

**A HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTITIONER
FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT THE ENGAGEMENT OF ACADEMICS
IN RESEARCH ETHICS**

by

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Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for
the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the subject

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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FEBRUARY 2021

DECLARATION

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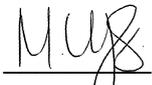
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I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.


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Date

DEDICATION

- ❖ To all Doctors – irrespective of your field of science – I salute you.
- ❖ To all Doctoral candidates who embark on the journey of writing a thesis, I hope that it will be a rewarding experience for you, albeit difficult at times.
- ❖ To all research participants who fell victim to unethical research. My sincere hope is that the findings of this research will bring us one step closer to achieving the goal where scientists are so engaged in conducting ethical research that no participant will fall prey to thoughtless and unethical research again.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my Heavenly Father, my Saviour, my Strength, and my Light. I praise and honour You for all the talents I have received so abundantly from Your hand. My biggest wish is to honour You with my life. Thank You for providing me with the opportunity to undertake, and the courage to complete, this study.

I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude and appreciation to the following people for their support in completing this thesis:

- ❖ My magnificent supervisors, Dr Retha Visagie and Prof Adelé Bezuidenhout. Thank you for your guidance, support, and encouragement and for sharing your knowledge and experience. Thank you for your patience and allowing me to grow and develop as an academic researcher. Thank you for your unwavering belief in my abilities. I could not have done this without your guidance and support.
- ❖ To the participants of this study. Thank you for your time and for sharing your lived experiences with me. Thank you for entrusting me with your views and giving me an opportunity to make your voices heard. This thesis would not have been possible without you.
- ❖ Prof Jeanette Maritz for assisting me with the analysis and co-coding of the qualitative data. Your knowledge and expertise are exceptional, and I was privileged to work with you as an independent co-coder.
- ❖ My sincerest thanks to Mrs. Leatitia Romero for assisting with the language and technical editing of the thesis. Thank you for the meticulous work you did to ensure that the presentation of this thesis is of highest quality. Thank you for the long hours you spent to assist me in realising the ultimate presentation of this thesis.
- ❖ To my wonderful parents. Piet Uys and Elodie Uys; you are the embodiment of love. I honour you for being the pillars of strength for our family and for the remarkable example of integrity I have known all my life – set by your example. I am privileged to have you as parents. Thank you for always believing in me.

- ❖ To my remarkable friends and family. A heartfelt thank you, for your continuous support, motivation and understanding.
- ❖ In particular, I wish to thank my dearest cousin René de Klerk, and friends Maggie Holtzhausen and Annette Snyman, who embarked on this doctorate journey with me and who supported me through this whole process. Long nights, countless weekends of work, a million cups of coffee, laughter and tears brought us together in what is mostly an isolated and lonely journey.
- ❖ Finally, I want to acknowledge and thank the University of South Africa for the financial assistance they provided by awarding me with a Masters' and Doctoral Research Bursary during my studies.

ABSTRACT

This study explored academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an Open Distance Learning (ODL) institution in South Africa (SA), with the intention of discovering the way in which human resource management (HRM) practitioners, employed at the same institution, can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. The study's purpose was to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics, at an ODL institution in SA.

For this qualitative study, an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was followed. Data were collected from 13 purposively selected academic researchers, employed at an ODL institution, by means of semi-structured individual interviews, naive sketches and fieldnotes. The IPA approach offers an analysis method that was accordingly employed. Thereafter, the findings were interpreted with the Job-Demands Resource (JD-R) theory. These interpretations were used to construct the conceptual framework according to the organising principles of Dickhoff, James and Wiedenbach (1968).

Academic researchers have some resources to support engagement in research ethics, but also face several job demands, which has a negative influence on their ability to engage in research ethics. HRM practitioners have a critical role to fulfil to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics, by facilitating a work environment where job resources are readily available. In addition, the ODL institution must be well-balanced, successful, and endorse a culture of ethics within its organisational culture, for academic researchers to engage in research ethics. HRM practitioners have an essential role to endorse a culture of ethics within the ODL institution.

The findings will benefit both academic researchers and the ODL institution. The support that HRM practitioners provide, should include, *inter alia*, a) enabling an engaging leadership style, b) ensuring that ethical values are embedded in the recruitment strategy, and c) revising the performance agreements and performance appraisals of academic employees to include research ethics.

This study forms part of a limited pool of qualitative studies to investigate WE, using the JD-R theory as a theoretical framework. This study is furthermore a forerunner in exploring the role that HRM practitioners can play in supporting academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. It is the first study to use the IPA approach in the field of Management Sciences to

investigate WE with the JD-R theory as a theory of engagement. By using the organising principles of Dickoff *et al.* (1968), for conceptual framework development to explain WE according to the JD-R theory, a seminal contribution was made.

KEY TERMS

Human resource management; human resource management practitioners; research ethics; engagement; work engagement; open distance learning; JD-R theory; job demands; job resources; interpretative phenomenological analysis.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie ondersoek akademiese navorsers se verbintenis tot navorsingsetiek by 'n oopafstandleerinstelling (*ODL institution*) in Suid-Afrika met die voorneme om 'n manier te vind waarop menslikehulpbronbestuurspraktisyns (MHB-praktisyns) wat by dieselfde instelling werkzaam is, akademiese navorsers se verbintenis tot navorsingsetiek kan ondersteun. Die studie se oogmerk was om 'n konseptuele raamwerk vir MHB-praktisyns te ontwikkel om akademiese navorsers se verbintenis tot navorsingsetiek by 'n oopafstandleerinstelling te ondersteun.

Vir hierdie kwalitatiewe studie is 'n Interpretierende Fenomenologiese Ontledingsbenadering (*Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] approach*) gevolg. Data is by 13 doelbewusgeselekteerde akademiese navorsers, werkzaam by 'n oopafstandleerinstelling, ingesamel deur middel van semigestruktureerde- individuele onderhoude, naïewe sketse en veldnotas. Die Interpretierende Fenomenologiese Ontledingsbenadering bied 'n ontledingsmetode wat dienooreenkomstig gebruik is. Hierna is die bevindings met die werkvereistes-hulpbronneteorie (*job-demands resource [JD-R] theory*) geïnterpreteer. Hierdie interpretasies is gebruik om die konseptuele raamwerk te ontwikkel volgens die organiseringsbeginsels van Dickhoff, James en Wiedenbach (1968).

Akademiese navorsers beskik oor 'n paar hulpbronne wat 'n verbintenis tot navorsingsetiek ondersteun, maar word ook met verskeie werkseise gekonfronteer wat 'n negatiewe invloed op hulle vermoë om hul tot navorsingsetiek te verbind, kan hê. MHB-praktisyns speel 'n kritiese rol om akademiese navorsers te ondersteun ten opsigte van hul verbintenis tot navorsingsetiek deur 'n werksomgewing te fasiliteer waar werkhulpbronne geredelik beskikbaar is. Verder moet die oopafstandleerinstelling 'n gebalanseerde etiese organisasiekultuur onderskryf om akademiese navorsers te help om hulle te verbind tot etiese navorsing. MHB-praktisyns speel 'n noodsaaklike rol om 'n etiese kultuur binne die *ODL*-instelling te ondersteun.

Akademiese navorsers, sowel as die oopafstandleerinstelling, sal baat vind by die bevindinge. Die ondersteuning wat MHB-praktisyns bied, behoort onder meer die volgende in te sluit: a) om 'n werksbegeesterde leierskapstyl moontlik te maak; b) om te verseker dat etiese waardes by die werwingstrategie ingesluit is; en c) om die prestasie-ooreenkomste en prestasiebeoordelings van akademiese personeel te hersien om navorsingsetiek in te sluit.

Hierdie studie maak deel uit van 'n beperkte aantal kwalitatiewe studies om werksbegeesting, aan die hand van die werk-vereistes-hulpbronneteorie, te ondersoek. Hierdie studie is ook 'n voorloper wat betref die verkenning van die rol wat MHB-praktisyns kan speel om akademiese navorsers se verbintenis tot navorsingsetiek te ondersteun. Dit is die eerste studie om die Interpretierende Fenomenologiese Ontledingsbenadering in die vakgebied van Bestuurswetenskappe te gebruik om werksbegeesting met die werk-vereistes-hulpbronneteorie as 'n teorie van begeesting te ondersoek. Baanbrekerswerk is uitgevoer deur die organiseringsbeginsels van Dickoff *et al.* (1968) vir konseptuele raamwerkontwikkeling te gebruik om werksbegeesting volgens die werk-vereistes-hulpbronneteorie te verduidelik.

SLEUTELTERME

Menslikehulpbronbestuur; menslikehulpbronbestuurpraktisyns; navorsingsetiek; verbintenis; werksbegeesting; oopafstandleer; werk-vereistes-hulpbronneteorie; werksvereistes; werks-hulpbronne; Interpretierende Fenomenologiese Ontleding

KAFUSHANE NGOCWANINGO

Lolu cwaningo lwacubungula ukulandela nokusebenzisa kwabacwaningi inkambiso yocwaningo enhle nelungileyo esikhungweni seMfundo-buqama Evulelekile (ODL), phecelezi, i-*Open Distance Learning institution* eNingizimu Afrika (SA), ngenhloso yokuthola indlela engasetshenziswa ngabasebenzi abangongoti bezokuphathwa kwabasebenzi (HRM), abaqashwe esikhungweni lesi-UK, ukweseka ukulandela nokusebenzisa kwabacwaningi bezikhungo zemfundo ephakeme inkambiso yocwaningo enhle nelungileyo uma benza ucwaningo. Inhloso yalolu cwaningo kwabe kuwukwakha nokuthuthukisa uhlaka-kuhlaziya lokuqonda olwenzelwe abasebenzi be-HRM ekusekeleni abacwaningi bezikhungo zemfundo ephakeme ukuze bakwazi ukulandela nokusebenzisa inkambiso enhle nelungileyo uma benza ucwaningo esikhungweni esiyi-ODL eNingizimu Afrika.

Kulolu cwaningo olwabe luwucwaningo olugxile ekuxoxisaneni okunzulu futhi okunohlonze nababambiqhaza bocwaningo abakhethiweyo abayingcosana (*qualitative research*) kwalandelwa indlela-kuhlaziya egxile kwisimo-kuqonda sombambiqhaza wocwaningo, phecelezi i-*Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA). Imininingo yocwaningo yaqoqwa kubacwaningi bezikhungo zemfundo ephakeme abayi-13 abakhethwe ngenhloso, kusetshenziswa indlela-kuxoxisana engagcini nje kuphela ohlwini lwemibuzo ehlelekile, kepha elandelisa nangeminye imibuzo evulekile, phecelezi ama-*semi-structured individual interviews*, nemidwebo elula kanye namanothi athathwe endaweni okwenzelwa kuyona ucwaningo. Indlela-kuhlaziya i-IPA ihlinzeka ngendlela yokuhlaziya okuyiyona eyasetshenziswa ocwaningweni. Emuva kwalokho imiphumela eyatholakala ocwaningweni yahunyushwa kusetshenziswa ithiyori i-*Job-Demands Resource (JD-R) theory*. Ngokusho kuka-Dickhoff, James no-Wiedenbach (1968) lezi zihumusho zabe sezisetshenziselwa ukwakha uhlaka-kuhlaziya lokuqonda.

Abacwaningi bezikhungo zemfundo ephakeme banazo izinsiza-kusebenza zokulandela nokusebenzisa inkambiso yocwaningo enhle nelungileyo, kodwa-ke zikhona futhi nezingcindezi-zidingo zomsebenzi eziningana ezinomthelela ongemuhle emandleni abo okulandela nokusebenzisa inkambiso enhle nelungileyo uma benza ucwaningo. Abasebenzi be-HRM banendima esemqoka kakhulu okumele bayidlale ekwesekeni abacwaningi bezikhungo zemfundo ephakeme ekulandeleni nokusebenzisa inkambiso enhle nelungileyo uma benza ucwaningo, ngokuthi bakhe isimo sokusebenzela lapho ziyinala futhi zitholakala kalula izinsiza-kusebenza. Ngaphezu kwalokho isikhungo esiyi-ODL kumele kube ngesizinzile nesihleleke kahle, esiphumelelayo futhi eseseka usiko-mpilo lwenkambiso enhle nelungileyo

ngaphakathi kusiko-mpilo lwaso njengenhlangano, ukuze abacwaningi bezikhungo zemfundo ephakeme bakwazi ukulandela nokusebenzisa inkambiso enhle nelungileyo uma benza ucwaningo. Abasebenzi be-HRM banendima esemqoka okumele bayidlale ekwesekeni usiko-mpilo lwenkambiso enhle nelungileyo ngaphakathi esikhungweni esiyo-ODL.

Imiphumela etholakale ocwaningweni izohlomulila abacwaningi bezikhungo zemfundo ephakeme iphinde futhi ihlomulise nezikhungo eziyo-ODL. Ukwesekwa okuhlinzekwa ngabasebenzi be-HRM kumele kubandakanye, phakathi kokunye, a) ukwakhiwa kwesitayela sobuholi senzebenziswano, ubambiswano nokubonisana b) ukuqinisekisa ukuthi izimo-mpilo zenkambiso enhle nelungileyo ziyisisekelo seqhingasulu lokuqashwa kwabasebenzi, kanye c) nokubuyekezwa kwezivumelwano zensebenzo kanye nokuhlolwa nokubuyekezwa komsebenzi wabasebenzi bezikhungo zemfundo ephakeme ukuze kubandakanywe inkambiso enhle nelungileyo.

Lolu cwaningo luyingxenye yeqoqwana elincane lomsebenzi osuwenziwe kuze kube manje wocwaningo olugxile ekuxoxisaneni okunzulu futhi okunohlonze nababambiqhaza bocwaningo abakhethiweyo abayingcosana okuhloswe ngalo ukuphenya nokucwaninga i-WE, kusetshenziswa ithiyori i-JD-R njengohlaka lwethiyori yocwaningo. Ngaphezu kwalokho, lolu cwaningo luyivulandlela ekucubunguleni indima engadlalwa ngabasebenzi be-HRM ekwesekeni ukulandela nokusebenzisa kwabacwaningi bezikhungo zemfundo ephakeme inkambiso enhle nelungileyo uma benza ucwaningo. Lolu wocwaningo lokuqala olusebenzisa indlela-kuhlaziya i-IPA emkhakheni wamaSayensi Ezokuphatha ngenhloso yokuphenya nokuhlola i-WE kusetshenziswa ithiyori i-JD-R njengethiyori yokucubungula umsebenzi wocwaningo. Kwaba negalelo elikhulukazi impela ukusetshenziswa kwemigomo yokuhlela ka-Dickoff nabanye (1968), ekwakheni nokuthuthukisa uhlaka-kuhlaziya lokuqonda ngenhloso yokuchaza i-WE ngokuhambisana nethiyori i-JD-R.

AMATEMU ASEMQOKA

Ukuphathwa kwabasebenzi; abasebenzi abangongoti bezokuphathwa kwabasebenzi; inkambiso enhle nelungileyo; ukubandakanywa/ukusebenzisa noma ukulandela inqubo ethile; ukuzibandakanya ngentshisekelo nokuzimisela kwabasebenzi emsebenzini wabo; inqubo yemfundo-buqama evulelekile; ithiyori i-JD-R; izingcindezi-zidingo zomsebenzi; izinsiza-kusebenza; indlela-kuhlaziya egxile kwisimo-kuqonda sombambiqhaza wocwaningo.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CHE	Council on Higher Education
DE	Distance Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoH	Department of Health
ERC	Ethics Review Committee
GCC	Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings
GWA	Gallup Workplace Audit
HRM	Human Resource Management
HEA	Higher Education Act (101 of 1997)
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution(s)
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
JD-R theory	Job Demands Resources theory
MBI	Maslach Burnout Inventory
MBI-GS	MBI-General Survey
NDP	National Development Plan
NHA	National Health Act (61 of 2003)
NHREC	National Health Research Ethics Council
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NRF	National Research Foundation
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
ODL	Open Distance Learning
SA	South Africa
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SOP(s)	Standard Operating Procedure(s)
UWES	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale
WE	Work Engagement

CHAPTER 1

SCIENTIFIC OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

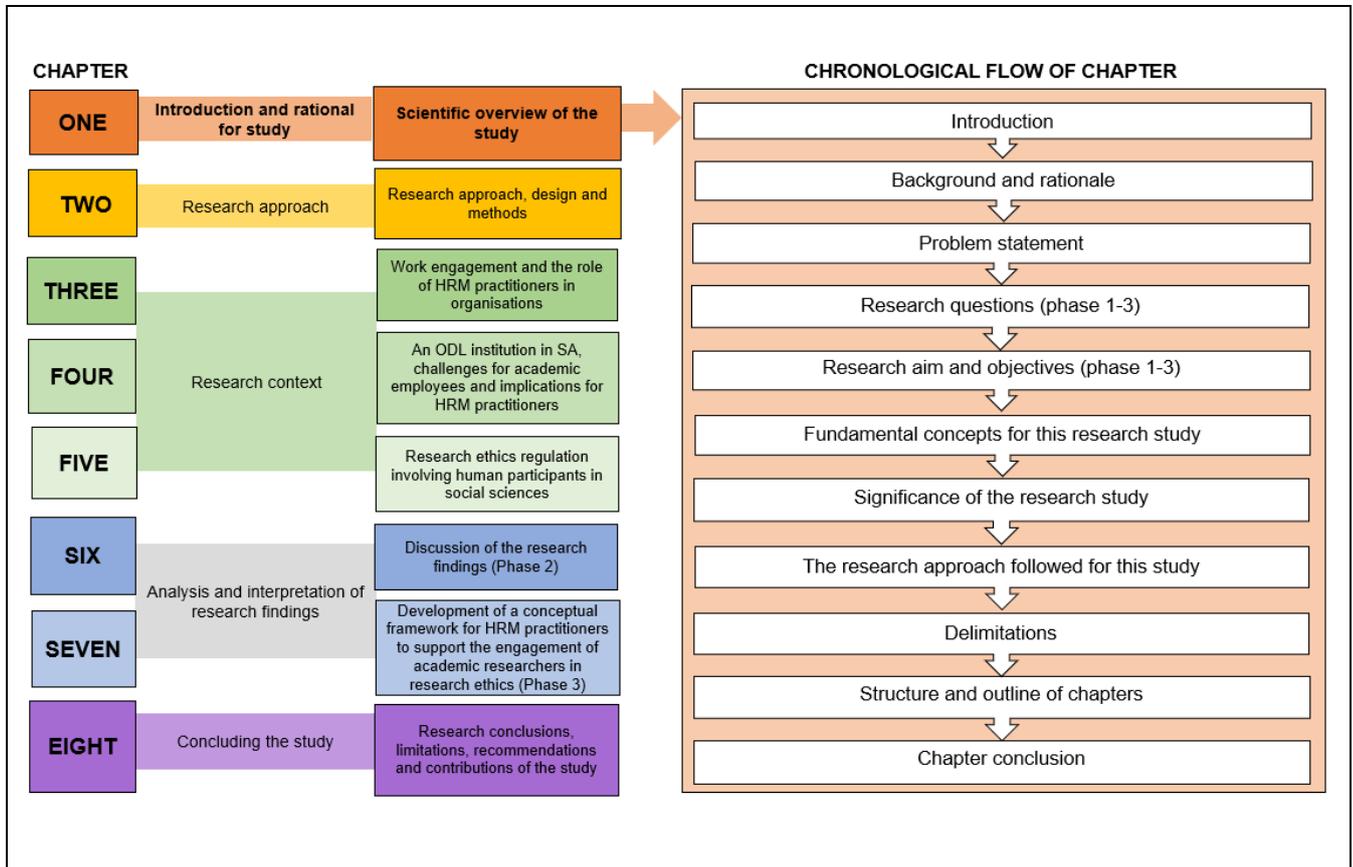


Figure 1.1: Composition and structure of Chapter 1

Source: Own compilation

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study set out to explore academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an Open Distance Learning (ODL) institution. The intention was to discover how human resource management (HRM) practitioners who work at the respective ODL institution can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. This research is the first study conducted that specifically focuses on the way in which HRM practitioners can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. This study's overarching purpose was to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

The thesis is presented in eight consecutive chapters. Chapter 1 offers the background and rationale for the study. Chapter 2 provides insight into the research approach and methods followed for this study. The research was conducted over three sequential phases; the focus of phase one was to obtain a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon, guided by a narrative analysis of scholarly literature. Phase two focused on the collection of empirical data within the interpretative research paradigm following an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. This was done to gain a deeper understanding of the research participants' lived experiences related to the research phenomenon. Finally, phase three focused on the construction and presentation of a conceptual framework as a frame of reference for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution in South Africa (SA).

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 form the first phase of the study and, as stated above, a narrative scholarly literature analysis was conducted for each chapter. This narrative literature analysis was dedicated to obtaining a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon. These chapters focused on considering different theoretical perspectives and selecting the most suitable theory of engagement to inform the conceptual framework; the role of HRM practitioners in support employees in organisations' engagement; the role of the contemporary higher education (HE) environment to support academic employees' engagement; and the connection between research ethics and academic employees' engagement in social sciences.

Chapters 6 and 7 were devoted to analysing and interpreting the research findings and the presentation of the conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics (phases two and three, respectively). The study is concluded in Chapter 8, with the final conclusions; acknowledgement of the limitations of the study; recommendations for further research, education, and organisational practice; and my personal reflections on my development as an academic researcher. At the beginning of each chapter, a flowchart is provided to orientate the reader (see Figure 1.1). The flowchart highlights the present chapter, indicating the focus and purpose of the chapter, while emphasising the chronological flow of that specific chapter.

As stated earlier, this chapter provides the background and rationale for this study. Accordingly, a concise portrayal of HRM practitioners' role within organisations is given. Furthermore, higher education institutions (HEIs) and the role of academic employees, including their work role as academic researchers, are briefly considered. The background of the study also focuses on research ethics within the context of the social sciences. Following

this, the formulation of the problem statement, the research questions, the purpose and objectives, and the justification for the need for this study, are explained. Attention is paid to alert the reader of specific key concepts used in this study. Moreover, the research approach followed for this study is introduced, and the delimitations of the study are provided. The chapter concludes with the chapter outline of the thesis and a chapter conclusion.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

HRM practitioners' role is interwoven with the lives of employees at work. From an HRM point of view, organisational goals and human needs are mutual and compatible (Berman, 2015; Sultana & Hussain, 2016; Wörnich, Carrell, Norbert & Hatfield, 2015:8). This implies that the role of HRM practitioners is to support employees in such a way that it is mutually beneficial to both employees and the organisation (Lee, Lin, Wu, Lin & Huang, 2018). This central role of HRM practitioners can also be understood in terms of employees' 'job design'. For the job design (of an employee) to be satisfactory, it needs to be to the benefit of the organisation (satisfy organisational interests) and the employee (supportive of the employee's goals) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Belias & Sklikas, 2013; Zareen, Razzaq & Mujtaba, 2013). Due to the significance of job design for HRM practitioners, academic researchers have extensively studied this phenomenon and accordingly developed several job design theories (Van den Broeck & Parker, 2017; Zareen *et al.*, 2013). While discussing these theories goes beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that the job demands-resources theory (JD-R theory) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014) is one such theory (Parker, Morgeson, & Johns, 2017; Van den Broeck & Parker, 2017). This theory's flexibility means it is fitting in contexts where the aim is to gain an understanding of employees' work engagement (WE) (see Section 3.4.1).

WE is the "persistent, positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá & Bakker, 2002:74) (also see Section 1.6.3). WE is associated with positive organisational outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, organisational commitment and motivation, and it promotes the health and wellbeing of employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Bakker, Demerouti & Sanz-Vergel, 2014; Chughtai & Buckley, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). For the HRM practitioner, employees' WE will therefore be of great importance. The benefits of engaged employees in an organisation, in terms of having a healthy workforce, are self-evident. When employees do not experience engagement in the workplace, it will have a direct bearing on HRM practitioners since employees' wellbeing and the positive organisational outcomes will be adversely influenced.

The organisational outcomes expected of universities are to teach, conduct academic research and deliver community services (Erdem, 2016; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016; Shaw, 2009; Van den Berg, Manias & Burger, 2008). The attainment of these organisational outcomes needs to be realised by academic employees, who therefore have a wide range of work tasks and multiple job demands (Bezuidenhout, 2018; Botha & Swanepoel, 2015; Kyvik, 2013b). This can sometimes lead to work overload. Academic employees recurrently complain about the trouble they experience in completing tasks properly, due to work overload (Han, Yin, Wang & Zhang, 2019; Kyvik, 2013a). The pressure to complete tasks can be further increased when these academic employees are obliged to perform several administrative tasks (Bezuidenhout, 2013).

As mentioned, one of the primary responsibilities of academic employees is conducting scientific research. Indeed, in SA, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013) upholds that universities need to fulfil the crucial function of conducting academic research and disseminating this novel knowledge. Academic employees should therefore see research production as a critical task. This work task is important since it is a statutory obligation (DHET, 2013) but also because conducting and publishing scientific research is associated with career advancement opportunities (Barkhuizen, Rothmann & Van de Vijver, 2014). The importance of academic research for these employees is thus not denied, but the fact that it is a time-intensive activity, necessitating specific requirements to satisfy scientific standards, must also be considered (Kyvik, 2013b).

In this capacity, an academic researcher should network, collaborate with other academic researchers, manage their research, conduct research, publish research, and evaluate research (Kyvik, 2013b). Another requirement that needs to be fulfilled by academic researchers is to obtain research ethics approval for proposed research projects involving human participants (Israel, 2017; Pather & Remenyi 2019; Wassenaar & Slack, 2016). In accordance with international best practices, legislation in SA dictates that academic researchers who wish to conduct research involving human participants must obtain research ethics approval (NHA s 73(1), 2003) (DoH, 2003). This legislation is given effect to and regulated through the National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC, 2006).

These regulations are acknowledged and subscribed to at the ODL institution where this study was conducted (Institution A, 2016c; Mamotte & Wassenaar, 2009). Reasonably, tertiary institutions support these regulations since the implications of reputational damages that can occur if unethical research is conducted under the auspices of these institutions are clearly

understood (Henry, Romano & Yarborough, 2016). Moreover, the broader scientific community can be negatively affected by questionable research practices (Chen, 2011). The foremost concern, however, remains the wellbeing of research participants who might be exposed to harmful situations and unethical research protocols in the absence of research ethics regulation (Beckmann, 2017; Heale & Shorten, 2017; Lategan, 2012; Lefkowitz, 2007).

The research-related responsibilities identified above therefore clearly demonstrate the substantial workload academic researchers should manage. Barkhuizen *et al.* (2014) state that work overload (extensive job demands), and the negative impact thereof on academic employees, amplify the need to increase these employees' WE. This need is expanded on in the observation of Kyvik (2013b), who states that the numerous tasks embedded in academic researchers' responsibilities inevitably create tension in terms of the time and dedication that can be assigned to each of these sub-roles.

Since universities are mandated to conduct scientific research, a task that academic employees fulfil, a lack of engagement in research ethics not only justifies but necessitates further investigation. Indeed, only with the exploration of this research phenomenon can insight be gained of beneficial or hampering aspects of academic researchers engaging in research ethics. Obtaining a deeper understanding of academic researchers' lived experiences can offer valuable insight to HRM practitioners in terms of how they can best support academic researchers and facilitate a work environment conducive to engagement in research ethics.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Research is a core responsibility of universities (Fourie, 2003; Institution A, 2016a; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016; Van den Berg, *et al.*, 2008). Even more so, if the ODL institution fails to conduct sound academic research (involving human participants), approved by an Ethics Review Committee (ERC), it will also fail in its statutory responsibility set forth by the National Health Act (s 73(1), 2003) (DoH, 2003). Thus, it is essential to consider the importance of conducting ethically sound research at universities, including the ODL institution under study.

Section 73 of the NHA (61 of 2003) governs all health research in SA (DoH, 2003). However, as Wassenaar and Slack (2016) explained, this Act, which was updated in 2015, defines 'health research' broadly, which means that scientific research in all social or psychological study areas, where human participants are involved, should be approved by ERCs. Yet, social

science academic employees at the specific ODL institution where this study was conducted displayed resistance towards research ethics (Wessels, Visagie & Van Heerden, 2015). According to Biggs (2020), for employees to engage in their work, resistance needs to be resolved. The author (Biggs, 2020) continues by stating that in instances where resistance is coupled with high work demands, such employees will be demotivated and dejected. Social science academic researchers' resistance to research ethics thus poses a substantial problem for engagement. In addition, burnout is related to excessive work demands and demotivated employees (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Schaufeli, 2017). Burnout has a negative influence on work outcomes in contrast to the positive work outcomes that are associated with WE (Han *et al.*, 2019).

If the quality of academic research conducted by employees deteriorates, or if academic employees lose interest in research altogether, it will be detrimental for several reasons. Primarily, the protection of research participants and the standing of the academic employee, the scientific community, as well as the ODL institution, might be compromised. For the individual academic employee, a lack of engagement towards research ethics will be detrimental since career advancement opportunities are subject to publishing scholarly articles in accredited journals (Al-Khatib, 2016; Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Grimes, Bauch & Ioannidis, 2018; Johnston, 2010). These academic journals frequently pose proof of research ethics approval as a prerequisite for accepting empirical research articles (Jordan, 2014; Wassenaar & Slack, 2016; Wessels & Visagie, 2017). In instances where low-quality academic research is conducted, it will have no value in the knowledge creation arena and can place the profession in disrepute (Chen, 2011). Alternatively, in instances where academic employees completely lose interest in conducting academic research, a decline in research outputs will manifest, thus adversely influencing one of the core responsibilities and statutory obligations of the ODL institution.

When this problem is considered from the perspective of an HRM practitioner, two vital aspects come into play. First, HRM practitioners have a responsibility to support the welfare of academic employees. Second, but equally important, these HRM practitioners should support the efficiency and productivity of the ODL institution as a whole. In light of these identified challenges, I uphold that it is vital to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners, as a frame of reference, to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at this ODL institution. Currently, such a conceptual framework does not exist, thus necessitating the development thereof. HRM practitioners employed at the ODL institution can utilise the developed conceptual framework to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the background and rationale offered in the preceding sections, a gap in understanding the research phenomenon became evident. This recognised gap resulted in the formulation of the problem statement and the justification for conducting this study. The main research question to ask was thus: How can HRM practitioners support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution? With this primary question in mind, the subsequent research questions were framed according to three sequential but interrelated research phases:

PHASE ONE:

The purpose of phase one was to obtain a deeper understanding of academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution through a narrative analysis of scholarly literature. To this end, the following questions sought clarification:

- What theory of engagement will be best suited to inform the conceptual framework of this study? (Chapter 3)
- How can HRM practitioners support academic employees' engagement within organisations? (Chapter 3)
- How does the contemporary HE environment support academic employees' engagement? (Chapter 4)
- How can HRM practitioners support academic employees' engagement within HEIs? (Chapter 4)
- What is the connection between research ethics and academic employees' engagement in social sciences? (Chapter 5)

PHASE TWO:

The purpose of phase two was to obtain a better understanding of how HRM practitioners can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The following research questions were accordingly identified for this phase:

- How do academic researchers make sense of the phenomenon 'engagement in research ethics' at an ODL institution? (Chapter 6)
- What are academic researchers' experiences of engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution? (Chapter 6)

- How do HRM practitioners make sense of their role in supporting academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution? (Chapter 6)

PHASE THREE:

The purpose of phase three was to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The following research question was subsequently asked:

- Of what should a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners consist to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution? (Chapter 7)

1.5 RESEARCH PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The overall purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. To realise this overarching aim, this study was conducted over three sequential but interrelated research phases. The objectives for each phase are identified below:

PHASE ONE:

The purpose of this phase was to obtain a deeper understanding of academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution through a narrative analysis of scholarly literature. To this end, the following objectives were identified:

- Objective 1:** Obtain an overview of 'engagement' from different theoretical perspectives to select an engagement theory that could inform the conceptual framework. (Chapter 3)
- Objective 2:** Obtain a deeper understanding of the HRM practitioners' role in supporting engagement within organisations. (Chapter 3)
- Objective 3:** Obtain a deeper understanding of how the contemporary HE environment supports academic employees' engagement. (Chapter 3)
- Objective 4:** Obtain a deeper understanding of HRM practitioners' role in support of engagement within HEIs. (Chapter 4)
- Objective 5:** Obtain a deeper understanding of the connection between research ethics and academic employees' engagement in social sciences. (Chapter 5)

PHASE TWO:

The purpose of phase two was to obtain a better understanding of the role that HRM practitioners can play in supporting academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The objectives identified for this phase included:

Objective 6: Explore how academic researchers make sense of the phenomenon 'engagement in research ethics' at an ODL institution. (Chapter 6)

Objective 7: Explore academic researchers' experiences of engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. (Chapter 6)

Objective 8: Explore how HRM practitioners make sense of their role in supporting academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. (Chapter 6)

PHASE THREE:

The purpose of the final phase was to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

Objective 9: Design a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution (Chapter 7)

1.6 FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS FOR THIS STUDY

The following concepts are of fundamental importance to this study and are accordingly defined and presented in alphabetical sequence in the sub-sections that follow. Thus, within the context of this study, these conceptual definitions should be read and understood as explained below.

1.6.1 Academic researchers

While the assumption can be made that academic employees and academic researchers refer to the same cohort of individuals, this assumption would be incorrect for the purposes of this study. The ODL institution where this study was conducted defines 'research' as a systematic investigation aimed at the development of, or contribution to, knowledge (Institution A, 2016c). The Department of Higher Education, in turn, stipulates that research includes a variety of activities that are performed in numerous disciplines that can employ various methodologies and explanatory frameworks to expand knowledge through a systematic examination or disciplined investigation (DoH, 2015).

Creswell (2012) understands research as a process of actions employed to collect and analyse information to expand our understanding of a topic or issue. Yet Basias and Pollalis (2018) explain that research is undertaken on a systematic basis to increase knowledge and use this knowledge to establish or verify facts, resolve problems, offer novel solutions, and develop new theories.

From the abovementioned definitions, two conclusions can be made. First, all of these definitions unambiguously stipulate that the objective of academic research is to create or expand on knowledge, broaden our understanding of phenomena under study, and that this new insight is achieved with the aid of a systematic investigation. Second, none of these definitions refers to the employment position of an individual performing this activity. In contrast, HEA number 101 of 1997 defines an 'academic employee' as "any person appointed to teach or to do research at a public higher education institution and any other employee designated as such by the council of that institution". This definition mentions the employment position at a public HEI and consequently excludes all academic researchers who are not employed at a public HEI.

For the purposes of this study, academic researchers are distinguished in terms of their research-related activities, and fulfilling this duty is not dependent on these individuals' employment position. Still, it is acknowledged that a significant proportion of academic researchers would be employed as academic employees. In this study, **academic researchers** should thus be understood as individuals with the objective of creating or expanding on knowledge to broaden understanding of phenomena under examination following a systematic investigation. This cohort of individuals includes academic employees, and incorporate postgraduate students and individuals who are affiliated with the ODL institution, but not those not employed in an academic employment position.

1.6.2 Conceptual framework

The purpose of a conceptual framework is to promote theory, which can have a positive influence on practice (Adom, Hussein & Agyem, 2018). The focus of a conceptual framework is not to offer an analytical or causal standpoint of research findings, but rather an interpretative consideration of social reality (Jabareen, 2009). It is a visual representation developed by the researcher to explain the relationships between the key concepts being investigated (Adom *et al.*, 2018; McEwen & Wills, 2014). For the purpose of this study, a **conceptual framework** can therefore be understood as a network or arrangement of

interrelated concepts that, as a whole, offer a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Adom *et al.*, 2018; Imenda, 2014; Jabareen, 2009).

1.6.3 Engagement

Typical connotations made when thinking about the concept of engagement include involvement, absorption, commitment, enthusiasm, focused effort, passion, devotion, and energy (Schaufeli, 2014). Even when specifically referring to the engagement of employees in the workplace, varying definitions are available in both consulting and academic literature. Also, the concepts 'employee engagement' and 'work engagement' are frequently used interchangeably. However, it is important for the reader to take cognisance of the fact that WE is more specific (Schaufeli, 2014) and is the preferred academic term (Schaufeli, 2012b).

The definition of 'engagement', specifically '**work engagement (WE)**' as conceptualised by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002), is adopted as the preferred definition for this study. According to these scholars, WE can be defined as a "persistent, positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002:74). Vigour is characterised by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest energy in one's work, and perseverance, even in the face of difficulties (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Dedication is characterised by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, motivation, pride and challenge in relation to your work (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Absorption refers to being completely and positively immersed in your work, to the extent that it is hard to detach yourself from it (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002).

1.6.4 Human resource management practitioner

Within an organisation, human resources refer to the employees, together with their experience, knowledge and the skills they bring to work (Ololube, Agbor & Kpolovie, 2016). These human resources are of vital importance to realise the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation (Jouda, Ahmed & Dahleez, 2016; Sultana & Hussain, 2016; Tran, 2016). HRM is a specific approach to managing people at work, with the twofold objective of satisfying their needs as employees and promoting their commitment to the organisation, while supporting the effectiveness and success of the organisation (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020; Berman, 2015; Sultana & Hussain, 2016; Wörnich *et al.*, 2015; Wilton, 2016).

Conversely, a practitioner refers to an individual who is engaged in the practice of a specific skill, activity, job or profession (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020; Dictionary.com, 2020; Merriam-Webster, 2020). For this study, a **human resource management (HRM) practitioner** should thus be understood as a professional employee with the required skills and knowledge to manage the human resources at an organisation with the understanding that the wellbeing of employees and the success and effectiveness of the organisation are equally important.

1.6.5 Research ethics

Research ethics signify the specific principles, rules, guidelines and norms of research-related behaviour that are understood to be appropriate, fair and suitable to the research community (Davis, Gallardo & Lachlan, 2012). This means that the methods and procedures of research studies must be performed in such a way that harm to research participants are minimised (Heale & Shorten, 2017).

HEIs (including the ODL institution) are required to examine all aspects of research projects involving human participants on behalf of government and broader society (Hoecht, 2011). This process, performed by the ODL institution, is referred to as an **ethical review** (Institution A, 2016c). The research ethics policy of the ODL institution (Institution A, 2016c) provides the following definition: An “ethical review is an objective appraisal of the effect of the proposed research on the wellbeing of potential participants, animals, the environment, institutions, collectivities and communities...” (Institution A, 2016c:2).

This task is fulfilled by “established **Ethics Review Committee[s]**” (Institution A, 2016c:2). These committees are authorised to evaluate and monitor research studies that involve human participants (Braun, Ravn & Frankus, 2020; Ells, 2011). At the ODL institution, a decentralised monitoring model is used, which implies that more than one ERC exists. This means that an ERC is representative of a specific ODL business unit or faculty, either at the unit or departmental level (Institution A, 2016c).

Academic researchers who submit their proposed research project to an ERC for ethical review do so by submitting a **research ethics application form**. The process typically comprises of developing a formal explanation of research plans and procedures and submitting these to the relevant ERC (Babb, Birk & Carfagna, 2017). ERCs then review these research ethics applications meticulously and critically (ethical review) with the objective of protecting potential participants from harm that could have been avoided (Beckmann, 2017; Davis *et al.*, 2017; Kruger, Ndebele & Horn, 2014; Rice & Bernard, 2018, Weiss, 2015). If the

ERC is satisfied with the application, a **research ethics approval certificate** (also referred to as a research ethics clearance certificate) is issued (Braun *et al.*, 2020). The concepts related to research ethics will be used throughout this study and should be understood, as explained above.

1.6.6 Social sciences

Social sciences encompass various fields of study which are concerned with interactions among individuals or groups, human relationships, how individuals act in social or cultural settings within societies, and how researched societies function (CFI Education, 2020; Greenfeld, 2020; Liberto, 2020). The main scientific research areas in social sciences include Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, Economics, Political Sciences, Management Sciences, and Education (CFI Education, 2020; Greenfeld, 2020; Liberto, 2020).

Social sciences are distinct and different from natural sciences (Liberto, 2020). Natural sciences include fields of study such as biology, chemistry and physics, and are concerned with the physical world (Liberto, 2020). **Social science fields of study**, in turn, are concerned with the relationships between individuals and societies and the development and functioning of cultures or societies, and are thus more dependent on the meaning-making (interpretation) of research findings (Liberto, 2020).

Academic researchers study social sciences for many reasons, ranging from the need to obtain a better understanding of how a given society or social environment operates; why people act in certain ways within society; the causes for economic growth or decline; causes of unemployment; how social and cultural elements of a society influence individuals' behaviour; to what makes individuals happy (CFI Education, 2020; Liberto, 2020). The knowledge and insight obtained from research findings in these study areas can be used for a number of purposes, which include, among others, the formulation of organisational strategies; decision-making in organisations; the development of government policies; and supporting community leaders to make decisions (CFI Education, 2020; Liberto, 2020).

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is the first research conducted that explicitly focused on HRM practitioners' role in supporting academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. With the presentation of this thesis, an original contribution is made to different subject areas. This study contributed

to different scholarly disciplines, which enhanced scientific knowledge in the fields of Philosophy, Education and Management Sciences. The thesis is situated in the field of Management Sciences and contributes meaningfully to the scholarly understanding of the field of HRM and the engagement of academic employees.

The overall aim of this study resulted in the development of a conceptual framework as a frame of reference for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. This conceptual framework is the first framework to address a gap in scholars' theoretical understanding of the supportive role that HRM practitioners can fulfil in supporting academic researchers' engagement in this specific context.

The significance of the study is thus demonstrated with contributions made to theory, practice, and methodology. The theoretical contribution offered with this study is an extension to theoretical dialogue pertaining to HRM, WE, research ethics and ODL. The study's pragmatic contribution is centred around the insights HRM practitioners will obtain to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at the ODL institution. These findings can accordingly benefit HRM practitioners within the ODL institution, who will be better informed of how to attend to the needs of academic researchers and add to the organisational success of the ODL institution.

The study also made a methodological contribution by studying academic researchers' WE from an interpretative paradigm, following a qualitative interpretative phenomenological approach and employing IPA to analyse and interpret data. Additionally, the development of a conceptual framework was the first study, to my knowledge, to utilise the organising principles of Dickoff, James and Wiedenbach (1968) to propose strategies to support employees' WE.

1.8 THE RESEARCH APPROACH FOLLOWED FOR THIS STUDY

In this section, a brief introduction to the research approach is provided. A comprehensive explanation of the research approach, procedures and methods implemented to realise the overall aim of the thesis, is provided in Chapter 2.

As a point of departure, it is important to understand that the research approach is the umbrella term and denotes the plans and procedures for the study. It enfolds the worldview assumptions

right down to the specifications of data collection, analysis and interpretations (Creswell, 2014). This study is qualitative and explorative in nature, and an interpretivist research paradigm (worldview) was selected as the most fitting approach to realise the research objectives. The specific research procedure followed for the study was IPA. The different methods used for data collection, analysis and interpretation will not be dealt with in this section, but can be found in Chapter 2.

The overall aim of the study was to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. To actualise this overall aim, the study was conducted over three sequential and interrelated research phases. Phase one was dedicated to conducting a narrative literature analysis to obtain a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon (engagement in research ethics). During phase two, the empirical data were collected; to realise the objectives of phase two, an IPA approach was followed. Phase three involved generating a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

The scientific value of this study was ascertained by using the measures of trustworthiness and authenticity developed by the naturalistic scholars Lincoln and Guba (1989; 1985). These measures are discussed in detail in Section 2.5 of Chapter 2. The strategies I employed to attain trustworthiness and authenticity are also explained. To further add to the scientific value of the study, I adhered to the research ethics principles and the Policy on Research Ethics of the ODL institution (2016c) throughout the study, including in the reporting thereof. Part 2 of the institutional Policy on Research Ethics (2016c) specifically provides guidelines for research involving human participants. These guidelines are internationally recognised moral principles of ethics and are based on the principles of the Belmont Report (1978), which include respect for persons, beneficence and justice (Belmont Report, 1978). A comprehensive discussion of the ethical research processes and procedures adhered to in this study is presented in Section 2.6 of Chapter 2.

As mentioned, interpretivism is a qualitative research approach. The reader should take cognisance that qualitative researchers frequently use the first-person pronouns (e.g., "I" or "we") in their reporting of the study (Creswell, 2014). For this study, I also make use of first-person pronouns. Another feature of qualitative research is that the researcher is seen as the primary data collection instrument (Creswell, 2013; Cypress, 2017). In this role, I had the responsibility of obtaining information from research participants and truthfully conveying that information to the reader (Zhou & Hall, 2018). I was therefore mindful of biases I might bring

to the study and the measures I needed to take to avoid such biases from interfering with the trustworthiness of the research findings (Cope, 2014; Johnson, Adkins & Chauvin, 2020).

1.9 DELIMITATIONS

The present study's focus was to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The study investigated the engagement in research ethics of social science academic researchers specifically. The study was conducted at a single ODL institution in SA, and it was qualitative in nature. To this end, the research findings cannot be generalised.

No other HEI was included or investigated in this study. Only the lived experiences of academic researchers in the fields of social sciences were explored. A non-probability purposive sampling method was used. Only academic employees employed at the ODL institution with a clear understanding of HRM practices (one or more degrees in HRM), and HRM practitioners employed at the ODL institution with a clear understanding of academic research, were included in the sample. In addition, these individuals had to be familiar with research ethics, specifically the processes and procedures followed at the ODL institution. Finally, from this sampling frame, only individuals who conducted empirical research involving human participants – thus necessitating research ethics approval – were included in the sample.

The selected research approach was not intended to generalise, make predictions, or establish the cause and effect of the relationships of the research phenomenon (engagement in research ethics). The purpose of the study was to understand and interpret the research phenomenon and, in doing so, offer a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

1.10 STRUCTURE AND OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The thesis consists of eight chapters, and the structure and outline for each of these chapters are offered below:

Chapter 1: Scientific overview of the study

Chapter 1 commenced with the introduction, background and rationale for conducting the study. Following this, the problem statement was formulated, resulting in the revealed research questions, the specific purpose and the objectives for the study. The chapter further explained the fundamental concepts for this study; the significance of this study; offered oversight of the research approach followed for this study; and highlighted the delimitations of the study. The chapter concluded with the structure and outline of chapters of the study, and a chapter conclusion.

Chapter 2: Research approach, design and methods

Chapter 2 focused on the research approach, design and methods chosen for this study. As a point of departure, the research paradigm (interpretivism) was identified as the most appropriate world view to address the research problem. Following this, a section was dedicated to explaining the chosen research design. In order to give structure to the study, the methods used to collect, analyse and interpret the data, were arranged over three sequential and interrelated research phases. The chapter furthermore focused on the measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research findings, and the ethical considerations upheld throughout the study. Thereafter, the chapter conclusion was provided.

Chapter 3: Work engagement and the role of HRM practitioners in organisations (Phase one)

In Chapter 3, a narrative literature analysis was conducted, which focused on the concept of engagement, specifically WE and how this phenomenon influence employees at work. The chapter commenced with a brief introduction followed by a discussion of the historical development of the concept 'engagement'. Closely tied to the historical development of the concept 'engagement' is the different theoretical positions held by scholars of what engagement in the contemporary work environment entails. With consideration of the different theories of engagement, a specific theory (and relevant definition) was chosen to inform the conceptual framework of this study. From there, the focus of the chapter shifted to gain a comprehensive understanding of HRM practitioners' roles and functions within organisations, and their role in the promotion of engagement in the workplace. The chapter concluded with the chapter conclusion.

Chapter 4: An ODL institution in South Africa, challenges for academic employees and implications for HRM practitioners (Phase one)

Chapter 4 formed part of the narrative literature analysis. In this chapter, a thorough discussion of the HE environment globally, and specifically for SA, was provided. Following these sections, the organisational context of a particular ODL institution was discussed as the identified research setting for this study. From there, time was spent to learn more about academic employees' challenges and how the contemporary HE environment influences their WE. This analysis also resulted in consideration of the implications thereof for HRM practitioners. The chapter conclusion followed the abovementioned sections.

Chapter 5: Research ethics regulation involving human participants in social sciences (Phase one)

Chapter 5 was the final narrative literature analysis chapter with the aim of thoroughly assessing and exploring literature on research ethics regulation and governance within the social science research context. The chapter commenced with an analysis of the objectives of research ethics regulation involving human participants within the social sciences context. Following this section, I drew the reader's attention to unethical research studies in history and the consequential underpinnings of research ethics regulations. From there, the focus narrowed to research ethics regulation within a SA context specifically. This section was followed by social science researchers' perspectives on research ethics regulation; both their appreciations and criticisms of research ethics in social sciences were acknowledged. The relationship between research ethics regulation and WE among academic employees in social sciences was also considered. The chapter was closed thereafter with the chapter conclusion.

Chapter 6: Discussion of the research findings (Phase two)

Chapter 6 reported on the findings of phase two of the study. Following an IPA approach, this chapter reported on the empirical findings (phase two) of an in-depth understanding of academic researchers' lived experience of engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, naïve sketches, and field notes. The chapter focused on describing the research participants, the interpretation and reporting of the research findings. The analysis and reporting on the data during this phase formed the foundation of the conceptual framework, which was presented in Chapter 7. The chapter conclusion completed this chapter.

Chapter 7: Development of a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support the engagement of academic researchers in research ethics (Phase three)

In accordance with the design of the study, Chapter 7 focused on phase three of the study. This phase was dedicated to the development of a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The chapter commenced with an explanation of the purpose of the conceptual framework, followed by a concise overview of the conceptual framework. Thereafter, the assumptions of the conceptual framework were provided, along with a comprehensive discussion of the structure, the key concepts and focus thereof. The conceptual framework was developed with the aid of the organising principles of Dickoff *et al.* (1968). After the presentation and explanation of the conceptual framework, the chapter was concluded.

Chapter 8: Research conclusions, limitations, recommendations and contributions of the study

Chapter 8 commenced with a brief introduction to the final chapter of the study. This was followed by the conclusions of the study. Thereafter, the limitations of the study were acknowledged, and the significance of the study was highlighted. Furthermore, recommendations for HRM practice, education and further research were offered. The chapter, and the thesis, was concluded with my personal reflections of my doctorateness.

1.11 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this first chapter of the thesis, the background and rationale for the study, together with the problem statement, was presented. The problem statement resulted in the formulation of the main research question: How can HRM practitioners support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution?

The rationale for the study is that no known research has been conducted on social sciences academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at any university worldwide. This qualitative, exploratory research thus investigated social sciences academic researchers' engagement in research ethics, following an inductive approach. This study was conducted to explore how HRM practitioners can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. Accordingly, the central purpose of this study was to develop a

conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

The orientation chapter also provided clarity on the fundamental concepts of the study and an explanation of the significance of this research undertaking. A brief overview of the research approach was given together with the delimitations to the study. In the next chapter, a detailed discussion of the research approach, procedures and methods used in this thesis is provided.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH APPROACH, DESIGN AND METHODS

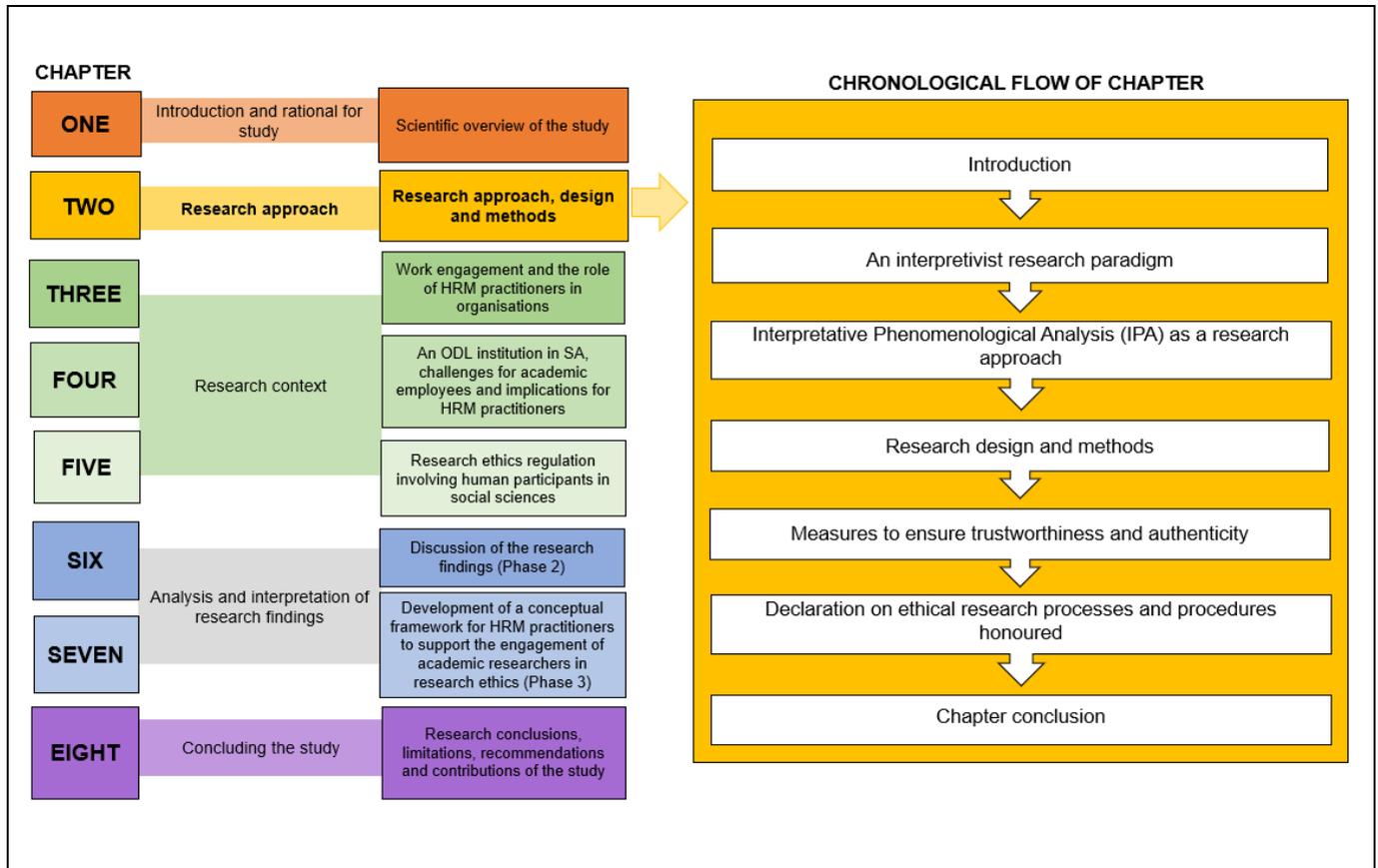


Figure 2.1: Structure of Chapter 2

Source: Own compilation

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 was dedicated to providing the study's background and rationale to highlight the importance of conducting this research. This study's overall purpose was to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. This chapter aims to offer insight into the research approach, procedures, and research methods used to realise the study's primary purpose.

A qualitative theory-generating, interpretivist research paradigm, complemented with an IPA research approach, was employed in this study. It should be noted that research approaches, including IPA, have specific philosophical beliefs and offer guidance on procedures and methods that researchers can utilise to realise their research objectives when adopting that

approach (Creswell, 2014). The research design, in essence, refers to the procedures that will be followed to actualise the research (Creswell, 2014). The procedures followed in this study were given structure by implementing three sequential and interrelated research phases that each had specific research questions and research objectives; these were addressed using different methods. The research methods refer to the methods used for data collection, analysis, and interpretations (Creswell, 2014).

The chapter commences with the ontological and epistemological perspectives of interpretative research and a comprehensive discussion of the IPA research approach. From there, the focus shifts to the research methods used for each phase of the study. The chapter concludes with a description of the research ethics procedures and considerations adhered to, and the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity throughout this study. Finally, a chapter conclusion is provided.

2.2 AN INTERPRETIVIST RESEARCH PARADIGM

All research has philosophical foundations with certain assumptions or beliefs which inform the procedures to be followed in research and the conduct of enquiry (Creswell & Clark, 2011). A research paradigm is, in essence, a set of fundamental assumptions and beliefs of how the world is perceived, guiding researchers to select a particular framework of thinking while simultaneously influencing their conduct (Jonker & Pennink, 2013). This study was conducted within an interpretivist research paradigm.

The interpretivist paradigm was developed in reaction to positivism (Mack, 2010). From a positivistic frame of reference, the researcher's primary concern is to study observable and measurable variables in certain controllable conditions with the aim of predicting the outcomes of the research in order to control these variables in the future (Cypress, 2017; Saunders & Lewis, 2012). As a researcher, I distanced myself from this frame of reference and chose to subscribe to the ontological and epistemological views of interpretivism. This was an important choice for me as a researcher; Creswell (2014) and Mack (2010) state that your ontological assumptions inform your epistemological assumptions, which in turn, inform your approach, ultimately informing the methods used for data collection.

Interpretivism is sometimes also referred to as constructivism, as it emphasises the individual's ability to create meaning (Ang, Embi & Yunus, 2016; Mack, 2010). This reference frame allows the researcher to better understand how social experience is created and given

meaning (Creswell, 2014; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Storey, 2015; Yilmaz, 2013). The qualitative paradigm views the relationship between the knower and the known as indistinguishably related (Yilmaz, 2013). The key ontological assumptions of interpretivism are that social reality is seen by multiple people who interpret events differently, resulting in various perspectives of an occurrence or event (Creswell, 2014; Mack, 2010). While ontology is a person's view of reality and being, epistemology refers to someone's view of how they acquire knowledge (Kafle, 2011; Mack, 2010). Therefore, this frame of reference permits the researcher to provide an in-depth description of the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013). Researchers following this paradigm therefore focus on understanding a phenomenon rather than explaining it (Basias & Pollalis, 2018; Creswell, 2014; Mack, 2010).

Given that I adhere to the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning interpretivism, I deemed a qualitative approach to research as most suitable for this study. As a qualitative researcher, I am committed to the naturalistic perspective and the interpretative understanding of human experience (Creswell, 2014; Joubish, Khurram, Ahmed, Fatima & Haider, 2011). Qualitative research (sometimes referred to as naturalistic research) is interpretative since researchers need to make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meanings demonstrated about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2014; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). In this qualitative study, I therefore made every effort to deepen my understanding of the lived experiences (socially constructed meanings) of academic researchers' engagement in research ethics within an ODL institution.

I selected IPA to complement the interpretivist research paradigm; therefore, the next section provides an overview of the IPA's ontological and epistemological beliefs.

2.3 INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS (IPA) AS A RESEARCH APPROACH

The research approach is the blueprint of the research. It involves the broad assumptions of the chosen approach and informs the procedures and methods for collecting and analysing the data (Creswell, 2014). This section was dedicated to providing an overview of IPA as the selected research approach, and then explaining the different theoretical roots of IPA and how these theories influenced IPA as a research approach.

The majority of academic researchers refer to IPA as 'interpretative phenomenological analysis', but occasionally it is referred to as 'interpretive phenomenological analysis'; it should nevertheless be understood as a single research approach (Smith, 2011). IPA was developed by Jonathan A. Smith in the 1990s (Langdrige, 2007; Spiers & Smith, 2020), and although it was first used in health psychology, it is not a method that is used in health psychology exclusively. It is increasingly used in other study fields as well, including Humanities and Management Sciences (Crawford, 2019; Smith, 2017; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Spiers & Smith, 2020).

IPA is interested in meaning and processes, and is not concerned with events and their causes, distinctive of most qualitative research approaches (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). IPA is dedicated to a detailed examination of personal meaning and how individuals make sense of their lived experience (Crawford, 2019; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Spiers & Smith, 2020). Researchers using this approach do not enter the research process with a predetermined research hypothesis, but instead have a broad question that they wish to explore (Crawford, 2019; Langdrige, 2007).

IPA is well-established, is systematic in nature, and follows a phenomenologically focused approach with the aim of understanding the first-person perspective from the third-person position as far as possible (Crawford, 2019; Larkin, Eatough & Osborn, 2011). This is achieved by the participant sharing their thoughts and feelings with the researcher who inquires and analyses, and with the shared consciousness, a common understanding is developed (Crawford, 2019; Larkin *et al.*, 2011:321). Therefore, it is reasonable to say that IPA necessitates an intensive qualitative analysis of detailed personal narratives received from participants (Smith, 2011). The IPA researcher should, therefore, have the skillset to present interpretative analysis, which is closely related to the account shared by the participant (Smith, 2017). Because of this focus, IPA is regarded by several scientific scholars as the "most participant-oriented qualitative research approach" since the researcher who follows this approach demonstrates sensitivity and respect to the personal accounts shared by research participants (Alase, 2017:10).

With IPA, the researcher initially focuses on the meaning a research participant ascribes to an experience (experiences usually refer to an occurrence, relationship or process) and then aims to establish the significance of the experience for the participant (Larkin & Thompson, 2015). Stated differently, in IPA, the researcher is interested in finding out what matters to a participant, and then exploring what these things mean to the participant (Larkin & Thompson, 2015). Accordingly, with IPA, the interpretation of the phenomenon is done through the

process of a double hermeneutic circle, where the participant initially has to make sense of or interpret the phenomenon, before the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant's interpretation (Crawford, 2019; Vicary, Young & Hicks, 2016).

Finally, in this overview of the research approach, it is essential to note that IPA is built on the theoretical perspectives of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Larkin & Thompson, 2015; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2011; Smith, 2017; Smith & Osborn, 2015). In the subsequent sections, attention is paid to these theoretical perspectives. Thereafter, I explain how these theories influenced the development of IPA as a research approach.

2.3.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is one of three research approaches that influenced the development of IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Phenomenology is the philosophical tradition concerned with the lived experience (Smith, 2011; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Spiers & Smith, 2020). It holds a range of distinctions and differences (Kafle, 2011; Larkin *et al.*, 2011), and no shortage exist in the number of scholars who have written on phenomenology as research tradition (Alase, 2017).

Although there are several diverse emphases and interests among phenomenologists, they all share a specific concern with trying to understand what the experience of being 'human' is like, in all of its limitless parts, but predominantly in terms of the things that are important to us, and that form part of our lived world (Smith *et al.*, 2009). To this end, it is the phenomenon that is being investigated and studied (inquired about) through the experience shared with the researcher by those who have experienced it (McCarthy, 2015).

Different methodological traditions of phenomenology exist, separated by their diverse perspectives of what phenomenology entails (Larkin & Thompson, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). These perspectives can be grouped into two separate traditions: descriptive and interpretive phenomenology (Larkin & Thompson, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Descriptive phenomenology is also known as transcendental phenomenology (Cerbone, 2006; Larkin *et al.*, 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014), while interpretive phenomenology is sometimes referred to as existential phenomenology (Sloan & Bowe, 2014) or hermeneutic phenomenology (Larkin *et al.*, 2011; Larkin & Thompson, 2015). In this study, descriptive and interpretive phenomenology are the preferred terms.

Edmund Husserl prefigured descriptive phenomenology (Alase, 2017; Larkin *et al.*, 2011; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), and Martin Heidegger is considered the father of interpretative phenomenology (Langdrige, 2007; Reiners, 2012). Husserl and Heidegger established their two classic versions of phenomenology, and subsequently, other philosophers and methodologists became involved, including Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre (Groenewald, 2004; Sloan & Bowe, 2014:). These philosophers contributed to or refined the ideas and approaches presented by Husserl and Heidegger. Together, these four phenomenological philosophers (Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre) influenced the development of IPA as a research approach (Cerbone, 2006; Spiers & Smith, 2020). In Table 2.1, the key phenomenological theorists that influenced IPA, together with their central theoretical convictions, are highlighted.

Table 2.1: Key phenomenological theorists that influenced IPA and their central convictions of phenomenology

HUSSERL	HEIDEGGER	SARTRE	MERLEAU-PONTY
Husserl is seen as the father of descriptive phenomenology (Alase, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).	Heidegger was a student of Husserl (Kafle, 2011; Langdrige, 2007; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Reiners, 2012).	Sartre was not an academic philosopher but instead led the life of an author, playwright and public intellectual (Cerbone, 2006).	Merleau-Ponty was a contemporary philosopher and followed in the footsteps of influential philosophers like Husserl, Sartre, and Heidegger (Earle, 2010).
Phenomenology can be understood as a descriptive analysis of clear consciousness (McCarthy, 2015).	Considered the work of Husserl too theoretical and too abstract (Smith <i>et al.</i> , 2009), and critiqued the transcendental aspect of Husserl’s philosophy (Langdrige, 2007; Reiners, 2012).	Sartre placed emphasis on the notion that we are caught up in projects in the world (Smith <i>et al.</i> , 2009).	He describes phenomenology as the enquiry of essences, including the essence of perception and of consciousness (Scott, 2002).
“Transcendental” and “pure” are important concepts and what he considered the principal methodological innovation: “phenomenological	All people are inseparable from the world in which they	According to Sartre, even though we have self-consciousness and pursue meaning, the pursuit is an action-oriented, meaning-making, self-	He underscored the phenomenological description of Husserl,

HUSSERL	HEIDEGGER	SARTRE	MERLEAU-PONTY
<p>reduction” (Cerbone, 2006; Larkin <i>et al.</i>, 2011; Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>Researchers should ‘go back to the things themselves’ (Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>‘Reduction’ is regarded as a form of “purification” of the findings (Cerbone, 2006).</p> <p>Reduction entails the bracketing of phenomena in order to return to the ‘things themselves’ (Kafle, 2011; Larkin <i>et al.</i>, 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).</p> <p>People’s natural attitude towards the world is based on many assumptions, and although these may facilitate our everyday existence, it also masks and distorts proper understanding of the essence thereof (Larkin <i>et al.</i>, 2011).</p>	<p>live and, consequently, it is not possible to bracket off your way of seeing and identify the essence of a phenomenon (Langdrige, 2007).</p> <p>He is of view that realities are diverse, and these realities are perceived as how an individual constructs the reality, dependent on different situations (Kafle, 2011).</p> <p>He rejected the notion of suspending personal opinions and believed it is not possible for the researcher to investigate things in a neutral and detached manner (Langdrige, 2007), and supported the interpretive account to the experience (Earle, 2010; Kafle, 2011).</p> <p>Emphasis is placed on individual, subjective accounts and attempts to reveal the world as experienced by the participant through</p>	<p>consciousness, which engages with the world in which we live (Mittal, 2017; Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>Sartre believed that human nature is more about becoming than being (Mittal, 2017; Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>The individual has the freedom to choose, and therefore is, in a way, accountable for his or her actions (Mittal, 2017; Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>Humans are always becoming themselves, and the self is not a pre-existing unity to be revealed, but rather a continuous project to be developed (Mittal, 2017; Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>The issue of humans ‘becoming themselves’ are complex and should thus be viewed within the context of the individual life, the biographical background, and the social climate in which</p>	<p>rather than interpretation (Earle, 2010; Scott, 2002).</p> <p>Merleau-Ponty did support a form of phenomenological reduction, however different from Husserl’s idealist view, since Merleau-Ponty acknowledged that the real world cannot be reduced or simplified (Earle, 2010).</p> <p>His perception of science resonates with Husserl, with second-order knowledge obtained from first-order observation (Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>Also supported the view of Heidegger of the situated and interpretative quality of our understanding of the world (Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>Merleau-Ponty proposed that, as humans, we regard ourselves as different from everything else in</p>

HUSSERL	HEIDEGGER	SARTRE	MERLEAU-PONTY
<p>These experiences, assumptions or personal opinions should be transcended to discover reality (Kafle, 2011). (Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>The aim of transcendental reduction (bracketing) is to suspend personal prejudices which might muddle the findings, and to reach the core or essence through a state of untainted consciousness (Kafle, 2011; Larkin <i>et al.</i>, 2011; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).</p> <p>Belief is that phenomenological reduction does not deny the world but demonstrates the possibility of acceptance in the world as it exists prior to any theoretical positing (McCarthy, 2015).</p>	<p>their lived experience (Kafle, 2011; McCarthy, 2015).</p> <p>Is concerned with individual experiences and not general findings and generalisations of the research findings (McCarthy, 2015).</p> <p>Reflecting on the situation or experience is essential for the researcher to interpret the meanings discovered or add value to the interpretations made (Sloan & Bowe 2014).</p>	<p>the individual functions (Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>A person's perception of the world is formed to a large extent by the presence of others, and others have their own projects with which they are engaged (Mittal, 2017; Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>What we will be (humans becoming themselves), instead of what we are, is linked to another important concept of Sartre, namely the concept of 'nothingness' (Mittal, 2017; Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>For Sartre, things that are absent is just as significant as those that are present in defining who we are and how we understand the world (Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p>	<p>the world (Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>Merleau-Ponty explained that our sense of self is holistic, and it is engaged in viewing the world, rather than being integrated into it (Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p> <p>Merleau-Ponty therefore believed that while we can observe and experience empathy for others, ultimately, we can never share entirely in other humans' experiences, because their experience belongs to their own embodied position in the world (Smith <i>et al.</i>, 2009).</p>

Source: Own compilation

2.3.1.1 Differences between descriptive and interpretative phenomenology

Phenomenology, as a research tradition, developed over time, but two noteworthy historical phases include descriptive and interpretative phenomenology (Larkin & Thompson, 2015).

There are several differences between descriptive phenomenology and interpretative phenomenology (Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Kafle 2011), and one of the most critical differences is the notion of bracketing (Reiners, 2012). Descriptive phenomenology focuses on describing the conscious experience while preconceived viewpoints or perspectives are bracketed (Larkin & Thompson, 2015; Reiners, 2012). It focuses on bracketing your presuppositions and attempts to approach something as if you had no prior experiences, ideas, beliefs, or expectations (Benner, 2008) or influence from culture, history, or context (Larkin & Thompson, 2015). Thus, the basic principle of descriptive phenomenology is to adhere to the notion that experience should be transcended to discover reality (Kafle, 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). It is developed on the idea of reduction that refers to suspending personal prejudices and endeavouring to reach the core or essence through a state of pure consciousness (Kafle, 2011). Accordingly, descriptive phenomenology advocates that a phenomenological attitude should be applied over a natural attitude (Kafle, 2011). According to this school of thought, it is possible to suspend personal opinion, and it is possible to attain a single, essential and descriptive presentation of a phenomenon (Kafle, 2011).

In contrast to descriptive phenomenology, interpretative phenomenology focuses on interpretation and describing human experience (McCarthy, 2015). Consequently, it believes that bracketing is not suitable since interpretative phenomenologists recognise their preceding understanding (Benner, 2008; Reiners, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). In interpretative phenomenology, there is a shift towards interpretation and a disassociation from only offering descriptions (Finlay, 2011). In fact, Benner (2008) believes that interpretive phenomenology is based on the premise that humans are interpretation through and through. The focus is, therefore, on interpretation to understand the 'meaning of being', and this is entirely different from Husserl's focus, which was to describe the essence of the lived experience (Earle, 2010). The idea of interpretative phenomenology thus suggests that interpretations are all we have, and the process of description is an interpretive process in itself (Kafle, 2011).

Another difference between descriptive and interpretative phenomenology is the belief that interpretative phenomenology is more complicated than descriptive phenomenology since

time plays an integral part in interpretation for interpretative phenomenology, but not for descriptive phenomenology (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). This means that the lived experience of a participant is time-sensitive. In addition, the participants' existence and relation to the world around them, is also relevant in interpretative phenomenology; experiences, beliefs, and ideas, as such, are not transcended (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

2.3.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is one of three research approaches that influenced IPA's development (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Hermeneutics refers to the science of interpretation (Reiners, 2012; Spiers & Smith, 2020) and was derived from Hermes 'the messenger' – a Greek god – whose name is related to the ancient word "hermeneuein", meaning 'interpreting' (Lewis & Staehler, 2010; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Hermeneutics has an extensive history, originating as the theory that provided indisputable foundations for interpreting biblical texts (Lewis & Staehler, 2010; McLeod, 2001). Progressively, hermeneutics advanced as a philosophical underpinning for assisting with interpreting a broader range of texts (Smith, 2007; Smith *et al.*, 2009; Wernet, 2014). Hermeneutics is therefore focused on context, positioning the topic of an investigation into historical and cultural perspective (McLeod, 2001), and understanding the 'true meaning' of texts (Wernet, 2014). An important concept in the hermeneutic approach is the idea of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle is possibly the most widely accepted idea in hermeneutic theory and is acknowledged and utilised by most hermeneutic writers (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

In the hermeneutic approach's science of interpretation and obtaining the true meaning of texts, this 'true meaning' is obtainable using the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle advocates for the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole at various levels (Smith, 2007; Smith *et al.*, 2009). With the hermeneutic circle, the analyst pursues to understand lived experience by firstly examining their own pre-existing structures of 'the things themselves' and then shifting from the whole to parts and then back to the whole in a reciprocal manner (Earle, 2010; Smith *et al.*, 2009). Smith, *et al.* (2009) explain that the meaning of the word only becomes clear when it is understood in the context of the whole sentence, and the meaning of the sentence rests on the accumulative meanings of the separate words. The influence of hermeneutics on IPA is discussed in Section 2.3.4.

2.3.3 Idiography

Together with hermeneutics and phenomenology, idiographic research influenced the development of IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Idiographic research is concerned with the particular (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Wharton, 2011). The idiographic research approach underscores individual-based research, which is focused on specific cases and unique traits or functioning among individuals, instead of broad generalisations about human behaviour (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Van Zyl, 2011). Idiographic research is an approach within social research focused on specific elements, individuals, events, entities and situations, documents and works of culture or art, and concentrates on what is particular to these (Wharton, 2011). Accordingly, idiographic research offers typical information to understand a specific case in question (Wharton, 2011). As a result, a small purposively selected and specifically situated sample or a single case analysis is often used (Smith *et al.*, 2009). With this research approach, there is a commitment to the specific, in the sense of detail, therefore relating to the depth of analysis. The analysis, according to this approach, must therefore be detailed and systematic (Smith *et al.*, 2009). The information obtained is only valid for the investigated phenomenon and cannot be used to generalise to a broader context (Wharton, 2011).

2.3.4 How phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography shaped IPA as qualitative research approach

As mentioned earlier, IPA was influenced by idiography, hermeneutics and the different phenomenological approaches of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Although the phenomenological reduction, as proposed by Husserl, is problematic for IPA, it still had a specific influence on IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009). While IPA researchers do not agree with all the aspects of Husserl's work, his perceptions of bracketing do help IPA researchers to concentrate on the practice of reflection in a specific manner (Smith *et al.*, 2009), the importance of being committed to open-mindedness (Larkin *et al.*, 2011), and to ask critical questions of the texts (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

Hermeneutics, as a research approach, goes further than simply describing chief concepts of an experience; it also explores the meanings embedded in everyday occurrences (Reiners, 2012). Heidegger expanded hermeneutics (Reiners, 2012) and, to this end, re-established the notion of a 'hermeneutic circle', which permits for back-and-forth movement between pre-understanding and understanding (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Accordingly, with the IPA the interpretation of the phenomenon is done through the process of a double hermeneutic circle

where the participant initially has to make sense of or interpret the phenomenon, and then the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant's interpretation (Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Vicary *et al.*, 2016).

Although Sartre deliberated on different topics than those usually focused on with IPA, Sartre's interpretations portray a robust analysis of people engaged in projects in the universe and the embodied, interpersonal, affective and moral nature of such encounters (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Merleau-Ponty also had a critical influence on IPA with his perspective and conviction that embodiment (the body) is the fundamental character of our knowledge and understanding of the world (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

The hermeneutic research approach influenced IPA in terms of the appropriate procedure with which data is analysed. For IPA researchers, the hermeneutic circle provides an appropriate 'method' for data analysis (Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Smith *et al.*, 2009). In accordance with the principles of the hermeneutic circle, a vital principle of IPA is that data analysis is an interactive process (Smith *et al.*, 2009). IPA researchers should move back and forth and consider the data in various ways (Smith, 2011), and to think of moving according to the hermeneutic circle may be helpful to the researcher (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

The idiographic research approach influenced IPA in three ways. Like idiographic research, the IPA is committed to the 'specific' (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith *et al.*, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2015). This commitment to the specific or detail refers to the depth of analysis of the findings (Finlay, 2011; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, the analysis is detailed and systematic (Finlay, 2011; Smith *et al.*, 2009).

Second, idiographic research guided the IPA's commitment to understanding how a particular experiential phenomenon is understood by the specific individual (participant) from their perspective for a specific context (Finlay, 2011; Larkin & Thompson 2012; Smith *et al.*, 2009). Small, purposively selected and carefully situated samples are thus used for IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

Third, idiography refers to the commitment to a particular case in its own right or, alternatively, to a progression from examining the single case and then moving to more universal claims (Smith *et al.*, 2009; Larkin & Thompson 2012; Smith & Osborn, 2015). In agreement with this approach, IPA also adopts an analysis procedure which shifts from a single case to more universal statements, but always allowing for the retrieval of specific statements from any of the individuals involved (Finlay, 2011; Smith *et al.*, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2015).

The next section describes the research design and methods that were used for this study. The study design and methods were informed by the philosophical perspectives explained above.

2.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

In the previous sections, I paid attention to the research paradigm (interpretivism) and IPA as the research approach. In this section, the reader's attention is turned to the study's design, and the methods employed to realise the overall purpose of the study. As explained in Chapter 1, this research was carried out over three sequential and interrelated research phases. This research design gave structure to the study and was beneficial to create a logical course of action. Although all three phases are interrelated, each phase was dealt with separately to explain how the objectives of that phase were addressed. The flow diagram in Figure 2.2 depicts the sequential and interrelated phases of the research design followed in this study.

PHASE ONE:

Purpose:

To obtain a deeper understanding of academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution through a narrative analysis of scholarly literature focusing on:

- an overview of 'engagement' from different theoretical perspectives to select an engagement theory that could inform the conceptual framework;
- the HRM practitioners' role in supporting engagement within organisations;
- how the contemporary HE environment supports academic employees' engagement;
- the HRM practitioners' role in support of engagement within HEIs; and
- the connection between research ethics and academic employees' engagement in social sciences.

Body of analysis: Scholarly literature (journal articles and books), government documents, legislation, codes and policies, news reports in general media, conference proceedings, theses and dissertations.

Approach: Narrative literature analysis.



PHASE TWO:

Purpose: To obtain a better understanding of the role HRM practitioners can play in supporting academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

Invited participants: (a) HRM practitioners employed at the ODL institution and (b) academic employees with HRM qualifications involved in academic research activities. Refer to Tables 2.2 and 2.3 for the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Data collection: Semi-structured individual interviews; naïve sketches; field notes.

Analysis: Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).



PHASE THREE:

Purpose: To develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

Theoretical perspective for analysis and interpretation: Job-Demands Resources theory.

Development of a conceptual framework: Utilisation of the organising principles of Dickoff *et al.* (1968).

Figure 2.2: A Conceptual flow diagram of phases of the research design and methods

Source: Own compilation

2.4.1 Phase one

The purpose of this phase was to obtain a deeper understanding of academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution through a narrative analysis of scholarly literature. To this end, the following objectives were identified:

- Objective 1:** Obtain an overview of 'engagement' from different theoretical perspectives to select an engagement theory that could inform the conceptual framework. (Chapter 3)
- Objective 2:** Obtain a deeper understanding of the HRM practitioners' role in supporting engagement within organisations. (Chapter 3)
- Objective 3:** Obtain a deeper understanding of how the contemporary HE environment supports academic employees' engagement. (Chapter 3)
- Objective 4:** Obtain a deeper understanding of HRM practitioners' role in support of engagement within HEIs. (Chapter 4)
- Objective 5:** Obtain a deeper understanding of the connection between research ethics and academic employees' engagement in social sciences. (Chapter 5)

2.4.1.1 Conducting a narrative literature analysis

A literature analysis is a detailed and critical appraisal of previous research on a subject area of interest to the academic researcher (Bourhis, 2018). These forms of investigation are primarily associated with academic research-related activities (Bourhis, 2018; Waterfield, 2018). A literature analysis aims to assist the reader's understanding of why the academic researcher is interested in a specific study area, through the presentation of a vast amount of literature in a condensed format (Bourhis, 2018; Waterfield, 2018). In academic writing, popular approaches include, *inter alia*, descriptive, systematic, theoretical, meta-analysis, critical, and narrative reviews (Grant & Booth, 2009; Ferrari, 2015; Waterfield, 2018; UWO, 2020).

Not all literature reviews have the same purpose, and a variety of approaches to perform literature studies are thus available (Grant & Booth, 2009; Snyder, 2019; Tight, 2019). However, a challenge that academic researchers face is that the names of these approaches are not consistently applied by all scholars (UWO, 2020). Some academic researchers maintain that a narrative literature analysis and a traditional review are the same approach (see, e.g., Booth, Sutton & Papaioannou, 2016), while other academic researchers make a

distinction between these approaches (see, e.g., Snyder, 2019; Waterfield, 2018). Yet another perspective is that a narrative literature analysis is sometimes referred to as a semi-systematic review (Snyder, 2019), yet Noble and Smith (2018) maintain that a narrative literature analysis can be understood as an unsystematic narrative review.

A further challenge that academic researchers face is that some scholars favour specific approaches to literature studies above others, and as part of their justification for such preferences, alternative approaches to literature reviews are critiqued. For example, Booth *et al.* (2016) prefer a systematic approach for analysing literature and maintain that a narrative approach to literature investigations is biased in the approach followed in selecting literature. Yet other academic researchers (see, e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Hart, 2018; Waterfield, 2018), maintain that the value of narrative literature studies should not be underrated, since this approach aids in the fulfilment of specific purposes of literature investigations identified by academic researchers.

In contrast to systematic literature analyses, frequently used by quantitative researchers, interpretative researchers have different objectives for analysing literature since the aim is to create understanding and not to gather specific knowledge (Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Du Toit, Dos Santos, Wagner *et al.*, 2015). A narrative literature analysis is typically used to create an imperative link between widely spread and immense variety, and various collections of literature on a specific subject (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Snyder, 2019). This type of literature investigation is also ideal to link various studies of different subject areas, to interconnect and or reinterpret (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Snyder, 2019). Given the purpose of a narrative literature analysis, this approach was selected as the most fitting approach to conduct a literature study.

For the interpretative researcher, a narrative literature analysis is a way of obtaining a preliminary impression of the subject field that they wish to understand through their analysis (Bryman *et al.*, 2015). A narrative literature analysis is not as focused as a systematic literature analysis, and is wide-ranging by comparison (Bourhis, 2018; Bryman *et al.*, 2015). Ferrari (2015) maintains that no recognised strategies are available to conduct and write a narrative literature analysis.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for narrative literature analyses are also not as meticulously defined as with systematic analyses (Bryman *et al.*, 2015). This seems logical when it is understood that with an inductive research approach, the relationship between theory and empirical research differs from the relationship between theory and empirical

research for a deductive research approach (Bryman *et al.*, 2015). With deductive research, the investigation is based on theories and well-defined concepts. Conversely, with inductive research, the research findings are aimed at generating a theory denoting that the researcher does not have clear concepts and definitions prior to the collection and analysis of empirical data, thus making meticulous inclusion and exclusion criteria impossible (Bryman *et al.*, 2015). In the process of conducting a narrative literature analysis, the inductive researcher may pick up on issues they did not foresee, which might be of great value for their area of study (Bryman *et al.*, 2015). Accordingly, inductive researchers need more flexibility to adjust the boundaries of their research area as the study progresses (Bryman *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, in this study, I did not follow a meticulously defined strategy to conduct the narrative literature analysis. Instead, the inclusion and exclusion criteria emerged as I immersed myself in the scholarly literature.

I conducted this narrative literature analysis by performing a search of scientific papers using several databases. These included APA PsycArticles; Academic Search Ultimate; Academic Search Premier; Blackwell Encyclopedia of Management Online; Business Source Ultimate (previously Business Source Complete); Britannica Academic Online; Emerald Insight; the federated search engine of the institutional library; Google Scholar; JSTOR; Sabinet African Journals (formerly SA ePublications); Sage Journals Online; Sage Research Methods Online; ScienceDirect; ProQuest; and Taylor and Francis Online Journals. In addition to the scholarly literature and with the aid of these scientific databases, I also consulted government documents, legislation, codes and policies, news reports in general media, conference proceedings, theses, and dissertations for the narrative literature analysis.

When conducting a narrative literature analysis, there are different objectives that the researcher might wish to realise (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). For this study, four objectives of the narrative literature analysis, as defined by Baumeister and Leary (1997), were identified and utilised.

a) The evaluation of theory

This narrative literature analysis aims not to present a novel theoretical perspective but to analyse the literature related to the accuracy of an established theory or frequently to evaluate two or more opposing theories (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). For this study, I evaluated different theories of engagement to select the most suitable engagement theory to interpret the research findings.

b) Examining the state of knowledge on a specific topic

These analyses are beneficial for overviews and integrations of a study area, but it is not meant to provide new ideas, novel interpretations, or far-reaching conclusions (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). This type of analysis is beneficial as a way of logically structuring what is known about a specific phenomenon (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Bourhis, 2018). For this study, I analysed the current HE landscape, the JD-R theory as a theory of engagement and the development thereof, and different perspectives on research ethics. Furthermore, the research problem and the development of IPA, as a qualitative data analysis approach, were reviewed.

c) Problem identification

As the name suggests, this type of narrative literature analysis is meant to identify and make problems, flaws or limitations, contradictions, or controversies in a specific field of study known (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Bourhis, 2018). With the aid of a narrative literature analysis, the research problem was identified along with the challenges social science academic researchers face when engaging in research ethics at an ODL institution.

d) Providing a historical account

The objective of this narrative literature analysis is to provide a historical account of the development of theory and studies on a certain field of interest (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Bourhis, 2018). The goal is essentially to track the history of an idea and comment on the influence and limitations to commentary regarding the impact and shortcomings of different contributions to the study area (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). In Chapter 5 (Section 5.3), I provide a historical account of unethical research studies and the resulting codes and declarations for research ethics regulation.

The objectives of phase one were addressed using a single approach, namely narrative literature analysis, as explained above. These research objectives are addressed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

2.4.2 Phase two

The purpose of phase two was to obtain a better understanding of the role that HRM practitioners can play in supporting academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The objectives identified for this phase included:

Objective 6: Explore how academic researchers make sense of the phenomenon 'engagement in research ethics' at an ODL institution. (Chapter 6)

Objective 7: Explore academic researchers' experiences of engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. (Chapter 6)

Objective 8: Explore how HRM practitioners make sense of their role in supporting academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. (Chapter 6)

2.4.2.1 Recruitment and selection of participants

For this study, HRM practitioners who were employed at the ODL institution within the HR support department were invited to participate (or were employed at the ODL institution at the time of data collection). In addition, academic employees who were employed at the ODL institution, and who were qualified HRM practitioners (hold an HRM or equivalent qualification) within an academic staff position were invited to participate (or were employed at the ODL institution at the time of data collection).

In order to obtain the contact details of potential participants, institutional permission was obtained from the ODL institution (refer to Annexure B). In the application, I indicated that I needed access to specific ODL personnel records to contact 'information-rich' participants (purposive sampling). Information-rich participants refer to individuals who have knowledge or expertise with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2012). I also requested permission to use 'snowball sampling' as an additional method to reach 'information-rich' potential participants. This meant that additional participants were recruited by using information obtained from original participants, who were then invited to participate through a referral process (Struwig & Stread, 2013).

In order to recruit potential participants, the following procedures were followed:

An email was sent to potential participants' official ODL institution mailboxes containing the study's information letter. This email was sent by me (researcher). However, at the time of data collection, I was employed at the ODL institution. Therefore, taking cognisance that my position as (then) employee might be regarded as a possible undue influence, I explicitly stated in the email message that participation was strictly voluntarily. For details regarding the information letter, refer to Section 2.6.2.1.

Invited participants were asked to respond to the invitation via email or telephone. In cases where invited participants failed to respond to the initial invitation, one follow-up email was

sent. Willing participants were contacted by phone or email to arrange a date and time to conduct the interview. The willing participants were also sent an email asking them to write a naïve sketch regarding the research phenomenon (engagement in research ethics). Participants had the opportunity to complete the naïve sketch before the individual interview, or at another convenient time for them. Before the interview, the participants were asked to complete an informed consent document. A copy of the signed informed consent form and the information letter were provided to each participant.

In agreement with the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, a non-probability purposive sampling method was chosen as the most appropriate sampling technique (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Spiers & Smith, 2020). For this technique, I used my judgement to select participants who would best enable me to answer the research question (Creswell, 2012; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). This is sometimes referred to as judgemental sampling (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). With purposive sampling, I was able to obtain detailed information and an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Yilmaz, 2013). In conjunction with the purposive sampling method, I also used snowball sampling (as mentioned earlier). With this sampling method, I used the first few participants to recommend other potential participants, who also fit the inclusion criteria to report on the phenomenon under investigation (King & Horrocks, 2010). To achieve the aim of this research, it was essential that the participants were well versed in research ethics and HRM. More detail is provided in Section 2.4.2.3, dealing with the sampling criteria for participants.

The sample of this study consisted of 13 participants. Although there is no set rule regarding how many participants should be included in a sample (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), IPA tends to have smaller sample sizes (Larkin & Thompson 2012; Larkin & Thompson, 2015; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Spiers & Smith, 2020). The primary objective is to fully appreciate each participant's shared experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). With a smaller sample, it is thus more conceivable to conduct a thorough yet very time-consuming case-by-case analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2011). Larkin and Thompson (2012) explained that the quality of the analysis and interpretation (time spent on each case) is more important than a large sample. However, despite the understanding that IPA research typically permits small sample sizes, I decided to make use of the data saturation principle as an additional quality criterion. Data saturation is reached when it becomes apparent that no new information or insights emerge from the data, and the collection of data is subsequently discontinued (Creswell, 2014; Creswell, 2012; Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

In contrast to descriptive phenomenology, where maximum variation sampling is sought, IPA researchers typically employ fairly homogeneous samples (Langdridge, 2007; Larkin & Thompson, 2015; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2017). The details of the sampling criteria of the homogeneous sampling group are explained in the section below. Although the sampling group might seem heterogeneous based on the participants' different employment positions, I consider these participants as homogeneous in nature, since the selected participants were all employees of the specific ODL institution. They were all familiar with HRM practices, and they all had prior or current exposure to the research ethics at the ODL institution. This homogeneous group was therefore best suited to provide detailed information about their lived experiences of the research phenomenon (engagement in research ethics) (Langdridge, 2007; Larkin & Thompson, 2015).

2.4.2.2 Sampling criteria

In order to meet the research objectives of phase two of the study, the potential participants had to meet specific criteria to be considered for participation. This was to ensure that they were 'information-rich' participants. As explained, despite the fact that these participants held different employment positions within the ODL institution, they were considered homogeneous in nature for this study. The inclusion criteria for HRM practitioners and academic employees included the following:

Table 2.2: Inclusion criteria

HRM Practitioners at ODL institution	Academic employees at ODL institution
<p>An understanding of the role of HRM within the ODL institution.</p> <p>Employed for three years or more as HRM practitioner at the specific ODL institution to ensure that they were knowledgeable of the current work responsibilities of HRM practitioners within the ODL institution, and the current support offered to academic employees in their work endeavours.</p> <p>Had experience of the research ethics approval process within this ODL institution. Experience is</p>	<p>Academic employees familiar and knowledgeable about the role of HRM within an organisation.</p> <p>A qualified HRM practitioner or equivalent qualification.</p> <p>Experience with the research ethics approval application process within the ODL institution. Experience is understood as practical contact with and observation of the research ethics approval application process. To this end, they should:</p>

HRM Practitioners at ODL institution	Academic employees at ODL institution
<p>understood as practical contact with and observation of the research ethics approval application process. To this end, participants had to be busy with or completed a postgraduate qualification (NQF 9 or NQF 10). In addition, this qualification requires/required research ethics approval and this prerequisite was already met at the time of data collection.</p> <p>Had to be registered at the ODL institution to ensure that they were familiar with the research ethics policy and related documents and procedures of the ODL institution.</p> <p>Alternatively, HRM practitioners who previously completed either a postgraduate degree(s) (NQF 9 or NQF 10) at the ODL institution (where research ethics clearance was required).</p> <p>HRM practitioners who completed a master's and/or doctoral degree(s) (NQF 9 or NQF 10) at other institutions but who had conducted research while employed at the ODL institution and obtained research ethics approval from the ODL institution (thus familiar with the research ethics policy and related documents and procedures).</p>	<p>be busy with or completed a postgraduate qualification (NQF 9 or NQF 10), and this qualification requires/required research ethics approval, and this prerequisite was already met at the time of data collection.</p> <p>AND/OR</p> <p>supervisor of students who are busy with a postgraduate qualification (NQF 9 or NQF 10) and this qualification requires research ethics approval and this prerequisite was already met at the time of data collection.</p> <p>AND/OR</p> <p>employees conducting research for non-degree purposes, and this research study requires research ethics approval and this prerequisite was met.</p> <p>Academic employees who already obtained a master's or doctoral degree(s) (NQF 9 or NQF 10) in HRM (or equivalent qualification) at other institutions, but who have conducted research while employed at the ODL institution and accordingly obtained research ethics approval from the university (thus familiar with the research ethics policy and related documents and procedures).</p>

Although potential participants were considered from the identified population (an ODL institution in SA), not the entire population met all the criteria to be considered an 'information-rich' participant. If they did not meet all the criteria, they were excluded. The following aspects resulted in exclusion from potential participation.

Table 2.3: Exclusion criteria

HRM Practitioners at ODL institution	Academic employees at ODL institution
<p>HRM practitioners within the support department who were employed for less than three years at this specific ODL institution.</p> <p>HRM practitioners who were employed at this ODL institution for the required time, but who were not familiar with the research ethics approval application process within this ODL institution.</p> <p>HRM practitioners who were employed at this ODL institution for the required time and who were busy with or who had completed a postgraduate qualification (Masters or PhD) (NQF 9 or NQF 10) at another HEI.</p> <p>HRM practitioners who were familiar with the research ethics approval application process within this ODL institution, but who were not employed in the HRM support department.</p>	<p>Academics who had experience with the research ethics approval application process, but who did not hold a HRM practitioner or equivalent HRM qualification.</p> <p>Academics who held a HRM practitioner or equivalent HRM qualification but who did not have experience with the research ethics approval application process within this ODL institution.</p>

2.4.2.3 My role as academic researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument and plays an active role in collecting data (Cope, 2014; Creswell, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Joubish *et al.*, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2015). Although different methods can be used to collect the data (e.g. this study included semi-structured interviews, naïve sketches and fieldnotes), the researcher remains the primary instrument in the way in which the data is collected (Creswell, 2014; Cypress, 2017).

Apart from serving as the primary data collection instrument, the researcher also plays a crucial role in providing the reader with the needed insight to understand the study's context (Zhou & Hall, 2018). This is why I, like many other qualitative researchers, choose to use first-person pronouns in the reporting of the study (Creswell, 2014; Given, 2012). By using first-

person pronouns in my writing, I was able to give voice to the participants' perspectives and lived experiences (Given, 2012). In addition, by using first-person pronouns, I could share my own experience and observations (see, e.g. field notes in Section 2.4.2.4.c), which supported the research interpretation and audit trail of the research (Zhou & Hall, 2018).

The academic researcher who conducts interview(s) should be neutral and facilitative to create an opportunity for research participants to share their lived experiences (Larkin & Thompson, 2015). This is an essential role to fulfil for IPA researchers, who try to understand what a phenomenon is like from the perspective of the participant (Larkin & Thompson 2012; Larkin & Thompson, 2015; Smith & Osborn, 2015). Therefore, prior to each interview, it was vital for me to create rapport with the research participant and gain their trust (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) suggest that a casual, warm-up conversation can aid in setting the participant at ease about an interview where personal accounts will be shared with the researcher. In order to facilitate this form of trust, I introduced myself in a friendly manner and explained the context of the interview. During interviews, I faced the participant squarely in a relaxed way and had an open body posture to ensure that the participants were comfortable. All the interviews were audio-recorded after permission was granted by the participant, to ensure that no information got lost during the interview.

As mentioned earlier, I needed to understand my position as a researcher in this qualitative study and acknowledge my position as a data collection instrument. As research instrument, I had to be aware of biases I might have had and make every effort to avoid these (Cope, 2014; Johnson *et al.*, 2020). Biases can include aspects such as "values and personal backgrounds" (Creswell 2013:237). To this end, I provided a detailed account of my involvement with the ODL institution to express the possibility of biased perceptions I might have had and the efforts I made to avoid these biases from interfering with the study.

I was employed at the ODL institution for approximately eight years, first in a research assistant capacity and later as a lecturer within the department of HRM within the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences. During this time, I was involved with research ethics approval processes and procedures within the faculty. Initially, I served as secretary on the faculty's ERC and after a year, in which I gained extensive experience and insight, I was elected as a full ERC member with evaluation and approval responsibilities of proposed research projects submitted to the ERC.

Prior to embarking on this research journey, I attended several training sessions on ethical research, both internal and external to the university. I participated in a UNESCO research

ethics training initiative in 2014, which enabled me to become a UNESCO-affiliated research ethics trainer. In addition, I attended various workshops on different research paradigms; academic writing; writing for publication; data analysis for qualitative- and specifically IPA research projects. I also received training in the utilisation of the internet-based plagiarism recognition facility (Turnitin) recommended by the university, to ensure that no texts were duplicated or used without proper citation of the original works (see Annexure L for the Turnitin Report). In addition, I attended a masters' and doctoral conference in 2014 (hosted at the ODL institution). The knowledge I obtained through these training opportunities equipped me with the various skills needed to successfully navigate the research journey with the highest level of scientific integrity.

According to Joubish *et al.* (2011), research studies' quality is subject to the qualities researchers portray as human beings. As an instrument, it was my responsibility to obtain data from the participants (Chenail, 2011). I therefore had to provide a facilitative platform for communication and create an atmosphere where participants felt comfortable to share their lived experiences (Chenail, 2011). I was involved in the continued and demanding lived experience shared by participants (Creswell, 2014). Likewise, as researcher within the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm, I had to acknowledge that I could not help but bring myself into the research study. Finlay (2011:90) explained it as follows: "All our understandings are inevitably based upon our situatedness (our unique personal history and circumstances) and current understandings and these constitute both our 'closedness' and our 'openness' to the world: they are the basis of our experiencing." Acknowledging this, I resolved to establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) to strengthen the quality and scientific value of the study. These measures are discussed in more detail in Section 2.5.

Moreover, I declare the following potential biases, together with methods I used to curb the possible influence that my personal subjectivity could have brought to the study or justify such occurrences.

- A) A potential bias in this study was the use of a non-probability purposive sampling to identify suitable research participants. Although random sampling might have the benefit of avoiding allegations of researcher bias, most qualitative research studies make use of purposive sampling (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Shenton, 2004). Choosing a non-probability purposive sampling method, despite the potential critiques of being biased, is justifiable for three reasons. First, I knew that by carefully selecting potential participants (as classified in the including and exclusion criteria), these participants

would best help me in answering this study's research questions (Moser & Korstjens 2018; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). In addition, purposive homogeneous sampling is encouraged for IPA research studies, and this method upholds that groups of participants should be purposefully selected and should have meaningful mutual features depending on the focus of the investigation (Spiers & Smith, 2020). Accordingly, the sampling technique used is closely aligned to the sampling procedures advocated in IPA, the chosen research method. By closely following the procedures of the adopted research method (IPA), the credibility (trustworthiness criterion) of the study is also supported.

- B) As stated, I was employed at the ODL institution and served on the ERC of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences for several years. To this end, I acknowledge that my personal perspective of the research phenomenon is founded on being familiar with where the study was conducted. IPA researchers are faced with a careful balancing act when developing an interview guide (Spiers & Smith, 2020). Guided by Spiers and Smith (2020), I had to make every effort to uphold my naïve position and seek insight and understanding from participants on their lived experiences. However, I also had to be informed enough to ask appropriate questions during interviews with participants. To navigate this narrow path, I decided to conduct a pilot interview before data collection. Chenail (2011), Moser and Korstjens (2018) states that a customary procedure to test the quality of the interview guide and identify possible researcher bias is to conduct a pilot study. With the aid of the pilot interview, I could test if the interview questions would address the objectives of the study, and I had the opportunity to practice repressing any pre-existing assumptions I might have from interfering with the interviews.
- C) Finally, in my role as a researcher, I had to take cognisance of the possibility of the presence of confirmation bias. Confirmation bias refers to the researcher's notion to search for and interpret research findings to correspond with current perceptions or beliefs and ignore data that are contradictory to current perceptions in relation to the research phenomenon (Just & Cao, 2018; Nickerson, 1998). To this end, I made use of triangulation procedures in data collection, engaged in continuous reflection (Shenton, 2004), and I included divergent views by research participants (negative case analysis) (Creswell, 2014; Moser & Korstjens 2018), thus ensuring that the conclusions made were not subjective in nature. These trustworthiness measures (discussed below) were implemented to reduce the possibility of any confirmation biases I might have as a researcher.

2.4.2.4 Data collection

Multiple data collection methods were utilised in phase two. This included semi-structured individual interviews, naïve sketches, and field notes. Each of these data collection methods is discussed below.

a) Semi-structured individual interviews

The most frequently used data collection method in IPA studies is semi-structured individual interviews (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Spiers & Smith, 2020). For IPA studies, open-ended interview questions are important, since the focus of these studies is explorative in nature, where the researcher aims to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of participants (Larkin & Thompson 2012; Larkin & Thompson, 2015; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In addition, a semi-structured individual interview is flexible enough for the researcher and participant to engage in dialogue and accommodate the researcher to explore avenues of interest that might become apparent during the interview (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Yates & Leggett, 2016). The semi-structured interview schedule of this study was designed to enable the participant to share as much detail about their lived experience as possible (Langdrige, 2007; Larkin & Thompson, 2015; Spiers & Smith, 2020).

One pilot interview was conducted to pre-assess the interview questions, determine the approximate length (time-span) of the interview, and prepare myself as interviewer for the remainder of the interviews. All of the interviews were individual, face-to-face interviews. Interviews were scheduled on the dates that best suit each of the participants. The interviews took place either in the participants' offices or another convenient location where the participant felt at ease. One of the success factors in qualitative interviews is building rapport with participants (King & Horrocks, 2010). The measures I used to create rapport with the research participants were explained in Section 2.4.2.3. In IPA research studies, semi-structured interviews usually last an hour, but they can also take longer (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2015). The shortest semi-structured individual interview lasted just over 39 minutes, while the longest interview lasted approximately 81 minutes. The 13 interviews amounted to 822.18 minutes of recorded time.

An interview schedule consists of several open-ended questions on areas of interest (Langdrige, 2007) and possible prompts to help guide the conversation (Petty, Thomson & Stew, 2012). Five questions formed the basis of the semi-structured interview schedule used in this study:

- 1) I am curious, how do you understand the phrase or the concept 'engagement of academics/researchers in research ethics'? (During the interview, I explained that the concepts 'academics' and 'researchers' would be used interchangeably, in essence, referring to 'academic researchers').
- 2) Please describe your engagement in research ethics at the ODL institution.
- 3) Reflecting on your experience, what aspects supported your engagement in research ethics at the ODL institution?
- 4) What aspects hindered your engagement in research ethics at the ODL institution?
- 5) How can human resource management practitioners potentially play a role in supporting the engagement of academics/researchers in research ethics?

b) Naïve sketches

According to Larkin and Thompson (2012), it is beneficial in IPA research to use multiple methods when collecting data to facilitate understanding between the researcher and participant. Although semi-structured interviews are traditionally used for data collection in IPA studies, data can be collected in a number of ways (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Spiers & Smith, 2020). For this study, I decided to include naïve sketches for two reasons. First, I made use of multiple sources of data to strengthen the trustworthiness and authenticity, (e.g. triangulation, see Section 2.5.6.1). Second, I wanted to provide the research participants with a platform where they had access to the questions and had sufficient time to reflect and draw meaning from their lived experiences.

A naïve sketch is a self-reporting technique where participants must describe their lived experiences and perceptions of certain phenomena in written format by responding to a question posed to them by the researcher (Chokwe & Wright, 2012; Naicker, Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2014). In addition to the semi-structured interviews that were conducted, I also asked participants to narrate their lived experiences of the research phenomenon (engagement in research ethics) as a secondary measure to validate the data received during the interviews (Van der Merwe, Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2015; Hefer & Cant, 2013). The designed naïve sketch was used to invite academic researchers with knowledge of HRM practices to elucidate how they experienced the research ethics processes and procedures within the ODL institution.

The naïve sketch requests were sent electronically to the respective participants after the scheduled interview was confirmed. Participants were given three weeks to complete their naïve sketches, thus providing them with sufficient time to reflect on their experiences. The

voluntary informed consent forms provided prior to the one-on-one semi-structured interviews included information on the naïve sketches. Participants were asked to indicate their willingness to share their experiences in that format. A copy of the signed voluntary informed consent document was also attached to the electronic communication, for their record-keeping.

Five questions were posed to the participants in their naïve sketches, namely:

1. In your own words, please reflect on how you make sense of the phrase 'engagement of academics in research ethics'. The concept 'academics' referred here to academic researchers.
2. In your own words, please describe your engagement in research ethics in this ODL institution.
3. Reflecting on your experience of research ethics in this ODL institution, please write down what you consider to be critical aspects for engagement in research ethics for an academic working in an ODL context?
4. If you reflect on your own experience, what aspects support your engagement in research ethics in this ODL institution?
5. If you reflect on your own experience, what aspects hinder your engagement in research ethics?
6. Please write down how you think human resource management practitioners can play a role in supporting academics' engagement in research ethics, in particular in an ODL institution.

c) Field notes

The researcher should take field notes by writing down things they see, hear, experience or think while collecting data, or reflect on the data that were collected during the research (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2011; Moser & Korstjens 2018; Polit & Beck, 2012). Field notes supported me in remembering events that transpired during the interview and can be employed to provide detailed background of the field activities (Yates & Leggett, 2016). The objective of my field notes was to generate a truthful written record of the field activities and what I observed. I used observational, methodological, theoretical and personal field notes while I was in the field to gain a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences of their engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. These field notes formed a critical part of my reporting of the research findings (see Chapter 6), and examples of the field notes are provided in Annexure 9 of this thesis.

- ***Observational field notes***

During and after each interview, I wrote notes of all the important events observed during the interview. I carefully watched and listened to participants while they shared their lived experiences with me. These observations enabled me to gain a deeper insight and understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Mdhuli, 2015). According to Mdhuli (2015), observational notes should be captured with as little interpretation as possible, and the objective is simply to record the 'who, what, where and how' of the lived experience. To effectively observe a research participant, the researcher should be sensitive to the body language and facial expressions of the interviewee (Mdhuli, 2015). Observational notes can be of great value to the researcher, since repeated patterns or codes can be discovered (Mdhuli, 2015).

- ***Theoretical field notes***

According to Casacuberta (2012), theoretical field notes are efforts made by the researcher to develop theoretical interpretations of the research phenomenon. With these field notes, I was attentive to note how engagement in research ethics was perceived by participants and whether participants experienced this phenomenon as a job demand or a job resource. The notes I took were considered in line with the understandings obtained from the narrative literature analysis from phase one.

- ***Methodological field notes***

Methodological field notes focus on the interview details, including information on interview dates, location of the interview (thus including field notes), and information of the specific participant (Mdhuli, 2015). The objective of these types of field notes is to record a true reflection of the event and to aid in an organised description of the data for interpretation (Mdhuli, 2015). The methodological field notes I wrote included information on the location of the interview, the duration of the interview, whether there were any interruptions during the interview, efforts made to create rapport with the participant, seating arrangements, the effort needed to arrange the interview, and stipulating whether the naïve sketch was completed at the time of the interview.

- ***Personal field notes***

According to Creswell (2012), qualitative researchers realise that their personal views cannot be disconnected from their interpretations. Accordingly, they should include their personal reflections on what they believe is the meaning of the collected data. These field notes and personal interpretations are typically derived from guesses, insights, and perceptions

(Creswell, 2012). Still, Creswell (2012) believes that since the researcher spent a considerable amount of time in the field with participants, they are in the ideal position to offer personal reflections and ponder on the meaning of the data. In my personal field notes, I thus reflected on my impression of the participant, my experience during the interaction (interview), and how I felt after the interview.

2.4.2.5 Data analysis

This section is focused on explaining the procedures I followed in analysing the data obtained from the semi-structured individual interviews and naïve sketches. The data were analysed by employing IPA. This section commences with an explanation of the processes followed to convert the raw data to meaningful text to obtain meaningful insights into the participants' lived experiences. The steps followed to analyse the data (IPA), are explained in Section 2.4.2.5(b).

a) Transcriptions of interviews

In accordance with the requirements of IPA research, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim (Larkin & Thompson, 2015; Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith *et al.*, 2009; Yates & Leggett, 2016). Transcriptions were carried out by an experienced transcriber who signed a confidentiality agreement prior to receiving access to the raw data. The analysis in IPA is aimed at interpreting the meaning of the content of participants' lived experiences and therefore it does not have to contain the prosodic aspects of the recordings (Smith *et al.*, 2009). IPA requires a semantic record of the interview, which means that the transcripts should include the interviewer's questions, together with the participant's responses (Smith *et al.*, 2009). The transcriptions had wide margins for coding purposes, as proposed by Smith *et al.* (2009). The transcribed interviews in the original format, prior to conversion to the analysis documents, amounted to 360 pages (Arial; double line spacing) (see Chapter 6 Section 6.4 for additional information on analysis documents).

b) Data analysis – Carrying out Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

The data were analysed by me with the support of an independent co-coder. The co-coder received the transcribed documents only after a confidentiality agreement was in place. The analysis of the data was done separately. After the coding was completed, the independent co-coder and I held a consensus discussion where we equated our findings.

IPA provides a number of steps for analysis, which enable the researcher to identify codes and themes within the data, however, these steps are not prescriptive (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Eatough, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2015; Storey, 2015). Fundamentally, the

researcher is concerned with making sense of the participant's world and therefore spends a considerable amount of time working through the transcript (and listening to the audio voice recording) in order to identify the major themes (Langdridge, 2007; Petty *et al.*, 2012). Analysis involves two subcategories of interpretive processes, namely phenomenological reduction (i.e. researcher makes sense of the participants' first-order meaning-making by reducing the content of transcripts into themes), and interpreting or explaining the findings in the context of relevant scholarly literature (Latham, 2015). Finlay (2011) explains that although IPA is interactive and inductive, a systematic approach is followed. Therefore, I first had to focus on the individual meanings and then look for patterns that emerged across the lived experiences of participants. The analysis begins with a single case and proceeds through the different steps of analysis before the researcher proceeds to the next case (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

According to Smith and Osborn (2015), Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), the researcher has the flexibility to adapt the method of analysis to suit the needs of the study and complement the researcher's working style. For this study, I reviewed several studies that offered recommendations on the analysis of IPA. The literature I studied gave me insight into what would be the most suitable way to analyse the data. To this end, I followed a combination of recommendations made by IPA scholars, yet strictly adhering to the principles of case-by-case analysis followed in IPA. The steps followed to analyse the data (each case separately) are explained below.

Step one: Multiple readings of transcript and initial noting

The first step of IPA involved immersing myself in the data. This stage required careful reading of the transcript several times (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Eatough, 2015). The audio-recording was also listened to several times (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This allowed me to engross myself in the data, to recollect the atmosphere of the interview, and the setting in which it was conducted (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In addition to listening to the audio-recording and reading the transcript, I started to make initial notes on aspects that I believed were of importance (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Eatough, 2015). It should be noted that I converted the original transcribed interviews to documents that enabled initial noting and the identification of emergent themes. The converted documents had three columns. I transferred the transcribed data to the first column. In the middle column, I captured all my initial thoughts, while the last column was used to capture emerging themes. Spiers and Smith (2020) recommend that the researcher makes initial comments in one margin of the transcript. As explained above, I slightly adapted this recommendation and made initial comments in the middle column of the converted document.

Step two: Developing emergent themes

At this stage of the analysis, I was fairly familiar with the content of the first interview and had made wide-ranging supplementary notes which were still roughly noted comments, but which were potentially important. The transcript and these comments were then considered together to develop emergent themes (Spiers & Smith, 2020; Storey, 2015). The focus of this step was on developing themes that would enable the reader to enter the world of the participant and their lived experience (Spiers & Smith, 2020). To enable this as far as possible, it was essential that the identified themes held a close resemblance to what the participant shared about their lived experience (Spiers & Smith, 2020). For this process, Smith and Eatough (2015) recommend that the themes be captured in the right-hand margin of the document; as explained above, I slightly deviated from these recommendations. The emergent themes were accordingly captured in the last column of the converted transcription.

Step three: Searching for connections across emergent themes

In the third step, preliminary themes were considered, and in instances where connections could be made, these themes were clustered together (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Spiers & Smith, 2020; Storey, 2015). For each of these clustered themes, a descriptive label was created (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Most of the themes also had sub-themes relating to the superordinate theme (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Not all of the preliminary themes were used in this step of the analysis, and some were discarded (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Storey, 2015).

Step four: Moving to the next case

Step four involved progressing to the next transcribed interview(s) and repeating steps one to three. During this step of the analysis, it was important to treat the new transcribed interview on its own terms in order to acknowledge its own individuality and distinctiveness (Smith *et al.*, 2009). The practical implication was to bracket the ideas which became apparent in the previous transcript as far as possible, while working with the present data (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

Step five: Looking for patterns across cases

This step entailed looking for patterns across different cases (Smith *et al.*, 2009). The objective of step five was to identify connections across the various interview transcriptions. I had to determine how the themes of one transcript promoted the themes of another case (Smith *et al.*, 2009). I also had to identify which themes were most convincing (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Inevitably this also involved reconfiguring and renaming of certain themes (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Step five was concluded with the concise presentation of the superordinate and sub-themes in a table (see Chapter 6, Table 6.3).

The findings of step five informed the third phase, which was the development of a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

2.4.3 Phase three

The purpose of the final phase was to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

Objective 9: Design a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution (Chapter 7)

2.4.3.1 Theoretical perspective for analysis and interpretation

The job demands-resources (JD-R) theory is explained in detail in Chapter 3, along with the justification for selecting the JD-R theory as the most appropriate theory of engagement. To this end, only a brief summary of the primary principles of this theory are highlighted in this section.

The JD-R theory developed from the JD-R model and was inspired by job design and job stress theories (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). The JD-R theory considers job stress theories and job design theories together. With the combination of the two research traditions, the JD-R theory describes how job demands and resources have unique and accumulative effects on job stress and motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Several researchers have used the JD-R theory to demonstrate how job resources and job demands influence job burnout, organisational commitment, work enjoyment, connectedness, WE (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014), organisational behaviour, work performance and occupational health (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). For this study, the JD-R theory was also employed to interpret participants' lived experiences in terms of job demands and resources at the ODL institution under investigation. These interpretations, in turn, shed much-needed light on how HRM practitioners can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

2.4.3.2 Development of a conceptual framework

In order to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution, the organising principles of Dickoff *et al.* (1968) were utilised. These include "agency" which is focused on answering the question 'who or what performs the activity?' Second, "patency or reciprocity" focus on answering the question 'who or what is the recipient of the activity?' Third, Dickoff, *et al.* ask the question related to the framework itself – 'in what context is the activity performed?' Next, the focus is moved to the "terminis", which enquires 'what is the end point of the activity?' The next question presented is 'what is the guiding procedure, technique, or protocol of the activity?' which relates to the "procedure". Finally, they turn their attention to "dynamics", which is focused on determining 'what is the energy source for the activity – whether chemical, physical, biological, mechanical, or psychological?' (Dickoff, *et al.* 1968:423).

Dickoff *et al.*'s. (1968) organising principles might seem abstract and complex, but can be better understood when applied to this specific study. The principles can thus be understood as follows:

1. *Who or what performs the activity (agent or "agency")?*

The "agency" refers to the individuals or factors that will realise academic employees' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

2. *Who or what is the recipient of the activity (recipient, or "patency or reciprocity")?*

The "patency or reciprocity" refers to the receiver of the support provided by HRM practitioners to support engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

3. *In what context is the activity performed (context)?*

The "context" refers to the setting or milieu in which HRM practitioners can support the recipients or "patency or reciprocity" of the procedure, to enable academic researchers to engage in research ethics at an ODL institution.

4. *What is the end point of the activity (outcome or "terminis")?*

The "terminis" refers to the envisioned outcome of the conceptual framework.

5. *What is the guiding procedure, technique, or protocol of the activity (procedure)?*

The "procedure" explains the steps necessary to achieve the outcome.

6. *What is the energy source for the activity (dynamics)?*

The “dynamics” refer to the energy source which can support academic researchers to engage in research ethics at an ODL institution.

These questions posed by Dickoff *et al.* (1968) are successfully answered in Chapter 7, with the presentation of a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers’ engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

2.5 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS AND AUTHENTICITY

As stated earlier in the chapter, qualitative research is vastly different from quantitative research in its methodological approaches. Thus, it is comprehensible that different criteria are used to evaluate the scientific value of qualitative research studies (Ang *et al.*, 2016; Cope, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Several measures and approaches to assess the scientific value of qualitative research findings are available in literature (Amin, Nørgaard, Cavaco, Witry, Hillman, Cernasev & Desselle, 2020; Ang *et al.*, 2016; Hays, Wood, Dahl & Kirk-Jenkins, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Johnson *et al.* (2020), for example, uphold that when qualitative research is reported, it should meet the quality criteria of clarity, completeness, accuracy, conciseness and have an organised format in order to unambiguously communicate the findings to the reader.

One of the best-known approaches to establish scientific rigour in qualitative research without compromising the scientific significance is trustworthiness and authenticity (Ang *et al.*, 2016; Cope, 2014; Hays *et al.*, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Visagie, 2009). According to Cypress (2017), academic writers have defined trustworthiness in several ways, but in essence, the concept denotes the truthfulness, quality and authenticity of the research findings.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the essential issue related to trustworthiness is that the researcher should be able to convince the reader that the findings of the qualitative research are noteworthy and defensible against claims made by quantitative researchers that qualitative research is ‘sloppy’ research or ‘merely subjective’ observations. To annul such claims, Lincoln and Guba (1985) redefined the concepts of reliability and validity, commonly used in quantitative research, to comparable concepts consisting of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability criteria. Later, these scholars (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) added authenticity as a fifth criterion to support the scientific rigour of qualitative research studies.

According to Connelly (2016), no parallel concept exists for quantitative research, thus enabling qualitative researchers to lead the way in supporting readers' understanding by comprehensively demonstrating the rich meaning of a phenomenon.

For this study, the criteria offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1989) to establish scientific rigour were also utilised. Each criterion is discussed separately, then procedures that were implemented to endorse the criteria are outlined. It is important to note that a number of these procedures supported more than one criterion to enhance the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research findings.

2.5.1 Credibility

Internal validity is the measure used by quantitative researchers to ensure that the study they conduct measures or tests what is actually intended (Given & Saumure, 2008; Shenton, 2004). Credibility in qualitative research can be understood as the equivalent of internal validity in quantitative research (Connelly, 2016; Given & Saumure, 2008). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is essential to establish trustworthiness. Credibility can therefore be understood as the general plausibility or likelihood that the findings of the research study seem truthful when considering the research process (Hays *et al.*, 2016).

According to Hoque, Parker, Covaleski and Haynes (2017), the credibility of the study should be considered from the very beginning of the research process, when doing fieldwork and collecting data, right up until the research findings are presented. A detailed presentation of the research findings and the process followed to come to the conclusions are essential to ensure that the perceived credibility is upheld (Hoque *et al.*, 2017). Several strategies can be employed to enhance the credibility of research findings. These include prolonged engagement with research participants, debriefing sessions, negative case analysis, observation, triangulation, and continuous reflection (Connelly, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The strategies mentioned here were also employed in this study, as discussed in Section 2.5.6.

2.5.2 Transferability

External validity is used to determine the degree to which the results of a quantitative study can be generalised and applied in other situations (Given & Saumure, 2008; Shenton, 2004). Transferability can be understood as the corresponding measure used in qualitative research,

as external validity is used in quantitative research (Given & Saumure, 2008; Hays *et al.*, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), but it is important to understand that transferability is not the same as statistical generalisation (Connelly, 2016).

Generalisability, as understood in the quantitative research paradigm, refers to situations where results can be applied across various contexts. Conversely, transferability promotes the importance to clearly communicate the scope of the research study in order to evaluate the applicability in different contexts (Given & Saumure, 2008). Qualitative researchers are concerned with offering a truthful reflection of participants' lived experiences but refrain from making any claims that it is the lived experiences of all human beings (Connelly, 2016).

Providing thick descriptions of the phenomenon studied will enable the reader to assess the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other settings, time frames, people and situations (Amankwaa, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These evaluations by readers are referred to as transferability judgments (Korstjens & Moser, 2018), and it is therefore important that qualitative researchers invest time to meticulously collect, interpret and report on research procedures and research findings. The reader is thereby enabled to make such judgements, and ultimately contribute to the trustworthiness of the research findings (Amin *et al.*, 2020; Connelly, 2016). In essence, this means that the findings of a qualitative study should not be disregarded simply because it cannot be used in broader contexts. The insight and value of the research study are evaluated by the extent to which readers are able to establish to which other settings the findings might be applied (Given & Saumure, 2008).

In this study, I offered a detailed account of the data interpretations, which included details pertaining to the organisational context of the ODL institution where the research was carried out, the sample, including information on the sampling strategy, and the sample size. In addition, I provided the demographic profile of each one of the research participants, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the interview procedure, and the interview guide.

I also provided dense descriptions of the findings, supported by direct quotations from participants to offer readers an opportunity to evaluate the transferability of the research findings.

According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), Marshall and Rossman (2016), my responsibility as researcher is to demonstrate transferability is upheld when I provide thick descriptions of the research process and participants. The onus is then shifted to the reader to make the

transferability judgments, since I cannot foresee or provide for the specific research setting(s) or context(s) in readers' minds (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

To enable readers of this study to determine whether the research findings are applicable to their setting(s) or context(s), a detailed account of the research method is discussed in Section 5.4 in Chapter 5. A description of the research participants is given in Section 6.3 and in Section 6.5, the findings of the study, including direct quotations, are provided.

2.5.3 Dependability

For quantitative researchers, reliability is tested to demonstrate that should the research be repeated, using the same methods, the same participants, and it is done in the same context, then similar results should be achieved (Connelly, 2016; Given & Saumure, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Hays *et al.*, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Within the qualitative research paradigm, dependability can be understood as the equivalent of reliability in the quantitative research paradigm and speaks to the consistency of research findings across time and researchers (Connelly, 2016; Given & Saumure, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Hays *et al.*, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that the consistency of the findings is reliant on the objective of the research study (Connelly, 2016). Connelly (2016) explains that if a phenomenon is studied, the lived experience of a single participant is likely to remain the same across time, but in a research study where an intervention or programme is introduced, the conditions will inevitably change and accordingly also influencing the research findings.

The dependability of a study is increased by fully explaining the procedures followed during the research study, including keeping a comprehensive audit trail and having frequent debriefing sessions (Connelly, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Such measures will enable another researcher who wishes to repeat the study to do so and, if the research findings from the original study are indeed dependable, the next researcher should be able to achieve similar findings (Connelly, 2016; Given & Saumure, 2008; Shenton, 2004). The measures to enhance the dependability of this study included a comprehensive audit trail and frequent debriefing sessions with my supervisors, as discussed in Section 2.5.6.

2.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the researcher's objectivity (Connelly, 2016; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Hays *et al.*, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Confirmability is the extent to which the findings reflect the

focus of the study, the actual viewpoints and lived experiences of participants, and not the bias of the researcher (Given & Saumure, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Hays *et al.*, 2016). The researcher should make every effort to ensure that the findings are the outcome of participants' experiences and thoughts, and not his or her personal preferences and characteristics (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation is beneficial to support confirmability, as it limits the effect of researcher bias (Anney, 2014; Shenton, 2004). To this end, the researcher should also acknowledge their own predispositions (Shenton, 2004).

The confirmability of a study can be advanced with a detailed audit trail of the project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Petty *et al.*, 2012; Shenton, 2004). An 'audit trail' enables any reader to follow the course of the research step-by-step because the decisions made and procedures described can be understood. In addition to an audit trail, as researcher, you can employ triangulation, reflective field notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and debriefing sessions to ensure that the research findings are not a single person's perspective, which might be subjective (bias) of the research findings (Connelly, 2016). To ensure the confirmability of the study's research findings, I employed triangulation measures, reflective field notes, and a comprehensive audit trail, which are elaborated on in Section 2.5.6.

2.5.5 Authenticity

No equivalent measure for authenticity can be found in quantitative research (Amin *et al.*, 2020; Connelly, 2016). Authenticity was not always part of the trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985); it was only added in 1989 as a fifth criterion to support the scientific rigour of qualitative research studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Guba and Lincoln (1989) added authenticity to address what they believed to be a shortfall in the scientific rigour of qualitative research. The main concern for Guba and Lincoln (1989) was that the criteria used at that stage only answered questions related to the methodological concerns of the research findings but failed to speak to concerns of power, diversity, multiple values, representation, empowerment, and accountability (Amin *et al.*, 2020).

Authenticity can be understood as the degree to which the qualitative researcher accurately and comprehensively reports on a variety of diverse realities and truthfully portrays the lived experiences of the research participants (Amin *et al.*, 2020; Connelly, 2016; Cope, 2014). Similar to trustworthiness, authenticity is also focused on the proper recording of data (Hoque *et al.*, 2017). Detailed capturing of the data is essential to offer an authentic account of research participants' lived experiences (Hoque *et al.*, 2017). It is also critical that the researcher identifies and selects suitable research participants (Connelly, 2016). In addition,

it is important for the researcher to reflect on their role in the research setting and how to appropriately engage with research participants in their context(s), being mindful to demonstrate respect and integrate appropriately in these environments (Amin *et al.*, 2020; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

For Amin *et al.* (2020), the most important criteria for authenticity are situated in the fairness of the study. This *fairness* should be evident in the efforts made by the researcher to avoid settings where certain views expressed by some individuals are muffled, while other views which are held by a number of individuals are amplified (Amin *et al.*, 2020). By suppressing some views and accentuating others, the participation of some individuals is exploited while advantage is given for the participation of other individuals (Amin *et al.*, 2020). The reader should thus be able to see how the researcher proceeded in analysing the data to evaluate the authenticity of the study (Amin *et al.*, 2020).

Amin *et al.* (2020) further indicate that it is critical that all participants are fully informed of the research and willingly give their consent to participate, and that all procedures of the research, but particularly the data collection procedures, should be transparent to participants and other stakeholders. The researcher and the participant should collaborate in all steps of the data collection to ensure that a truthful reflection of the account is documented (Amin *et al.*, 2020).

Creswell (2014) maintains that it will be beneficial to the authenticity of the research if the researcher shares their personal reflections and acknowledge the biases they might bring to the research. Researchers will benefit in investing time to properly reflect on their role, since participants are likely to notice when a researcher is not sincere or inauthentic, resulting in these participants refusing to share their lived experiences with the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In addition, an open and honest portrayal of the research journey is expected to be positively received by readers since it will enable them to identify with these experiences and reflections (Cope, 2014; Creswell, 2014).

The strategies employed to ensure the authenticity of the research were comprehensively explained in Sections 2.5.6 and 2.6, which dealt with the ethical research processes and procedures adhered to in this study. My role as a researcher and the methods to address potential biases were discussed in Section 2.4.2.3 above. The justification for the chosen participants was provided in Sections 2.4.2.1 and 2.4.2.2.

2.5.6 Strategies to support the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research findings

In this section, the strategies that were utilised in this study to attain trustworthiness and authenticity are discussed. It is worth mentioning that not all strategies to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity are used across the board for all qualitative research studies. The strategies chosen to establish scientific rigour should complement the research design of the specific study (Connelly, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

In Table 2.4, an overview of the different strategies applied to support the study's trustworthiness and authenticity is offered. These strategies are then discussed in greater detail in the subsequent sections.

Table 2.4: Procedures employed in this study to ensure that the research findings are trustworthy and authentic

Criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity	Strategies and protocols employed in this research study
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ suitable and well-documented research methods. • Use different data collection methods, enabling triangulation. • Use several strategies to encourage participants to be honest and truthful. • Several debriefing sessions were held with my superiors. • Describe my background and experience in my role as researcher. • Provide thick descriptions of the findings of the research phenomenon. • Ensure prolonged engagement in the study field. • Document negative case analysis (differing views by research participants).
Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thick descriptions of research findings. • Non-probability purposive sampling of research participants. • Thorough audit trail recorded.
Dependability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough audit trail recorded. • Frequent debriefing sessions.

Criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity	Strategies and protocols employed in this research study
Confirmability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triangulation. • Thorough audit trail recorded. • Reflexive field notes. • Debriefing sessions to reduce the effect of possible biases by the researcher.
Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound data recording procedures. • Voluntary informed consent. • Being respectful of the context/setting of participants. • Purposive sampling of suitable participants. • Negative case analysis. • Honouring participation fairness. • Declare possible biases held by the researcher. • Transparent and collaborative data collection procedures.

Source: Own compilation

2.5.6.1 Triangulation

Triangulation is traditionally employed to determine credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Ang *et al.*, 2016). Triangulation is a process of verification that increases the validity of the findings by incorporating several viewpoints and methods (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). It can typically entail the use of different data collection methods, for example, observation, focus groups, and individual interviews (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Shenton, 2004; Yates & Leggett, 2016). In the social science studies, it can also refer to the combination of two or more theories, data sources or methods, and can be used in both quantitative and qualitative studies (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). Another method that can be employed to triangulate research findings is investigator triangulation, where more than one researcher codes and analyses the raw data (Amin *et al.*, 2020; Fusch, Fusch & Ness, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The objective of triangulation is to obtain confirmation of findings through the merging of different perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). With the use of triangulation, the researcher has the means to justify the interpretation of the data and identified themes, and can provide supporting evidence from different data sources (Creswell, 2014) while simultaneously addressing any possible concerns readers might have of researcher bias (Shenton, 2004).

In this study, methodological triangulation was employed, implying that different data collection methods were used (Fusch *et al.*, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). These included semi-structured, face-to-face, individual interviews, naïve sketches, and field notes. These different sources of data enabled me to triangulate the findings. Additionally, the data were analysed by me and an independent co-coder, thus employing investigator triangulation. The first four semi-structured individual interviews were coded independently. The identified codes and themes were then compared, and interpretations were discussed to ensure that the interpretations were the best representation of the meaning of the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

2.5.6.2 Prolonged engagement

Prolonged engagement refers to spending an extended period in the field (Creswell, 2014) in order to build trust and rapport with participants to encourage rich and detailed responses when data are collected (Cope, 2014). It is needed in order for the researcher to obtain a sufficient understanding of a specific research setting and form a relationship of trust between herself and the research participants (Amin *et al.*, 2020; Creswell, 2014). The researcher can encourage this process by allowing adequate time for collecting data and obtaining an understanding of the participants, their context, and the phenomenon of the study (Amin *et al.*, 2020; Cope, 2014). Prolonged engagement is beneficial to minimise the distortions of information that might arise due to the researcher's presence in the field (Anney, 2014). Amin *et al.* (2020) consider prolonged engagement as essential, because it allows the researcher to reflect and provide thick descriptions of the data. This idea is echoed by Creswell (2014), who maintains that the more experience a researcher obtains while in the field engaging with participants within their contexts, the more substantially the probability of accurate and valid findings increases (Creswell, 2014). This is because the researcher will be better equipped to develop an in-depth understanding of the research phenomenon, and she will be able to explain the research setting and the population which is studied in greater detail, thus adding to the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2014).

Prior to the data collection, I ensured that every participant was aware of my role in the study and also why I asked them to participate in the research. Participants were fully informed of the aim of the study and provided voluntary informed consent. A conscious effort was made with each participant to build a trusting relationship and demonstrate appreciation for their time and effort in sharing their lived experiences with me. In all instances where I was not sure what participants meant by a response to a question during interviews, I asked for clarification to

ensure that I could offer a truthful reflection of their lived experience when reporting on the research findings.

2.5.6.3 The use of established research methods

According to Basias and Pollalis (2018), research is a creative work activity that is conducted by an academic researcher who follows a systematic approach to expand knowledge, and then use this knowledge for theory development, problem-solving, the establishment or confirmation of facts, and offer innovative solutions. In order to perform this task, academic researchers need to select the most appropriate research method to realise the research objective(s) (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). For this study, IPA was chosen. The credibility of the study can be enhanced with the utilisation of well-established research methods (Shenton, 2004), and several researchers regard IPA as the method that is the *most participant-oriented* qualitative approach to obtain a deep understanding of participants' lived experiences (Alase, 2017).

The credibility of the research is enhanced when the data collection and analysis methods are well-established (Shenton, 2004), as is the case with IPA (Alase, 2017). Attention should be paid to accurately executing the research procedures, including the data collection and analysis methods (Shenton, 2004). For this study, I made every effort to implement the research procedures correctly, including the data collection, the analysis, and the reporting thereof. In this journey, I also meticulously documented these steps in a clear audit trail (discussed below).

2.5.6.4 Audit trail

Several academic scholars uphold that the trustworthiness of the qualitative inquiry can be underwritten with the presentation of a comprehensive audit trail (Amin *et al.*, 2020; Bailey, 2007; Carcary, 2009; Connelly, 2016; Cope, 2014; Hoque *et al.*, 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Similar to the notion of reflection by the researcher (see Section 1.7.6.8), the audit trail can be employed to support more than one criterion of trustworthiness (Amin *et al.*, 2020) and support the authenticity of the research (Hoque *et al.*, 2017).

The purpose of the audit trail is to enable a reader to review the research processes and procedures to establish if the same study conclusions can be reached (Amin *et al.*, 2020; Bailey, 2007; Cope, 2014), and whether the research findings can be relied upon as a platform

for further research studies (Carcary, 2009). The audit trail can therefore be understood as the gathering of information, notes and other records used in the research process that capture and provide evidence of the assumptions, decisions made, and conclusions drawn by the researcher during the study (Cope, 2014). Examples of such materials include interview transcripts, data analysis and process notes, and drafts of the final research report (Cope, 2014). Throughout this study, I ensured that a detailed audit trail was held.

2.5.6.5 Strategies to ensure honesty and truthfulness from participants

While conducting fieldwork, it sometimes happens that research participants respond to the researcher in ways they believe are preferable responses for the researcher (McCambridge, Kypri & Elbourne, 2014). Different terms are associated with this occurrence, including observer effect (referring to the fact that participants alter their behaviour and responses because they are aware of being observed) (Sassoli de Bianchi, 2018), the Hawthorne effect (Franz, 2018), social desirability bias (Bergen & Labonté, 2020), and the research participation effect (McCambridge *et al.*, 2014). McCambridge *et al.* (2014) explain that individuals who are inclined to conform to this behaviour do so because they believe that by modifying their responses, they will be considered 'good' participants.

Such behaviour by participants therefore creates a bias in the research, since the participants are not sharing a truthful reflection of their lived experiences with the researcher (Bergen & Labonté, 2020), therefore compromising the trustworthiness of the research findings (Franz, 2018; Sassoli de Bianchi, 2018).

For the data collection process, the researcher should be confident that the research participant is voluntarily participating and is fully informed (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice & Bernard, 2018). Any person who is invited to participate in a study should have the opportunity to decline the invitation if they do not want to participate without being concerned about negative consequences (Shenton, 2004). This is to ensure that the data collected only involve participants who are genuinely willing to participate and prepared to offer data freely (Shenton, 2004). It is also important for the researcher to establish rapport with participants at the outset of the interview by explaining that there is no correct or incorrect answer to the questions posed and that the participant should feel free to be honest and truthful (Bergen & Labonté, 2020; King & Horrocks, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Shenton, 2004). Participants can, thus, share their thoughts and talk about their lived experiences without the distress of losing credibility in front of others, such as colleagues, stakeholders or the interviewer (Bergen & Labonté, 2020; Shenton, 2004).

All individuals who participated in this study did so on a voluntary basis and were comprehensively informed of the objective of the study, why they were invited to partake in the research, and how the data would be analysed. According to Bergen and Labonté (2020), participants will be more comfortable or at ease if they are fully informed of the purpose of the research and less likely to feel that they were being appraised or scrutinised. As researcher, I established rapport with participants prior to any data collection and guaranteed confidentiality of the data shared by participants. Participants were made aware that they were welcome to discontinue participation if they desired to do so. According to Franz (2018), the influence of this phenomenon (Hawthorne effect) can also be countered with the use of triangulation, thus supporting the trustworthiness of the research findings.

2.5.6.6 Frequent debriefing sessions

When conducting in-depth qualitative research, it is important that the researcher seeks out the support of academic research colleagues who are willing to offer their professional insight and advice related to the research study on a frequent basis (Anney, 2014; Bergen & Labonté, 2020). The intention of debriefing sessions is manifold (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

First, frequent debriefing sessions between the researcher and her colleagues or other scholars can assist the researcher in developing her ideas and gaining insight, given that these academic researchers are not involved in the research and can objectively share their insight, experiences and perceptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). For this study, I chose to conduct my debriefing sessions with my thesis supervisors. Second, when the researcher is *honest* and reveals herself to an unbiased colleague(s) in a critical debriefing session, an opportunity is presented to explore facets of the research that might remain hidden in the mind of the researcher if not explored (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Third, with debriefing sessions, the researcher can discuss possible methodological approaches, and peer-reviewers can draw attention to possible weaknesses in the proposed courses of action (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Shenton, 2004). They can thus be supportive to help the researcher to improve the quality of the research findings (Anney, 2014).

Fourth, Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that any question asked during a debriefing session should be considered as relevant and acceptable, irrespective of whether it is related to the significance of the study, the methodology, the ethical aspects, or any other matter that might be relevant to the study. By opening conversations to challenge aspects of the study, it enables the researcher to open up and state her personal feelings, concerns and stresses that could have a negative influence on the research study if they go unvoiced (Guba & Lincoln,

1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, Bergen and Labonté (2020) believe that frequent debriefing sessions can be beneficial to consider and address challenges experienced, support the researcher to remain positive and optimistic, and also to develop her skills as an academic researcher.

Throughout this study, I had frequent debriefing contact sessions with my supervisors. I audio-recorded all of these debriefing sessions, which ensured that all feedback and insight provided by my supervisors were captured, enabling me to listen for a second (or third) time and reflect on these deliberations afterwards. Each contact session lasted more than 90 minutes to ensure that all aspects of the progressing study were discussed.

2.5.6.7 Thick descriptions of the phenomenon studied

By offering thick descriptions, the researcher supports the trustworthiness of the research findings (Amin *et al.*, 2020; Johnson *et al.*, 2020). Detailed descriptions of the data are important to promote credibility as it helps to convey the actual settings and contexts that were investigated (Amankwaa, 2016; Amin *et al.*, 2020; Shenton, 2004). Without this insight, it is difficult for the reader of the final product to determine the extent to which the overall findings are an actual reflection of the truth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

Thick descriptions of the research enable the reader to evaluate the extent and level of the data analysis and interpretation (Amin *et al.*, 2020). Providing sufficient information in the form of extensive descriptions of the research findings further enables the reader to determine how and if the research findings can be transferred to other settings (Amin *et al.*, 2020; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Petty *et al.*, 2012; Yilmaz, 2013).

The data presented in the research findings are entirely based on evidence. Throughout the study, I used thick descriptions to explain codes and themes extracted from the data, which ultimately resulted in the research findings. This enables the reader to determine the extent to which the findings are credible and transferable.

2.5.6.8 Reflection

When the researcher practices reflexivity, it supports the establishment of the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the research study (Amin *et al.*, 2020; Johnson *et al.*, 2020). Reflexivity is the awareness by researchers that their values,

background, and previous experience with the phenomenon can influence the research process (Cope, 2014; Petty *et al.*, 2012). Reflection involves the contemplation of the reasons for adopting a specific course of action for the study, challenging your own assumptions and biases, and recognising that your decisions shape the research (Carcary, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The researcher conducting qualitative research is considered the research instrument and must avoid researcher bias (Cope, 2014). Reflection thus provides a resource for the researcher to manage the inherent influence that she brings to the qualitative study (Amin *et al.*, 2020). A detailed discussion of my role as a research instrument, and efforts to prevent biases from interfering with the research findings, were discussed in Section 2.4.2.3 of this chapter.

Throughout the study, I continuously reflected on the research process, my own assumptions and frame of reference. In the final chapter of this thesis, a detailed account is given of my personal reflections of this research journey and my development as an academic researcher.

2.5.6.9 Negative case analysis

In qualitative research, it is important to report on negative cases of the research findings (Connelly, 2016; Creswell, 2014). The reporting of negative cases refers to the cases that are in contrast or differs from a theme that was identified during the analysis of the data (Anney, 2014). The reporting of negative case(s) should not be regarded as damaging to the research findings (Brodsky, 2008); it is, in fact, beneficial to support the credibility of the study (Anney, 2014; Brodsky, 2008; Yates & Leggett, 2016).

The idea of negative cases, also referred to as deviant cases (Yates & Leggett, 2016), can include cases that are in contradiction with the identified theme (Anney, 2014). However, it can also refer to inconsistent information provided by research participants (Creswell, 2014) or alternative explanations to answer research questions (Connelly, 2016). The importance of negative case analysis lies therein that it demonstrates that the lived experiences of all participants are equally important; the researcher does not discard this lived experience (negative case) simply because it does not support the theme identified. Presenting negative cases is also essential to demonstrate that the data collection and analysis was done as objectively as possible (Brodsky, 2008; Yates & Leggett, 2016).

Creswell (2014) explains that with the presence of negative accounts, it is all the more important to thoroughly discuss the evidence of the identified theme to support the credibility of the research findings. This means that most of the discussions will justify and support the

theme identified, but the presentation of negative cases is just as vital since the research becomes more real and trustworthy simply because it is unlikely that the perspectives of different individuals will always agree (Brodsky, 2008; Creswell, 2014).

With the presentation of negative cases, the authenticity of the research is also supported because it serves as a demonstration of the accurateness and comprehensiveness of the reporting of diverse realities and lived experiences of participants by the qualitative researcher (Connelly, 2016). This perception is also supported by Amin *et al.* (2020), who state that the most important criterion for authenticity is related to the fairness of the research study. This *fairness* is demonstrated when the researcher avoids situations where some participants' lived experiences are kept 'silent', while others are highlighted (Amin *et al.*, 2020).

In this study, every effort was made to demonstrate *fairness* in the presentation of the research findings. Where deviant perceptions of lived experiences were noted, when shared by participants, these negative cases were also analysed and interpreted.

2.6 DECLARATION ON ETHICAL RESEARCH PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES HONOURED

According to Connelly (2016), the measures implemented to support trustworthiness (see Section 2.5) should be regarded as the baseline for the study's integrity and value; however, other facets of the study must also be considered. These facets include the ethical implications of the research, appropriate recruiting procedures for participants, and the analysis of the qualitative data (Connelly, 2016). The research processes and procedures that I followed to ensure that the highest level of ethical standards for the study was honoured, are discussed in the following sections.

The measures and the strategies I implemented to uphold the trustworthiness and authenticity of this study, were complemented with my commitment to ethically sound research processes and procedures. I adhered to the research ethics policy (2016c) of the ODL institution throughout this study. The guidelines provided by the ODL institution for research involving human participants are internationally recognised moral principles of ethics and are based on the principles of the Belmont Report (1978). The Belmont Report was officially promulgated in 1979 and addresses the three key principles currently accepted as the minimum requirements that must be adhered to for ethical research with human participants (Rice & Bernard, 2018; Rice, 2008; Weiss, 2015). The three principles comprise respect for persons, beneficence,

and justice (Belmont Report, 1978). The guidelines used by the ODL institution distinguishes beneficence and non-maleficence, while the Belmont Report (1978) simply refers to the principle of beneficence, with the understanding that it includes non-maleficence (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Belmont Report, 1978). To demonstrate how I honoured the principles of autonomy, beneficence, and justice, as stipulated by the Belmont Report (1978) and endorsed by the ODL institutional Policy on Research Ethics (2016), I explained each principle separately.

In accord with the ODL institutional Policy on Research Ethics (2016), I also made the distinction between beneficence and non-maleficence but discussed these two principles simultaneously. The Belmont Report (1978) further states certain requirements that need to be actualised in order for the principles (identified above) to be realised. These requirements include informed consent, an assessment of the risks and benefits related to the research, and the selection of research participants (Belmont Report, 1978). The measures I took to realise these principles are therefore also discussed (see Section 2.6.2).

Before embarking on the discussion referred to above, it is important to mention that in addition to, and expanding on, the above principles, the ODL institution stipulates that all human, animal, plant, molecular and cell research conducted by their employees or students must obtain research ethics approval before the study may be conducted (Institution A, 2016c). In addition, the ODL institution requires that all researchers obtain institutional permission if they intend to conduct research that involves employees, students, or data (of the institution) prior to data collection (Institution A, 2016a). To this end, I applied for research ethics approval at the department of HRM sub-unit ERC in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences. A copy of the anonymised research ethics approval certificate (Reference number: 2017_HRM_014) is available as Annexure A of the thesis. Additionally, in accordance with the policy for conducting research involving the employees, students, or data (2016a) of the ODL institution, I obtained institutional permission to use employees who work at this ODL institution as research participants. I did not commence with any fieldwork before research ethics approval and institutional permission was granted. The anonymised institutional permission letter (Reference number: 2017_RPSC_058) is available as Annexure B of this thesis. In order for these applications to be approved, I had to comprehensively explain the procedures I would follow to realise the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice.

Moreover, the ODL institutional Policy on Research Ethics (2016) clearly indicates that academic researchers should take every effort to avoid plagiarism (Institution A, 2016c). To

demonstrate my commitment to avoid plagiarism and present the findings of an original and authentic study, the thesis was submitted to an electronic plagiarism tracking system (see Annexure L for the Turnitin Report). This system is designed to assess the originality of the work and determine if the author duplicated content or written sentences or paragraphs that require citation to original sources. By submitting my work, I thus underscored my integrity as an academic researcher, verified the authenticity of the study, and safeguarded the reputational risks for the ODL institution.

2.6.1 The principles of respect for persons (autonomy), beneficence, non-maleficence and justice

2.6.1.1 Respect for persons (Autonomy)

The principle of respect for persons in the context of academic research implies respecting and valuing their autonomy, therefore their freedom and self-determination to make decisions independently and without influence from outside (Al Tajir, 2018). The two central ethical convictions that emerge from the first principle include the conviction that people should be treated as autonomous agents and that people with diminished autonomy should be given additional protection to avoid possible exploitation (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Belmont Report, 1978; Rice & Bernard, 2018; WHO, 2002). Persons or populations with diminished autonomy are frequently referred to as vulnerable people or vulnerable populations (Rice & Bernard, 2018; WHO, 2002).

For the principal *respect for persons* to be realised, it is vital for the researcher to understand that a person who chooses to participate in a study should do so voluntarily (Al Tajir, 2018; Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice & Bernard, 2018). What this implies is that the consent given by the person can only be regarded as voluntary if the person was fully informed of the research (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice & Bernard, 2018). The principle of *respect for persons* requires that research participants, to the extent that they are capable, should choose what may or may not happen to them (Al Tajir, 2018; Belmont Report, 1978). This consent process should comprise three elements, which include comprehensive information, the ability to comprehend the information provided, and voluntariness (Belmont Report, 1978).

In addition, the researcher should take care that the privacy and confidentiality of research participants are protected (Al Tajir, 2018; Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice & Bernard, 2018). Anonymity is related to confidentiality, since anonymity is a form in which confidentiality is realised (Wiles, Crow, Heath & Charles, 2008). In a research setting, confidentiality consists

of two aspects: the information given by a person is not mentioned to or discussed with others, and the findings of research are presented in such a manner that participants cannot be identified (Al Tajir, 2018; Wiles *et al.*, 2008). In addition, participants must have the right to withdraw and stop participation from the study without penalty or negative consequences (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice & Bernard, 2018). In accordance with this principle, I acknowledged participants' dignity and ensured that they were made aware of their rights to autonomy throughout the research.

2.6.1.2 Beneficence and non-maleficence

The second research ethics principle identified by the Belmont Report (1978) is beneficence, and is joined to the concept of non-maleficence (Al Tajir, 2018). This principle of beneficence (and non-maleficence) is concerned with maximising benefits and minimising harm and wrongdoings to research participants as far as possible (Al Tajir, 2018; WHO, 2002). Stated differently, this principle implies that researchers have an obligation to protect the wellbeing of research participants and evaluate the potential risks and benefits of participation in the research (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Belmont Report, 1978).

All research studies involving human participants should therefore undertake a risk-benefit assessment, taking the possible benefits of the research into account along with potential harm to participants and general society (Al Tajir, 2018). However, this principle stretches beyond simply avoiding harm and includes the conviction that research should be designed in such a manner that potential risks are minimised, and potential benefits are maximised (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Belmont Report, 1978). A risk can be understood as any type of potential harm that might affect the research participant during or after the research (Al Tajir, 2018). The beneficence (and non-maleficence) of a research project can be determined by first evaluating if the risk related to the study can be justified by the potential benefits to the participant and/or society, and then evaluating if the study is designed in such a way that possible benefits are maximised and risks are minimised (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Belmont Report, 1978; Rice & Bernard, 2018). This principle further alludes to the need for a trustworthy research design and competent researchers to conduct the research and ensure the research participants' dignity, privacy, and autonomy (WHO, 2002).

In terms of the standard operating procedure (SOP) of the ODL institution, regarding risk assessment of proposed studies (see Section 5.6), this study was classified as a low-risk study (category 2). According to the SOP on risk assessments of proposed studies, a low-risk study is understood as follows: "Research involving human participants directly in which the

probability or magnitude of risk of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research is not greater in itself than ordinarily experienced in daily life. The researcher can easily mitigate the risk.” (Institution A, 2018:8-9).

2.6.1.3 Justice

The notion of justice is derived from the need to distribute risk within society (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice & Bernard, 2018). The possible risks of a research study should be borne equally by all members of society who might benefit from the research findings (Amdur & Bankert, 2011). This principle was included as a reactive measure with the realisation that some studies take advantage of some of the most vulnerable parts of society; two well-known examples being the Tuskegee syphilis study (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Babb *et al.*, 2017) and the coerced Nazi concentration camp prisoners (Belmont Report, 1978:9) (discussed in Sections 5.3.1.1 and 5.3.1.4, respectively). Stated differently, an injustice occurs when a benefit to which a person is entitled is refused, in the absence of a valid reason, or when a burden is imposed disproportionately (Belmont Report, 1978).

The implication is that researchers cannot systematically select or exclude certain groups or categories because of their accessibility or lack thereof, or their compromised position in contrast to the direct objective of the research study (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice & Bernard, 2018). The ethical conviction that emerges from the principle of justice, is therefore that the procedures and outcome for the recruitment of participants should be tied directly to the purpose of the research (Belmont Report, 1978; Rice & Bernard, 2018). In this study, a purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that the identified potential participants would be the most likely individuals to aid in the realisation of the research objectives. In addition, the procedures followed to recruit potential participants were conducted in a just manner.

2.6.2 Measures carried out in the study to uphold the moral principles set forth by the Belmont Report

In order to obtain the contact details of potential participants, institutional permission was obtained from the ODL institution. With the permission granted, I was able to identify and invite ‘information-rich’ participants to the study. Employees who were identified as potential participants were sent a written information letter of the study, which simultaneously invited them to participate. The information letter included the rationale and purpose of the study, the

reason why they were invited for participation, and what their involvement would entail (interview, naïve sketches). In addition, the benefits of the research and the potential inconvenience was explained; measures which were taken to protect their confidentiality; the safekeeping and storage of the data; how the findings of the study would be made available; and the research ethics approval reference number (Reference number: 2017_HRM_014) (see Annexure A).

According to Al Tajir (2018), voluntary informed consent is only possible if individuals are able to make an informed decision on whether they wish to partake in the research once they received verbal and written information regarding the study. In instances where individuals do not have the ability to make informed decisions (e.g., children or mentally disabled individuals), additional safeguards should be in place (e.g. guardian or legal representative) (Al Tajir, 2018). Every research participant of this study was able to make an informed decision and gave their voluntary informed consent for participation.

In addition to the information letter, I verbally explained the purpose of the study to individuals who agreed to participate, before data collection. I also indicated the approximate time they had to avail if they chose to participate. In both the information letter and my verbal explanation of the study, I indicated that participation was voluntary, and they were under no obligation to consent to participation. However, if they were willing to participate, they should sign the written consent form. They were also made aware that they were free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Participants were given the assurance that there would be no adverse consequences should they wish to withdraw their participation. Furthermore, measures to ensure their privacy and confidentiality were also included, and explanations of how reporting would be done, how data would be stored, as well as the efforts made to preserve the anonymity of the ODL institution were given.

In accordance with the moral principle of beneficence and non-maleficence, I explained the potential benefits and risks of the envisioned study. In the information letter, I explained to potential participants that they would not receive any immediate benefit from participation, apart from having an opportunity to share their lived experiences at the ODL institution pertaining to the research phenomenon. Still, the anticipated outcome of the research findings was the development of a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at the ODL institution. The outcome of the study thus had a potential indirect benefit to participants, and this was declared to them.

The only inconvenience that could potentially be experienced by participants was the time spent to participate in the study (time spent on the semi-structured individual interviews and the time needed to write a naïve sketch). This potential inconvenience was stated in the information letter and was verbally communicated to each participant prior to the data collection. The participants were thus aware of the potential inconvenience of participation, prior to agreeing to partake in the study.

In order for the actual informed consent document to be legally recognised and valid, two features must be fulfilled, which include information to potential participants and a section where the participant gives their signature as verification of voluntary participation (Al Tajir, 2018). For this study, the information letter and the consent documents were two separate documents. A copy of the information letter was given to each participant, which they were allowed to keep. However, the voluntary consent document was retained by me and securely stored. A copy of the signed voluntary consent document was made available to the participant upon request. A copy of the information letter as well as a voluntary informed consent document is available as Annexures C and D, respectively.

An independent transcriber transcribed the audio-recorded interviews. Furthermore, the analysis of the data was conducted with the assistance of an independent co-coder. However, both parties only obtained access to the data after confidentiality agreements were in place. The copies of the (anonymised) confidentiality agreements can be found in Annexure I and J of this thesis.

All electronic copies of transcriptions are stored on password-protected MS Word documents (encrypted documents) on my personal computer. Al Tajir (2018) stated that the researcher can protect the identity of the participants by 'de-identifying' the identifiable information in transcripts with coded identifiers. In agreement with Al Tajir, I ensured that all participants received pseudonyms as soon as the data were transcribed. All personal identifying information was removed. This included aspects such as employment position(s) within the ODL institution (in instances where this information become apparent during the interview), modules taught, and others. The naïve sketches received from participants were treated in the same manner. Hard copies of the signed voluntary informed consent documents are kept under lock and key for a period of five years. Both supervisors and the co-coder had access to the electronic data, but the identifiable information was removed prior to sharing these documents. All the original documents were made available for the examining board for auditing purposes but will not be shared with any other third parties. Although all the identifying

information was removed from the documentation for confidentiality reasons, I am confident that a comprehensive audit trail can be observed by the reader.

As stated earlier, institutional permission (Reference number: 2017_RPSC_058) was obtained prior to the collection of data. In the application, I indicated that the study would be conducted at the ODL institution and that it would be referred to as such in the reporting of the study. In the application, I also indicated that the institution's identity might become distinguishable given the unique position in role fulfilment and pedagogical approach (dedicated distance education institution) within the HE environment in SA. The institutional permission did not withhold permission to use the university's name. Nonetheless, I strived to keep the identity of the institution concealed. Throughout the thesis I therefore refer to 'an ODL institution'.

Even so, I was compelled to share information regarding the ODL institution with the reader to present the organisational context. This information was necessary to contextualise the unique setting of the study. However, in honouring the privacy of the ODL institution I did refrain from sharing certain information of the university with the reader, since such details would indisputably reveal the identity of the university.

In instances where I referenced documents of the ODL institution (e.g., policies, website information, strategic objectives etc.), or any other sources, and the name of the institution had to be cited (in-text citations), the ODL institution was referred to as "Institution A". Also, in the reference list of the thesis, the name of the ODL institution was replaced with "Institution A". In instances where electronic sources (websites) were used as a reference, the hyperlink to the website was also withheld. Finally, all supporting documents shared as appendices of the thesis were anonymised. The original reference list and appendices were made available to the examining board of this thesis for auditing purposes. Still, the possibility that the identity of the institution could be speculated on should not be excluded, despite my best efforts to conceal its identity.

Al Tajir (2018) correctly explains that the confidentiality of the research participants and the privacy of the institution should include procedures that will be taken to securely store the data, for how long it will be retained and how it will be destroyed at the laps of this time. As stated, the electronic copies of the data will be retained for five years after the completion of the study, in line with the ODL institutional Policy on Research Ethics. Hard copies of the transcriptions and the signed informed consent documents will be kept in a secure location at my private residence for the same duration. When this five-year duration lapses, all the information will be permanently deleted (electronic files and audio voice recordings) and

paper-based information will be shredded. This will include the contact details of the individuals who participated in this study.

2.7 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter was dedicated to identifying and describing the research approach, design and methods followed in the study. As a point of departure, the research paradigm was identified and explained. This section was followed by a detailed discussion of IPA as the selected research approach. With this discussion and the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, it became clear that this was the most suitable approach to answer the overall research question of this study. With the research approach selected, closer attention was paid to the study's design and the specific methods used to realise these objectives. The research design was used to give structure to the study, which was carried out over three sequential and interrelated research phases. For each phase, specific research objectives were identified, and the focus was therefore dedicated to explaining how those objectives were addressed.

This chapter also discussed the measures implemented to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study. Furthermore, detailed attention was given to explain the ethical considerations followed in this study. In the next chapter, closer attention is paid to phase one of the study. Chapter 3 is the first of three chapters, where a narrative literature analysis is carried out as part of the study's research objectives. In Chapter 3, I present a narrative literature analysis to learn how engagement influences employees at work. The HRM practitioners' role in promoting employee engagement in organisations is also investigated in this narrative literature analysis.

CHAPTER 3

WORK ENGAGEMENT AND THE ROLE OF HRM PRACTITIONERS IN ORGANISATIONS (PHASE ONE)

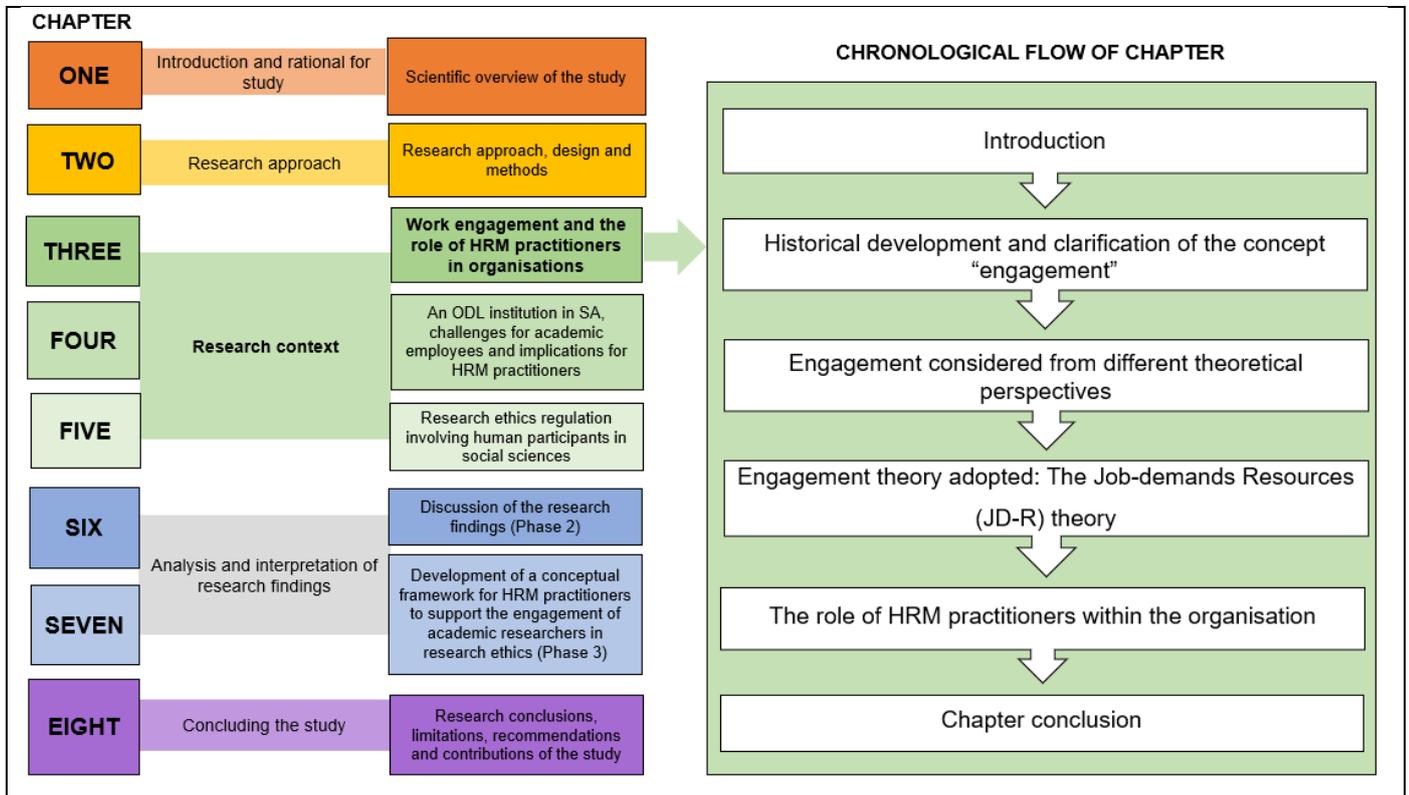


Figure 3.1: Composition and structure of Chapter 3

Source: Own compilation

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, attention was paid to explaining the research approach, design and methods followed for this study. The research was carried out over three sequential and interrelated research phases, and specific research objectives were identified for each phase. The focus of phase one of the study was to attain a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon (engagement in research ethics) through a narrative literature analysis. This chapter was dedicated to understanding how engagement influence employees at work. The second objective was to obtain a better understanding of HRM practitioners' role at organisations in the promotion of engagement of employees (The role of HRM practitioners specifically at HEIs is discussed in Chapter 4).

This chapter commences with a discussion of the historical setting and development of the concept of engagement of employees, including WE and why this phenomenon is important in the work environment. This is followed by a discussion of the different theoretical positions upheld for understanding the engagement of employees at work. With the presentation of these theoretical positions, the JD-R theory was selected as the most suitable theory to understand and interpret academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution in SA.

In addition, the HRM practitioners' role within organisations, and their role in the promotion employees' WE, are explained. The chapter is concluded with a conclusion of the outcomes of this chapter.

3.2 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND CLARIFICATION OF THE CONCEPT “ENGAGEMENT”

The engagement of employees is frequently presented as fundamental to an organisation's success and its competitiveness, thus highlighting the importance thereof to management (Gruman & Saks, 2011; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017; Welch, 2011). Therefore, it is not surprising that this concept receives wide interest from organisations, popular media, and consulting companies (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shuck & Wollard, 2009; Welch, 2011). Since employee engagement was primarily an organisational and consultancy concern during the 1990s, most definitions of the concept came from that sphere (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006). Still today, everyday associations of engagement are understood as involvement, attraction, commitment, enthusiasm, focused effort, passion, devotion, and energy (Schaufeli, 2014), and most consulting organisations define 'engagement' in relation to various organisational outcomes (Schaufeli 2012b).

While there is not one hundred per cent clarity of when the concept 'engagement' was first used in relation to employment, it is generally accepted that the Gallup organisation coined the term early in the 1990s within the consultancy world (Schaufeli, 2014). This organisation's work likely became the most influential work on engagement in consultancy literature (Schaufeli, 2012b; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017) and is assumed to be the first study to examine the engagement of employees at organisational level (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002).

The Gallup's Workplace Audit (GWA) was originally developed with the primary objective of establishing the practical value for managers in creating change in the workplace (Schaufeli

2012b). However, the concept of 'employee engagement', as offered by the GWA, is indistinguishable from employees' overall job satisfaction (Schaufeli 2012b). This can be better understood with a closer inspection of the GWA because it will become obvious that the instrument measures the employees' perceptions of job resources (Schaufeli 2012b). The GWA therefore measures the qualifiers for engagement in terms of perceived job resources rather than the actual experience of engagement among employees (Harter *et al.*, 2002; Schaufeli 2012b). Despite the GWA's inability to measure the actual experience of engagement by employees, the findings of the study alluded to a positive relationship between employee engagement and turnover, customer satisfaction, productivity and profitability, which are all essential business outcomes (Shuck, 2011). This proposed employee engagement-profit linkage encouraged a rapid increase of interest in this concept (Schaufeli, 2014; Shuck & Wollard, 2009; Shuck, 2011; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017).

The concept of employee engagement might have originated in the business world, but over the last three decades, the topic generated wide interest in academic circles as well, primarily by academic researchers in business and management, psychology, and organisational behaviour subject areas (Dhanesh, 2017; Schaufeli & De Witte, 2017; Schaufeli, 2014; Stoyanova & Iliev, 2017; Welch, 2011); this led to an increase in the rigour of academic scrutiny (Shuck & Wollard, 2009). Paradoxically, as the concept 'employee engagement' progressed from consulting literature to more rigorous academic publications, the concept remained vaguely defined and conceptualised (Dhanesh, 2017; Macey & Schneider, 2008), resulting in misuse and misinterpretation of the term (Shuck & Wollard, 2009).

Although 'employee engagement' and 'work engagement' (WE) are frequently used interchangeably (Park, Johnson & Chaudhuri, 2019; Schaufeli & De Witte, 2017), WE is more specific (Kosaka & Sato, 2020; Schaufeli, 2014) and is the preferred academic term (Schaufeli 2012b). WE refer to the relationship that an employee has with their work (Kosaka & Sato, 2020; Schaufeli 2012a; Schaufeli 2012b; Schaufeli, 2014). Conversely, 'employee engagement' can also include the relationship with the organisation (Kosaka & Sato, 2020; Schaufeli, 2012a; Schaufeli, 2014) and is typically used in business and consultancy settings (Kosaka & Sato, 2020; Schaufeli, 2012b). With the inclusion of the relationship with the organisation, the difference between engagement and other concepts such as organisational commitment and extra-role behaviour becomes unclear (Schaufeli, 2012b; Schaufeli, 2012a; Schaufeli, 2014). WE is also different and distinct from concepts such as workaholism or job satisfaction (Schaufeli, 2012a). Satisfaction refers to satiation (relaxation, calmness, serenity, and contentment), while engagement refers to activation (alertness, enthusiasm, excitement and elation) (Schaufeli, 2012a). Given that WE is more specific than employee engagement,

thus permitting less space for confusion or ambiguity of the meaning or scope of the concept, WE is the preferred term for this study. Stated differently, the concept of academic researchers' engagement in research ethics (the research phenomenon of the present study) should be understood as 'WE' and not 'employee engagement', for the reasons explained above.

Although explanations of employee engagement from business, consulting literature and popular media were not considered for understanding or analysing engagement in this study, these eliminations did not result in an indisputable definition of WE. Also, within the scientific arena, different theoretical frameworks are upheld of the meaning of WE and how it should be defined. To this end, the different theoretical perspectives of WE were presented below before clarifying the definition adopted for this study.

3.3 ENGAGEMENT CONSIDERED FROM DIFFERENT THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

There is no single unique theoretical framework to understand the phenomenon 'engagement' (Kosaka & Sato, 2020; Saks & Gurman, 2014; Schaufeli, 2014). Instead, several theoretical perspectives exist, each one emphasising different aspects of the concept, which cannot be merged into a single conceptual theory (Schaufeli, 2014). Shuck and Wollard (2009) investigated the development of engagement through a historical lens, and Shuck (2011) conducted an integrative literature study of the major theoretical positions of engagement. This section adds to these works. Moreover, the development of the different theoretical positions to engagement is presented in chronological order, therefore honouring the layout of the works of Shuck and Wollard (2009) and Shuck (2011).

Prior to embarking on these discussions, there are two aspects the reader should note: First, in the work of Shuck (2011), reference is made to the 'multidimensional approach' of Saks (2006). However, I referred to this work as the 'social exchange theory', in accordance to how Saks (2006) explained his theoretical position. Second, it is important to understand that before the research conducted by Kahn (discussed below), the focus of psychological research was on the negative side of psychology, which included the concept of burnout (O'Connor, 2014). Therefore, even though the present study is not focused on burnout, the inclusion thereof as a topic of discussion is needed, as it provides clarity on WE theories and how WE and burnout are connected. When research in the field of psychology started to move towards positive aspects of employees' wellbeing, with the focus on human strengths and

optimal functioning, the concept of WE emerged as a new field of interest as the perceived opposite of burnout, thereby ensuring its theoretical foundation (Kosaka & Sato, 2020; O'Connor, 2014). A presentation of the development of the theoretical perspectives of WE is discussed in chronological sequence in the sections that follow.

3.3.1 Kahn's need-satisfying approach as a theory of engagement

Kahn (1990) was the first academic researcher to conceptualise 'engagement' (Bakker, 2017; Bakker *et al.*, 2014; O'Connor, 2014; Schaufeli 2012b; Schneider, Yost, Kropp, Kind & Lam, 2017). For Kahn, engagement in work was a motivational variable encompassing the intrinsic and extrinsic continuum, encouraging the use of a person's full self in their work roles (Schneider *et al.*, 2017; Shuck, 2011). Kahn (1990) explained that personal engagement is the concurrent use and expression of someone's 'preferred self' in task behaviours which, in turn, then promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), as well as active and full role performances (Kahn, 1990). Kahn (1990) continued to explain that he believed people have dimensions of themselves that they choose to use and demonstrate while performing roles, provided that proper conditions are given. Furthermore, people who are personally engaged are able to remain themselves within a role, without sacrificing one for the other (Kahn, 1990).

In support of the work of Goffman (1961), Maslow (1970), and Alderfer (1972), Kahn (1990) theorised that 'meaningfulness', 'safety', and 'availability' are vital to understanding why individuals become engaged (Kahn, 1990; O'Connor, 2014; Shuck & Wollard, 2009). Kahn (1990:705) explained that 'meaningfulness' is the positive "sense of return on investments of self in role performance". 'Safety' was explained as the ability to show one's self "without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" and 'availability' was seen as the "sense of possessing the physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary" (Kahn, 1990:705).

'Personal engagement' was thus defined as "the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (Kahn, 1990:69). Schaufeli (2012b) demystified the definition offered by Kahn and explained that Kahn advocated that engaged employees identify with their work and therefore put a lot of effort into it. Kahn's original conceptualisation accentuated that engaged employees put significant effort into their work since they strongly identify with it (Bakker, 2017).

3.3.2 The burnout-antithesis approaches as theories of engagement

With the burnout-antithesis approach, WE is regarded as the positive antithesis of burnout (Schaufeli, 2014). However, two different but related schools of thought exist regarding the burnout-antithesis approach (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003; Schaufeli & De Witte, 2017; Schaufeli, 2014; Taris, Ybema & Van Beek, 2017). The first perspective of Maslach and Leiter (1997) regard burnout and engagement as a single continuum, and these authors maintain that engagement can be defined as the direct opposite of three burnout dimensions (O'Connor, 2014; Taris *et al.*, 2017). Schaufeli *et al.*'s (2002) second perspective is that although WE is negatively related to burnout, engagement should be understood as an independent, distinct concept (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Taris *et al.*, 2017). These two burnout-antithesis approaches are explained below.

3.3.2.1 Burnout and engagement as a single continuum

Maslach and Leiter (2008) explain that an individual's relationship with their work can be conceptualised as a continuum between the positive experience of engagement and the negative experience of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Schaufeli, 2014; Taris *et al.*, 2017). According to Maslach and Leither (1997), engagement should be understood as the direct opposite of the three burnout dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (O'Connor, 2014; Schaufeli & De Witte, 2017; Schaufeli, 2012b). These academic researchers further explain that in this single continuum, the three related measurements include energy to exhaustion; involvement to cynicism; and efficacy to inefficacy (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Maslach *et al.*, 2001; Schaufeli, 2014; Taris *et al.*, 2017).

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), originally developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), was designed to measure burnout in human service occupations. It was later adapted to form the MBI-General Survey (MBI-GS) to measure burnout in employment outside human services as well (Maslach *et al.*, 2001). The MBI-GS measures burnout by determining exhaustion, cynicism, and low professional efficacy (Maslach *et al.*, 2001).

With the development of positive psychology and the focus shift to human strengths and optimal functioning, Maslach and Leiter (1997) rephrased 'burnout' as an erosion of engagement with the work context (Maslach *et al.*, 2001; Taris *et al.*, 2017). The erosion of engagement therefore implies that work that was once considered to be meaningful, important and challenging, becomes unfulfilling, meaningless and unpleasant activities (Maslach *et al.*,

2001). Thus, according to this approach, someone who is high on engagement would inevitably be low on burnout, and someone who scores high on burnout would inevitably score low on engagement (Schaufeli & De Witte, 2017; Schaufeli, 2014). With this perspective, it is possible to assess engagement by observing the reverse pattern of scores on the MBI-GS (Maslach *et al.*, 2001).

Together, Kahn (1990) and Maslach *et al.* (2001) provided the two earliest theoretical frameworks for understanding the engagement of employees (Shuck & Wollard, 2009). The critique to understanding this approach of burnout and engagement as a single continuum is that neither engagement nor burnout can be measured separately from each other (Schaufeli, 2012b).

3.3.2.2 Engagement as a distinct concept from burnout

Differing from the position of Maslach and Leiter (1997), Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) believe that engagement cannot be sufficiently determined by the reverse pattern of scores of the MBI-GS. These authors agree that, conceptually, engagement is the positive antithesis of burnout, but they maintain that the measurement of engagement and burnout should be separate and distinct (Maslach *et al.*, 2001; Schaufeli, 2014; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002; Taris *et al.*, 2017). Engagement is therefore considered a separate psychological condition (Schaufeli, 2012a). They subsequently developed the Utrecht WE Scale (UWES), which measures the three principal aspects of WE, namely vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, 2012b).

Vigour is characterised by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest energy in your work, and perseverance, even in the face of difficulties (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Dedication is characterised by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, motivation, pride, and challenge, in relation to your work (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Absorption refers to being completely and positively immersed in your work, to the extent that it is hard to detach yourself from it (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). According to this approach, WE is considered as an independent, distinct concept that is defined in its own right (Schaufeli, 2012b; Taris *et al.*, 2017). WE is a “positive fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002:74).

3.3.3 The social exchange theory as a theory of engagement

Saks (2006) theorised that the engagement of employees is established through a social exchange theory (SET) (Kown & Kim, 2020; Saks, 2006; Shuck, 2011; Shuck & Wollard, 2009). According to the SET, obligations are created through various interactions between parties who are mutually interdependent (Kown & Kim, 2020; Saks, 2006). Rules of exchange typically encompass exchange or reimbursement rules so that the actions of one party generate a response or actions by the other party (Kown & Kim, 2020; Saks, 2006). Thus, the method that employees can utilise to repay their organisation is their level of engagement (Saks, 2006).

He further theorised that engagement could be separated into different states, including “job engagement” and “organisational engagement” (Bailey, Madden, Alfes & Fletcher, 2017:34) and accordingly became the first academic researcher to make this distinction (Shuck, 2011; Shuck & Wollard, 2009). Saks (2006) was also one of the first academic researchers to explicitly conceptualise and empirically test antecedents and consequences of employee engagement (Saks, 2006; Shuck & Wollard, 2009). Saks (2006) discovered that employee engagement is associated with but also distinct from other constructs in organisational behaviour. The constructs Saks (2006) found to be associated with employee engagement included organisational citizenship behaviour; job involvement; organisational commitment; and role performance.

Engagement differs from organisational citizenship behaviour, since the focus of engagement is on the formal role of the employee, contrary to the extra-role and voluntary behaviour typically seen in organisational citizenship behaviour (Saks, 2006). Engagement is also different from organisational commitment, since organisational commitment refers to an individual's attachment and attitude to the organisation, while engagement is the degree to which an individual is absorbed and attentive in the performance of their work role and not an attitude (Saks, 2006). Engagement also differs from job involvement. To clarify this, Saks (2006) referred to the work of May *et al.* (2004), who explained that job involvement is the result of a cognitive decision regarding the need-satisfying abilities of the job and is related to a person's self-image (Saks, 2006). Conversely, engagement has to do with how someone employs themselves in the performance of their job and includes the active use of emotions and behaviours in addition to cognitions (Saks, 2006).

This work of Saks (2006) played a key role in connecting earlier theories of engagement in work done by practitioners to the work within the academic society (Shuck & Wollard, 2009).

Prior to this research, the only literature available which connected employee engagement drivers to employee engagement consequences was found in practitioner works (Shuck & Wollard, 2009).

The findings of Saks (2006) proposed that employees who observe higher levels of organisational support are inclined to respond with greater levels of engagement in their work and the organisation. Employees who fill positions that are high on job characteristics are inclined to respond with greater job engagement (Saks, 2006). He maintained that employees' varying degrees of engagement are a method for employees to demonstrate their return on the investment made to them by the organisation through economic and socio-emotional resources (Kown & Kim, 2020; Pati & Kumar, 2010; Saks, 2006).

Saks (2006) defined 'engagement' as "a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance" (Bailey *et al.*, 2017:34). This definition is similar to that of Kahn (1990) since it also focuses on role performance at work (Schaufeli, 2014). Saks (2006) explained that employees who bring themselves more fully to their work roles and dedicate greater volumes of "cognitive, emotional, and physical resources" is a meaningful way for them to respond to the actions of the organisation (Saks, 2006:603).

3.3.4 The job-demands resources (JD-R) theory as a theory of engagement

The job demands-resources (JD-R) theory developed from the JD-R model and was inspired by job design and job stress theories (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Job design theories, for the most part, do not pay any attention to the role of job stressors or demands; and job stress theories mostly ignore the motivating potential of job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). In contrast to these theories, the JD-R theory considers job stress theories and job design theories together. With the combination of the two research traditions, the JD-R theory describes how job demands and resources have unique and accumulative effects on job stress and motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014:39).

Following the burnout-antithesis approaches as engagement theories, the JD-R theory also upholds that engagement can be understood as the opposite of burnout (Schaufeli, 2014). I, too, support this belief. However, like the JD-R theory, I do not see engagement and burnout as the two counterparts of a single continuum; the JD-R theory conceptualises engagement and burnout as two distinct constructs that are integrated into an overarching conceptual theory (Schaufeli, 2014) (see Section 2.3.2.2 above for more details). With this insight, the JD-

R theory was the most fitting theory to understand WE. The JD-R theory corresponded to my personal convictions and was the appropriate theory to achieve the overall purpose of this study. Accordingly, the JD-R theory is discussed in detail in the next section.

3.4 ENGAGEMENT THEORY ADOPTED: THE JOB-DEMANDS RESOURCES (JD-R) THEORY

The JD-R theory was initially used to explain burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Yet, with an increased focus on positive psychology, the UWES, developed by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002), became a popular instrument to investigate employee wellbeing and simultaneously played a substantial role in the expansion of the JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). As mentioned in Section 2.3.2.2, the UWES measures the three main attributes of WE, namely vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, 2012b). Together with the adoption of the JD-R theory to understand WE for this study, I also adopted the corresponding definition of WE, as offered by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002:74), which states that WE is “a persistent, positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption” (vigour, dedication and absorption, the three main attributes of an engaged employee, were explained in more detail in Section 2.3.2.2).

After its development as a framework to explain WE, the JD-R has been used in a multitude of studies (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli, 2014; Schaufeli, 2012a). Several researchers have used the JD-R model to demonstrate the methods through which job resources and job demands influence WE, job burnout, organisational commitment, work enjoyment, connectedness (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014), organisational behaviour, work performance, and occupational health (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Numerous studies have also focused on the antecedents of burnout and WE, since these experiences have significant consequences for individual employees and organisations at large (Bakker *et al.*, 2014).

Bakker and Demerouti (2014) explained that the JD-R theory was developed in terms of several important components, which included the flexibility of the theory; the two processes that are at play; the interaction between job demands and resources; reversed causal relationships; and job crafting. At a later stage, the JD-R theory was expanded by adding two additional components: personal resources of employees and engaging leadership (Schaufeli, 2017). These components are explained in the sections below.

3.4.1 The flexibility of the theory

The JD-R theory is flexible (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014), allowing it to be widely used to explain WE (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). The flexibility allows it to be applied to any work environment, and it can be tailor-made to the specific profession studied (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Therefore, the JD-R theory is theoretically flexible enough to explain academic researchers' WE in research ethics at an ODL institution.

The JD-R theory advocates that all job characteristics can be demonstrated using two categories, namely job demands and job resources (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Job demands can be defined as the physical, social, or organisational aspects of the work of an employee that necessitates sustained physical or mental efforts and are accordingly associated with certain physiological and psychological costs (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). Resources (job and personal) energise employees, make them focus on their efforts, and encourage their persistence (Schaufeli, 2014). Job resources, specifically, can be defined as the physical, social, psychological, or organisational facets of the job that contribute to achieving work goals (Bakker, 2017). Owing to the motivational potential of job resources, it can satisfy psychological needs, and support employees to handle their job demands and reach work targets (Bakker, 2017).

Furthermore, according to this theory, WE is understood as a function of the job demands and job resources given by the organisation (Bakker, 2017). Bakker (2017) clarifies his statement by explaining that WE is a mediator or intermediate feature in the causal relationship in which job demands and job resources (or the combination thereof) are predictors, and work or organisational performance are the outcomes. Stated differently, according to the JD-R theory, the combination of job characteristics, together with job and personal resources, predict work performance, and this is displayed through WE (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). More specifically, job resources (for example opportunities for professional development) are the drivers of WE and WE, in turn, leads to organisational outcomes (Van Wingerden, Derks & Bakker, 2018). This process, which originates with job resources that lead to WE and work performance, is called the motivational process (Van Wingerden, Derks & Bakker, 2018). The motivational process is discussed in more detail in the section that follows.

3.4.2 The two processes that are at play

The JD-R theory's second idea is that resources and job demands are catalysts of two relatively independent processes, which include a motivational process and a health impairment process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). These processes are demonstrated in Figure 3.2.

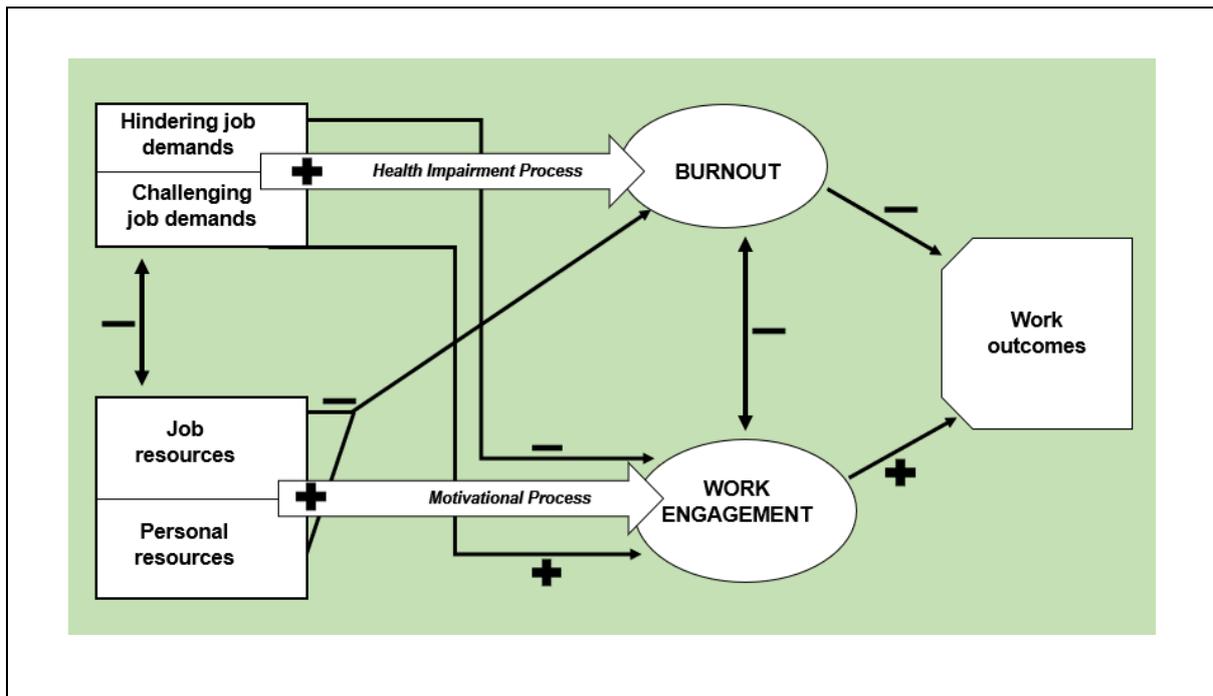


Figure 3.2: Job-Demands Resource theory

Adapted from Bakker and Demerouti (2014) and Schaufeli (2015)

The negative process (the health impairment process, sometimes referred to as the stress process) that can occur, is caused by job demands (Hakanen & Bakker, 2017; Schaufeli, 2014; Schaufeli, 2015). Job demands are those aspects of work that require sustainable physical or mental energy (e.g., work overload, complex tasks, time pressure, role conflict, emotional dissonance, and red tape) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Hakanen & Bakker, 2017; Schaufeli, 2014). Consequently, prolonged exposure to high job demands can cause employees to experience exhaustion, and they can psychologically become detached from their work (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Han *et al.*, 2019). Prolonged exhaustion and/or psychological detachment may therefore lead to burnout (Maslach, 2017; Bakker *et al.*, 2014).

Scientifically, job demands are recognised as one of the main reasons for burnout (Bakker *et al.*, 2014). Numerous research studies have found that burnout is related to several forms of negative reactions from employees to their work. These include dissatisfaction with their jobs,

depleted organisational commitment, absenteeism, intent to leave their employment positions, turnover (Maslach, 2017; Maslach & Leiter, 2008), ill-health and negative organisational outcomes (Bakke *et al.*, 2014).

In contrast, the positive process (the motivational process) that can take place is caused by job and personal resources (Schaufeli, 2017). Job resources are found to be one of the key drivers of WE and WE, in turn, leads to improved wellbeing and positive organisational outcomes (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Han *et al.*, 2019). Job resources are important for WE and can be psychological, social, physical, or structural (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). These job resources include opportunities for development, autonomy, feedback on work performance, justice, skill variation, leadership and social support from both supervisors and co-workers (Schaufeli, 2012a), flexible working times, equipment, participation in decision-making (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018), performance feedback, autonomy, supervisory coaching, innovative climate, job control, information, and opportunities to learn varied skills (O'Connor, 2014). Research studies have found that WE is related to a number of positive outcomes from employees related to their work, which include organisational commitment, intention to stay, extra-role behaviour, employee safety, and superior work performance (Schaufeli, 2015; Schaufeli, 2017). Within the present study, a positive organisational outcome – as a product of WE – would typically entail academic researchers at the ODL institution who demonstrate exemplary ethical research practices.

3.4.3 The interaction between job demands and resources

The third idea proposed by the JD-R theory is that occupational wellbeing can be predicted with the interaction of job demands and resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Although job demands and resources initiate different processes, they have joint effects on occupational wellbeing (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). There are two conceivable ways in which resources and job demands may have a shared effect on wellbeing, and also indirectly influence the performance of employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Figure 3.2 demonstrates the cross-links between the health impairment process (job demands) and the motivational process (resources).

First, job resources cushion the impact of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Stated differently, job resources are the aspects of work that support employees to handle job demands and realise their intended outcomes (Park *et al.*, 2019; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Bakker (2017) maintains that job resources have motivational potential, which gratifies psychological needs and assist employees in handling job demands

and reaching work goals. Therefore, job resources may play either an intrinsic motivational role because they foster employees' growth, learning, and development, or they may play an extrinsic role because they are instrumental in achieving work goals (Schaufeli, 2012b). Resources can thus also be understood as health-protecting factors (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001).

Second, with the interaction between job resources and job demands, it is important to understand that all job demands cost energy, but a distinction can be made in the type of job demands (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Some job demands, known as hindering job demands, hamper personal development and reaching goals, while other job demands, known as challenging job demands, can create opportunities for personal development and goal achievement (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018; Kwon & Kim, 2020). Examples of hindering job demands include role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, and hassles that are perceived as unnecessary obstacles to achieve goals and personal development (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Hindering job demands cause employees to become demotivated (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Examples of challenging job demands include workload and time pressure, and when employees then overcome these demanding aspects of their work, they experience a sense of accomplishment (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). This means that challenging job demands have the potential to be seen as rewarding work experiences and therefore worth the associated discomfort (the work that requires physical or mental energy to be utilised) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Finally, according to the JD-R theory, job demands can accentuate the impact of job resources on motivation and WE (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Research findings have shown that job resources become noticeable and have the strongest positive influence on WE when job demands are high (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Specifically, when an employee is faced with challenging job demands (as explained in the previous paragraph), job resources increase in value and cultivate dedication in the tasks at hand (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

However, from an intervention viewpoint, it is critical to understand that insufficient resources and high job demands contribute to burnout, but only sufficient resources will contribute to WE (not low work demands) (Schaufeli, 2017). If work demands are reduced, it will have a counter effect on burnout, but it will not influence the WE of employees (Schaufeli, 2017). Again, referring to the preceding paragraph, although job demands can be stressful and cost energy, the challenging demands can, to a certain extent, play a positive role in goal attainment. By removing job demands, it will simply result in less challenging jobs (job resources will also not be accentuated), which will lead to lower levels of WE (Schaufeli, 2017). For the specific aim of this study, this understanding is vital. The support that HRM practitioners should offer

academic researchers to enable them to engage in research ethics, should therefore not focus on lessening job demands, but rather supplying employees abundant resources.

3.4.4 The personal resources of employees

A significant extension of the JD-R was the inclusion of employees' personal resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Personal resources refer to employees' understanding or belief related to their perceived control over their environments (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). These personal resources thus support WE since it provides employees with a sense of empowerment, where they can demonstrate control over their work environment (Schaufeli, 2012a; Van Wingerden *et al.*, 2017). Personal resources, just like job resources, are beneficial to achieve work goals, and personal resources promote personal growth and development (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Personal resources include the ability to perceive emotions, the ability to regulate emotions, hope, optimism, self-efficacy, organisational-based self-esteem, personal effectiveness, resilience, intrinsic and extrinsic values, extraversion, intrinsic motivation, and low neuroticism (Schaufeli, 2012a; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014; van Wingerden *et al.*, 2017; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2009).

The JD-R theory advocates that personal resources (and job resources) foster WE in terms of focus (absorption), energy (vigour), and persistence (dedication) (Schaufeli, 2014). This belief is supported with a large collection of research studies that links personal resources and job resources to WE (O'Connor, 2014; Schaufeli, 2012a; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014) and, in turn, performance-based outcomes (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Schaufeli, 2014; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009). The relationship between the wellbeing of an employee and the nature of their work is facilitated with personal resources (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). What this implies is that if an employee works in a work setting with abundant resources, the employee will, in all probability, develop feelings of self-confidence and optimism about their future at work (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). In essence, the theory advocates that WE is the result of the inherently motivating nature of resources, which include personal resources and job resources (Schaufeli, 2014).

3.4.5 Reversed causal relationships

Furthermore, the JD-R theory proposes the reversed causal effects that job demands and resources can have on employees. The JD-R theory advocates that burned-out employees can, via self-undermining and a loss spiral, create more job demands for themselves over time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). However, engaged employees can,

via job crafting and a gain spiral, mobilise their job resources to remain engaged (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). In essence, the JD-R theory suggests that job resources are positively related to WE. In essence, job demands which are challenging can strengthen the positive relationship between job resources and engagement while hindering job demands that can deteriorate the positive relationship between job resources and engagement (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). The JD-R theory therefore acknowledges and integrates the fact that an employee's level of exhaustion and WE can also influence their job demands and resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

3.4.6 Job crafting

In addition, the JD-R theory acknowledges that employees have the ability to be proactive and innovative to personally modify their personal work environment (Bakker, 2017; Hakanen & Bakker, 2017). This behaviour displayed by employees, is called 'job crafting' (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015; Bakker, 2017; Hakanen & Bakker, 2017), which is defined as "the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in their task or relational boundaries" (Wrzesniewski & Dutton 2001:179). Physical changes are understood as changes in the form, scope, or number of tasks within the job, whereas cognitive changes are understood as altering how one sees the job (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014).

Tims, Bakker and Derks (2012), Le Blanc, Demerouti and Bakker (2017) offer slightly different criteria to categorise job crafting behaviour, such as cognitive, physical, and relational task boundaries (Le Blanc *et al.*, 2017). These different types of job crafting behaviour are therefore focused on increasing structural job resources; increasing social job resources; increasing challenging job demands; and decreasing hindering job demands (Tims *et al.*, 2012). Job crafting fits within the JD-R theory since job crafting behaviours predict future job demands and job resources, and indirectly have a positive effect on increased levels of WE, job satisfaction (Tims *et al.*, 2013), and work performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Hakanen & Bakker, 2017).

3.4.7 Engaging leadership

Leaders play an important role in organisations to manage and take care of the level of WE experienced by their employees (Rahmadani, Schaufeli, Ivanova & Osin, 2019). According to Rahmadani *et al.* (2019), Schaufeli (2015) integrated engaging leadership as an important component to understanding the JD-R theory, based on the notion that leaders are expected

to balance the job demands and job resources of followers in such a way that these employees stay motivated, healthy, and productive. Engaging leadership is founded on the principles of integrity, being transparent and open, and sincerely valuing others and their contributions, coupled with the ability to be decisive and finding resolutions for complex problems (Alimo-Metcalfe *et al.*, 2008). Without exception, engaging leaders' behaviour is guided by ethical principles and the aspiration to co-create and preserve a means of working with others to attain a shared vision (Alimo-Metcalfe *et al.*, 2008).

Although engaging leadership might hold some similarities to alternative leadership styles, clear differences exist (Nikolova, Schaufeli & Notelaers, 2019; Schaufeli, 2017):

- a) Engaging leadership is based on the well-established self-determination theory, as a theory of motivation, whereas other leadership styles do not have their roots in this theory (Basinska, Gruszczynska & Schaufeli, 2018; Nikolova *et al.*, 2019; Schaufeli, 2015; Schaufeli, 2017).
- b) Engaging leadership is distinct from other leadership styles since it is specifically focused on how to promote employees' WE (Schaufeli, 2017).
- c) Engaging leadership is relations-oriented since these leaders are supportive and concerned with the wellbeing of their employees, which is not the perspective of, for instance, transformational leadership (Rahmadani *et al.*, 2019).
- d) Engaging leadership is focused not only on the individual but also on the social and team dimension of the workplace (Schaufeli, 2017).

The theory of self-determination is widely recognised as an empirically founded theory of motivation and optimal human functioning (Rahmadani *et al.*, 2019). This theory links the inherent psychological needs of individuals for autonomy, relatedness, and competence, to the optimal functioning of individuals in the workplace (Nikolova *et al.*, 2019; Rahmadani *et al.*, 2019; Schaufeli, 2015). When engaging leaders satisfy employees' basic psychological needs, which include autonomy, relatedness and competence, these employees are likely to experience WE (Nikolova *et al.*, 2019; Rahmadani *et al.*, 2019). However, in the absence of engaging leadership, where the basic psychological needs of employees are not met, burnout is likely to occur (Schaufeli, 2015). The need for autonomy is the need to experience a sense of control over one's conduct (Rahmadani *et al.*, 2019; Schaufeli, 2015). The need for competence is the need to feel effective in dealing with challenges and capable of realising desired outcomes (Rahmadani *et al.*, 2019; Schaufeli, 2015). The need for relatedness is the desire to be part of a group, feel connected with others and cared for (Rahmadani *et al.*, 2019; Schaufeli, 2015).

Engaging leadership is constructed to complement these inherent psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Nikolova *et al.*, 2019). This implies that employees are likely to experience WE when these inherent psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence are met (Nikolova *et al.*, 2019; Schaufeli, 2015).

Engaging leaders can help satisfy these needs by inspiring, strengthening, and connecting their followers (Basinska *et al.*, 2018; Schaufeli, 2017). Employees can be inspired by engaging leaders by, for example, exciting the employees about their vision and plans, or they can strengthen their followers by giving them responsibility and freedom (Schaufeli, 2017). Engaging leaders can also facilitate connection (relatedness) by promoting collaboration and teamwork (Schaufeli, 2017). In addition to the motivating role that engaging leaders can fulfil, they can play a vital role in managing resources and job demands. Job resources are beneficial for employees' need satisfaction and, in turn, encourage WE (Schaufeli, 2015).

Engaging leaders can provide job resources to employees by demonstrating behaviour such as trust and justice; facilitating a good team atmosphere; providing role clarity; providing performance feedback; and catering for job control, use of skills, and task variety (Schaufeli, 2017; Schaufeli, 2015). These leaders understand the importance of providing their employees with resources since they recognise the need for competent employees to realise organisational objectives (Basinska *et al.*, 2018).

Engaging leaders can also keep an eye on job demands (not to exceed a manageable amount) such as work overload, emotional demands, work-home interference, preventing bureaucracy, and effectively managing organisational change (Schaufeli, 2017; Schaufeli, 2015). When these leaders reduce the job demands of their employees, it leads to lower levels of burnout, and at the same time, they can increase their employees' resources, which can lead to increased levels of WE (Schaufeli, 2015; Schaufeli, 2017).

In essence, engaging leadership creates a more favourable job environment and positive perceptions by employees of their work, which, in turn, reduces burnout and fosters WE and work outcomes, such as commitment and positive performance behaviour (Basinska *et al.*, 2018; Schaufeli, 2015).

3.5 THE ROLE OF HRM PRACTITIONERS WITHIN THE ORGANISATION

With a deepened understanding of the JD-R theory and how WE can be understood in the context of this research, comprehending HRM practitioners' role within organisations became all the more significant. As explained in the preceding sections, promoting employees' motivational processes is critical to achieving positive organisational outcomes (Basinska *et al.*, 2018). Employees are critical strategic assets in organisations (Jouda *et al.*, 2016), and since these assets are vital for organisations to be effective and reach their intended outcomes (Tran, 2016), they are managed by HRM practitioners. Moreover, HRM practitioners are concerned with how these strategic assets are used, developed, and managed in the workplace (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). This section is therefore dedicated to gaining insight into HRM practitioners' role within organisations and their potential role in supporting employees' WE. In Chapter 4, attention is paid to the roles of HRM practitioners, specifically within HEIs. This section, however, is devoted to offering a universal outline of HRM in any organisation, thus offering a broader perspective of the functions fulfilled by HRM practitioners.

The HRM approach began in the 1980s and differs from traditional personnel management practices (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). In contrast to traditional personnel management practices, HRM not only contributes to organisational performance but also strives to advance employees' commitment to the organisation (Waring, 2013; Wilton, 2016). Traditionally, personnel management was a managerial activity, typically located in a distinct department, mainly concerned with workforce administration, training provision, ensuring legal compliance, and managing collective industrial relations between the organisation and trade unions (Wilton, 2016).

However, HRM surpasses these traditional functions of personnel management that are primarily operated as support functions within the organisations (Waring, 2013). HRM is concerned with an increase in organisational effectiveness and, equally important, the fulfilment of all employees' needs (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020; Berman, 2015; Lee *et al.*, 2018; Sultana & Hussain, 2016; Wörnich *et al.*, 2015). Stated differently, as an alternative to addressing organisational goals and employee needs as separate and exclusive (as would be the case in personnel management), this management approach (HRM) supports the belief that organisational goals and employee needs are shared and compatible, and the need of the one should not be reached at the expense of the other (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2018; Marchington & Wilkinson, 2012; Wörnich *et al.*, 2018). HRM is frequently regarded

as the most important aspect distinguishing between successful and unsuccessful organisations and is considered more significant than technology or finance in gaining competitive advantage (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2012). Armstrong and Taylor (2020) identified seven key objectives of HRM practitioners within most organisations, as presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Key objectives of HRM practitioners (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020)

Implement HR strategies aligned to the overarching organisational strategy to enable the organisation to achieve its objectives.
Promote the development of a high-performance organisational culture.
Ensure that the organisation has the talented, skilled, and engaged employees needed to fulfil the organisational objectives.
Uphold a constructive employment relationship between employees and management. To realise this objective, HRM practitioners should ensure that employees feel trusted, valued and appreciated in order for these employees to work effectively and efficiently.
Ensure that the employees are provided with a satisfactory employment experience.
Promote the wellbeing of employees as key stakeholders of the organisation.
Realise social justice in the organisation by applying an ethical approach to the management of employees.

These key objectives of HRM practitioners, as identified by Armstrong and Taylor (2020), are echoed by the viewpoint shared by academic researchers below. Management literature advocates that there is a variety of factors associated with effective performance outcomes (Edgar & Geare, 2013). An HRM department plays a vital role in developing strategies and related policies to support overarching organisational strategies (Waring, 2013). HRM exemplifies the belief that employees, or human resources, are essential to organisational success (Banfield & Kay, 2008; Ololube, 2016). The truth for most employees is that how they contribute and work for the organisation, can make the critical difference between success and failure, and management should understand each employee's significance to the organisation (Banfield & Kay, 2008).

Wärnich *et al.* (2015) highlighted three principles of the HRM approach: the principle that employees are investments that will provide long-term rewards to the organisation in the form of greater productivity, if these employees are effectively managed and developed. The second principle is that policies, programmes and practices must be developed in such a way that is satisfactory to both the economic and emotional needs of employees (Wärnich *et al.*, 2015). The final principle that Wärnich *et al.* (2015) put forward is that a working environment must be created where employees are encouraged to develop and utilise their skills to the maximum extent.

For Berman (2015), HRM first includes the delivering of technical functions, second the upholding of policies and strategies that promote the development, performance, and wellbeing of employees, and finally, maintaining a strategic perspective and focus in order to meet and shape the future organisational needs. The technical functions entail managing employees' daily operations, including staffing, management of positions, remuneration systems, benefits management, training, job appraisals, and discipline (Berman, 2015). HRM practitioners should also be attentive to processes and activities that enhance career advancement and solve problems employees encounter along their career paths (Wärnich *et al.*, 2015).

It is the HRM practitioners' responsibility to ensure employees have the required motivation, skills, and aptitude to complete work tasks to the required organisational standards (Wärnich *et al.*, 2015). Motivation, as one of these aspects that should be facilitated or enabled by HRM practitioners, is a psychological state of mind that leads employees to perform tasks in such a way that it results in positive organisational outcomes, such as economic benefits and positive personal outcomes (for employees), prestige, personal growth and development (Basinska *et al.*, 2018). WE is profoundly rooted in intrinsic motivation and personal resources (Basinska *et al.*, 2018:). Also, job resources are one of the key drivers of WE and WE, in turn, leads to increased employee wellbeing and positive organisational outcomes (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Han *et al.*, 2019). Motivation is also essential in the management of employees, and HRM practitioners should develop and manage the motivational process to achieve positive outcomes (Basinska *et al.*, 2018). The role that HRM practitioners should play in employees' motivational process, to encourage WE, is therefore indisputably connected to their role of supporting organisations to reach organisational goals, and the responsibility they carry towards employees to foster a work environment that is supportive of employees' psychological wellbeing.

3.6 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to obtain a better understanding of HRM practitioners' role in organisations in the promotion of engagement. To do so, a narrative literature analysis was conducted. The literature analysis first presented a deeper understanding of how engagement influences employees in the workplace. As a point of departure, the historical development of the concept 'engagement' was examined, together with a consideration of the different theoretical perspectives of this phenomenon. The definition adopted for this thesis was also reiterated. With the insight and better understanding obtained from these theoretical perspectives, the JD-R theory was identified and selected as the most appropriate theory to understand WE in the context of this study. The JD-R theory was accordingly thoroughly explained to the reader.

The second objective of this chapter was to obtain a better understanding of HRM practitioners' role in organisations in the promotion of engagement of employees. In Chapter 4, the focus of the narrative literature analysis shifts to gaining a better understanding of how HRM practitioners at HEIs can aid in the promotion of WE, and how the contemporary HE environment influences academic employees' engagement.

CHAPTER 4

AN ODL INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA, CHALLENGES FOR ACADEMIC EMPLOYEES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR HRM PRACTITIONERS (PHASE ONE)

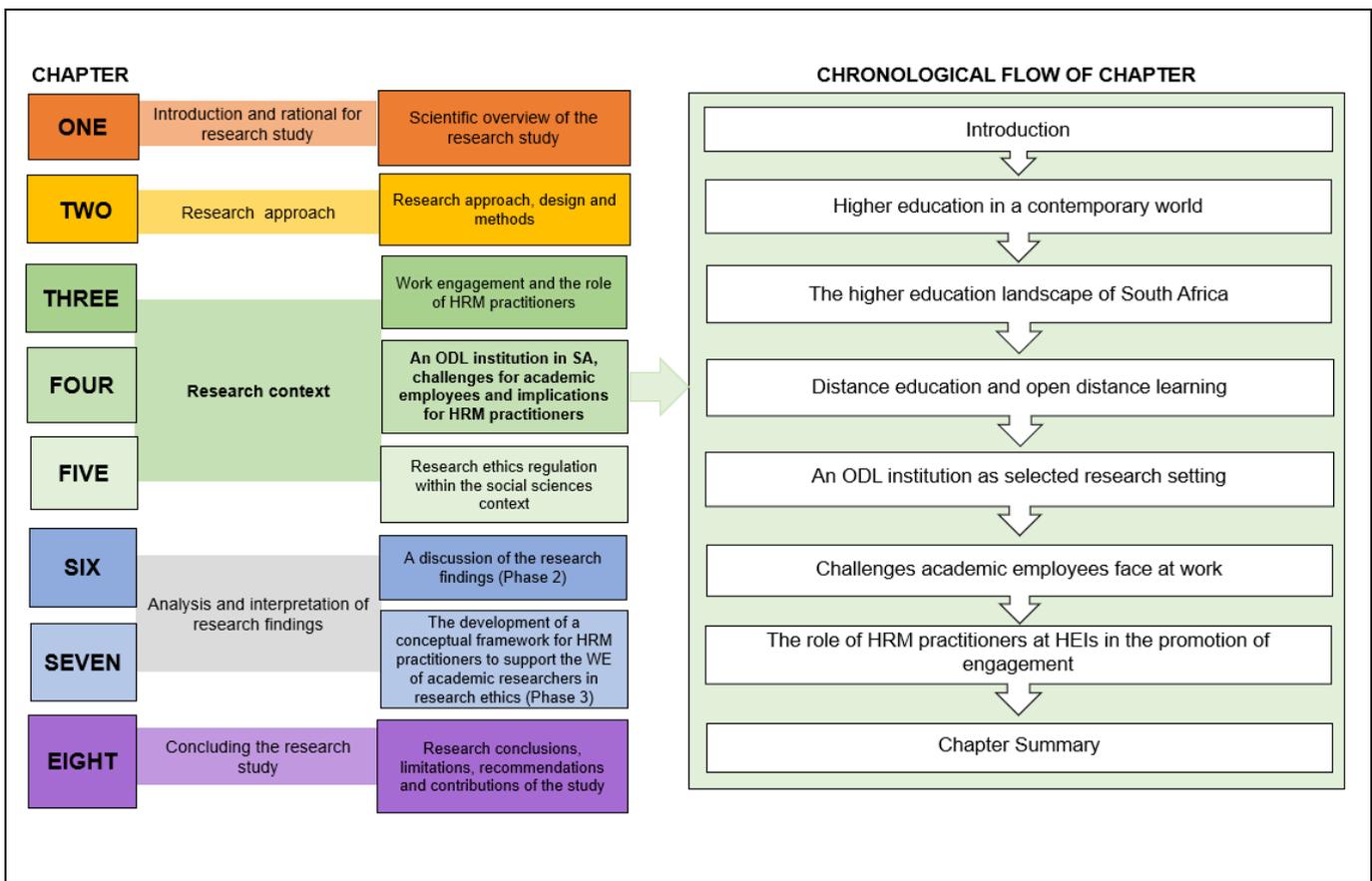


Figure 4.1: Composition and structure of Chapter 4

Source: Own compilation

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, a narrative literature analysis was conducted, which focused on an overview of ‘engagement’ from different theoretical perspectives to select a WE theory that could inform the conceptual framework. The JD-R theory was selected as the preferred theory to understand engagement and inform the conceptual framework for this study. The definition of WE was also restated. Furthermore, the role of HRM practitioners in the promotion of WE within organisations was discussed.

The purpose of this chapter is to gain a greater understanding of how the contemporary HE environment supports academic employees' WE. Furthermore, this chapter focuses on the HRM practitioners' role in supporting WE within HEIs. The chapter commences with an analysis of the current HE environment globally and in SA, including a consideration of the ODL institution where the study was conducted. The next sections deal with an analysis of academic employees' work and the challenges they face in the contemporary HE environment. The chapter concludes with an analysis of HRM practitioners' role in HEIs in supporting WE within these institutions.

4.2 HIGHER EDUCATION IN A CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The University of Bologna was founded in 1088 and is recognised as the first modern university (Archer, 2017; Pather & Remenyi, 2019). This university focused on developing scholars in the fields of literacy, sciences, theology, administration, mathematics, and astronomy (Archer, 2017). According to Archer (2017), our understanding of the role of universities today can be traced back to this first modern-day university. Undeniably, these societal institutions have existed for hundreds of years (Marshall, 2010).

Across the globe, numerous people have high regard for universities and consider these institutions representative of an elitist culture. As a result, only students who are believed to have the intellectual aptitudes to succeed, are admitted (Archer, 2017). Possibly because of this exclusive standing, numerous individuals regard a university degree as a crucial qualification and believe that these qualifications could create several employment opportunities (Marshall, 2010). Indeed, HE institutions play a vital role in offering quality education, generating knowledge, and empowering individuals to co-create a successful society (Erdem, 2016; Jouda, Ahmad & Dahleez, 2016; Mouton, Louw & Strydom, 2013; Ololube *et al.*, 2016). According to Ololube *et al.* (2016), universities form the foundation of a successful population. Universities, as social institutions, equip individuals with quality schooling and skills, which empower these citizens to constructively contribute to national development (CHE, 2016b; Ford, 2017; Gleason, 2018; Ololube *et al.*, 2016). In SA, the national context where this study was conducted, unemployment rates are particularly high and students believe that a tertiary qualification can improve their quality of life (Jacobs, Moolman & De Beer, 2019). (The HE landscape of SA is discussed in more detail below, in Section 4.3).

Universities, as societal institutions, are unique since they signify an unchanging and deep-rooted status and prestige in society, yet the same institutions are responsible for the generation of intellectuals who become instrumental for change in society (CHE, 2016b). This perceived prestige is possibly founded in the realisation that universities, as steadfast institutions, have been able to survive and adapt since the Middle ages (CHE, 2016b; Marshall, 2010). In fact, Ford (2017) states that universities have become more significant, and as such, have multiplied in number over the last 100 years. Yet Swartz, Ivancheva, Czerniewicz and Morris (2019) believe that universities, and the functioning thereof, are in a state of crisis, and they maintain that their continued existence is questioned by many. This crisis is true for universities in SA as well, and is echoed by the Council on Higher Education (2016), who observes that much has been written on the state of HEIs both for SA and across the globe. HEIs find themselves at an unclear yet unavoidable crossroad, where they can either disappear into the background and become insignificant, or they can rise further in stature with the fourth industrial revolution (CHE, 2016b).

The future of universities is yet to be discovered, but what is undeniable is that over the last few decades, universities have been exposed to various changes and challenges which altered the HE landscape significantly (Grobler & Horne, 2017; Maritz & Visagie, 2011; Mouton *et al.*, 2013; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). The factors contributing to these changes include increased internationalisation, globalisation, and the associated competition; the accountability and quality movement in HE; shifting stakeholder expectations; changes in funding regimes; economic and social reforms; diverse management and work practices; advancement in technology with the introduction of the fourth industrial revolution; and a significant increase in student numbers with changing student profiles (Bresler, 2007; Froneman, 2003; Kyvik, 2013a; Kyvik, 2013b; Motala, 2017; Ngambi, 2011; Prinsloo & Coetzee, 2013).

Despite these changes and challenges experienced by HEIs across the globe over the last few decades, the core functions of universities have remained steadfast over centuries and include teaching, research, and community service (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Erdem, 2016; Fourie, 2003; Mpofo & Maphalala, 2019; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016; Stewart, 2007; Shaw, 2009). The successful fulfilment of these core functions of a university is dependent on the competency and skills of its academic employees (Aberbach & Christensen, 2018; Bezuidenhout, 2018; Erdem, 2016).

While the core functions of universities have remained constant (teaching, research, and community service), it should still be acknowledged that with the changes and challenges

mentioned above, the role of academic employees has become more demanding and diversified (Mouton *et al.*, 2013). Han *et al.* (2019) also uphold that the work of academic employees in a changing HE work environment is stressful. Fulfilling multiple roles can lead to work overload, a significant stressor for academic employees (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2006; Converso, Sottimano, Molinengo & Loera, 2019; Van den Berg *et al.*, 2008). The demands experienced by academic employees may also lead to stress, exhaustion of personal resources, fatigue, cynicism, reduced self-efficacy, feelings of being overwhelmed, overworked and incompetent (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010; Diedericks, 2017). It is therefore vital that these academic employees, as human resources, are taken care of and supported in meeting these increased demands (Coetzee & Rothmann, 2005; Diedericks, 2017; Han *et al.*, 2019).

More than a decade ago, Van den Berg *et al.* (2008) voiced their concern that a balance needs to be sought and maintained between job demands and resources in support of an ideal work environment that is conducive for academic employees' high performance. These authors maintained that the solution lies in the identification of aspects hampering academic employees' engagement in the work environment, caused by the rapid transformation in HEIs, and then addressing these shortcomings. As a researcher, I believe that the view of Van den Berg *et al.* (2008) still holds true today. To this end, I considered the current challenges experienced by academic employees in SA, and specifically academic employees who are employed at the ODL institution where this study was conducted. But, in order to fully understand the challenges academic employees face at work, a deeper understanding of the SA HE landscape was needed. The SA HE landscape formed the macro-context of this study. After analysing the current HE landscape of SA, the focus was turned to distance education as a pedagogical approach used to disseminate knowledge by HEIs. To provide a clear understanding of the research setting, the context of a certain ODL institution in SA is thus conversed.

4.3 THE HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE OF SOUTH AFRICA

HEIs fulfil a crucial role in supporting the educational and social development in countries, including SA, in the creation of knowledge for the development of future skills, the financial welfare of the nation, and for community service (Bhorat & Pillay, 2017; DHET, 2013; Van den Berg *et al.*, 2008; USAF, 2017). In a developing country such as SA, the essential role of HEIs therefore becomes even more evident.

In SA, the HE system experienced major changes and challenges in the last three decades (CHE, 2016b; Kyvik, 2013b; Maritz & Visagie, 2011; Portnoi, 2015; Subbaye, 2018). One unintended side effect of the apartheid regime was the postponement of change in HE in SA, a motion that took place across the globe since around 1980 (Bundy, 2005). Moreover, HEIs in SA were relatively insulated from the changes globally until 1994 (Bundy, 2005). Since then, the HE system in SA has steadily grown to improve in quality and inclusivity (Rensburg, Motala & David, 2015). Currently, SA has universities in each of the nine provinces of the country (Universities South Africa, 2018), and the three main metropolitan centres of the country – situated in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape – house the largest number of universities (Universities South Africa, 2018).

After the democratisation of SA, the HE system transformed dramatically. Bundy (2005:90) described the experiences since 1994 as “a film projected at fast speed: the sequence is recognisable, but seems jerky, exaggerated and frenetic”. This observation seems feasible since the main objective of the National Commission of HE in 1996 was to restructure the HE landscape as quickly as conceivable to eradicate the apartheid-engineered educational context inherited from the previous regime (CHE, 2016b).

The then minister of education identified the years 1994 to 1999 as the ‘years of change’, with a clear goal of establishing a single national education system regardless of religion, race, class, or ethnicity in answer to the equity redress and full inclusion by the first SA democratic government (Adams, 2006; Fourie, 2003). With the restructuring of the SA institutional landscape, new institutions were formed through mergers, and old institutions were abolished (CHE, 2016b; Pillay, 2017b). The main objectives of these mergers were to set the transformational process in motion, increase efficiency, and diversify the HE landscape (CHE, 2016b). These transformations resulted in a more unified HE sector in terms of how they are governed, student enrolment processes, quality assurance measures, funding arrangements, and qualification types (CHE, 2016b). Today, qualifications offered by HEIs are classified on a single qualifications framework which was developed to provide clarity regarding the purposes of degrees and diplomas, and to provide consistency in the pathways between them (CHE, 2016b).

Additional changes included the admission of a diverse and altered student population, adherence to revised forms of governance, experimentation with delivery methods, the alignment of study curriculums and qualifications to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (Bundy, 2005). The combination of these changes mirrors the transformation that took

place in other parts of the world, with the exception that the changes in SA happened at an accelerated pace (Bundy, 2005).

With all the changes that took place over the last three decades, many HEIs in SA are facing several challenges (CHE, 2016b; Pillay, 2020). These challenges include insufficient access to quality education for all citizens; technological changes; unparalleled growth in student numbers; the admission of a diverse and altered student population; revised formulas for funding; mergers; intensified reporting and compliance expectations; smaller budgets; pressure to improve graduation rates; the demand for improvement in research output and international publications; and students' protests about tuition fees (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Bundy, 2005; CHE, 2016b; Mouton *et al.*, 2013; Ngambi, 2011; Subbaye, 2018).

Even though numerous reports recognised the rationale for such changes that were needed as a means to redress the injustices of the past in the HE landscape, changes and the accompanying challenges had a direct and indirect influence on the wellbeing of employees and HEIs (as organisations) as a whole (Moshoeu & Geldenhuys, 2015; Subbaye, 2018).

4.4 DISTANCE EDUCATION AND OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING

Distance Education (DE), often referred to as Open Distance Learning (ODL), plays a significant role in the educational development of countless individuals (Ngubane-Mokiwa & Letseka, 2015; Sefotho, 2015). Originally, DE, as a means to study through a university, was referred to as correspondence or independent study and study material was traditionally sent via mail (Bozkurt, 2019).

One of the greatest advantages of DE is that this pedagogical approach enables students from a large geographical area, both nationally and internationally, to obtain a qualification (Maphalala & Adigun, 2021; Oosthuizen & van Rensburg, 2012). Other common reasons for choosing DE as a means of furthering studies include the flexibility of staying employed while studying, which is beneficial in terms of earning an income and obtaining work experience; there is no need to live in close proximity of the HEI to study at that specific institution; the affordability of this mode of teaching and learning; the student can determine the number of modules to undertaken based on their available funds; more attainable admission criteria; the capability to combine family responsibilities with studies; and mature individuals who wish to return to HE for further professional development can do so (Dhunpath & Dhunpath, 2015; Oosthuizen & van Rensburg, 2012; Sefotho, 2015).

DE, as a pedagogical approach, can be defined as intentional and organised teaching and learning, where the students are separated from the lecturers in time and space (Bozkurt, 2019; Mouton *et al.*, 2013; Mpofu & Maphalala, 2019; Oosthuizen & Van Rensburg, 2012). Simonson, Zvacek and Smaldino (2019) however warn that the rapid changes in technology can challenge the conventional ways in which DE is defined. Netanda, Mamabolo and Themane (2019) agree with this observation and explain that it is becoming increasingly complex to define ODL education because of altered managerial approaches to institutions, which are predominantly formed by rapid changes and advancements in technology.

Various ODL institutions on the African continent, including DE institutions in SA, employ an assortment of cost-effective and contemporary technologies to enable the distribution of educational content to geographically removed students (Maphalala & Adigun, 2021; Ngubane-Mokiwa & Letseka, 2015). Various possibilities exist to carry out teaching and learning objectives, and several institutions rely on a combination of technologically advanced communications and a printed format of teaching material to provide this facility (Simonson *et al.*, 2019:9). Examples of these ever-advancing technological communications include e-learning, mobile learning and ubiquitous learning, which enable plentiful interaction for dispersed students (Bozkurt, 2019).

As mentioned in Section 4.3, SA had a history of inequality and discrimination, and DE has played an instrumental role in the past to offer oppressed groups the opportunity to further their post-school qualifications (Ngubane-Mokiwa & Letseka, 2015). Today, DE still plays a pivotal role in reaching more students and closing the skills and knowledge gap through the utilisation of ODL (Mpofu & Maphalala, 2019; Ngubane-Mokiwa & Letseka, 2015; Oosthuizen & Van Rensburg, 2012; Sefotho, 2015). It is therefore not surprising that DE has become an important topic in HE as a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning (Simonson *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, the number of HEIs that adopt open and blended educational approaches continuously increase in the contemporary HE environment (Prinsloo & Coetzee, 2013).

Since ODL, as an educational approach, increasingly rely on technology as a way to reach its student audience, academic employees need to learn fresh and innovative ways of teaching and learning to progress educational outcomes, and make a cognitive decision to abandon the traditional ways of teaching (Bezuidenhout, 2018; Oosthuizen & Van Rensburg, 2012). The implication of these continuous changes in DE will therefore, inevitably, have a direct bearing on academic employees, as the study population, who work at such an institution. The organisational context and specific challenges that are evident in the particular ODL institution where the study was conducted are discussed in the following section.

4.5 AN ODL INSTITUTION AS SELECTED RESEARCH SETTING

In this section, the organisational context of the ODL institution where the study was conducted is discussed. However, prior to embarking on the discussion, the reader is reminded of the ethical decisions I made as academic researcher. The name of the HEI was not made known in this study, and throughout the thesis, the university is simply referred to as an ODL institution. This was done to protect the institution's identity as far as possible and to protect the confidentiality of the research participants. Though I could not completely abandon a discussion of the ODL institution, since contextual insight is needed for the reader, I withheld certain information that could potentially reveal the institution's identity.

As an additional measure to protect the identity of the ODL institution, any documents which I referenced of the particular ODL institution (e.g., policies, website information, strategic objectives, or any other sources) were anonymised. The implication was that in-text citations of the ODL institution were cited as "Institution A". Likewise, in the reference list of the thesis, the name of the ODL institution was replaced with "Institution A". In instances where electronic sources (websites) were used as part of a reference, the hyperlink to the website was withheld (if the name of the institution formed part of the hyperlink). For more details on the ethical considerations adhered to in this study, refer to Section 2.6.2 of the thesis.

The ODL institution where the study was conducted was one of the first DE universities in the world, and one of the world's top-30 mega-institutions (Alpaslan & Lombard, 2011; Institution A, the leading ODL university; Institution A, Annual Report, 2013; Gerber, 2019; Martins & Ungerer, 2015; Prinsloo & Coetzee, 2013). As one of the first DE institutions in the world, it played a leading role in shaping the way in which DE is practised across the globe (Simonson *et al.*, 2019:39). It is one of the largest universities on the African continent (Prinsloo & Coetzee, 2013; USAF, 2017), and attract students from various African countries and other parts of the globe (Rensburg *et al.*, 2015). The ODL institution has an extensive labour force (Njiro, 2016) and provides education to between thirty to forty per cent of all HE students in SA (Institution A, Annual Report, 2013; USAF, 2017).

The history of this specific ODL institution portrays a journey of transformation and growth, since the institution is more than a hundred years old (Institution A, 2019d; Prinsloo & Coetzee, 2013). In accordance with the reconfiguration of the SA educational landscape, this ODL institution merged with two other educational institutions, which included another DE institution and a Technikon (Van Niekerk & Schmidt, 2016). Collectively these institutions formed the

ODL institution as it is known today (Institution A, Annual Report, 2013; R&I strategy, 2013-2015). With the merger, the management and governance structures of the institution were also revised and adjusted in order to adhere to socioeconomic dynamical factors the regulatory requirements, and in agreement with the spirit of transformation and advancement of the ODL institution (Institution A, Annual Report, 2013).

This specific merger was not without obstacles. The three educational institutions had very different organisational cultures, and the employees from these different institutions had to compete for employment positions (Van Niekerk & Schmidt, 2016). In addition, the ODL institution revisited its curriculum system, and the beginning of the new millennium also signified a new undertaking at the ODL institution, as the year-course system was changed to a semester-course system (Van Niekerk & Schmidt, 2016). By switching to a semester-course system, the number of registrations, assignments and exams doubled, causing a substantial increase in academic employees' workload, yet no additional support was provided (Van Niekerk & Schmidt, 2016). This meant that academic employees had to fulfil additional administrative functions, which did not form part of their job tasks previously and, as a result cutting into the time they had available to lecture students (Van Niekerk & Schmidt, 2016).

As discussed in Section 4.5.1.2, the massification of universities had a significant impact on student numbers and the same hold true for the ODL institution where this study was conducted. Between 2003 and 2013, the number of students doubled at the ODL institution, causing additional job demands on academic employees (Van Niekerk & Schmidt, 2016). This student population is also diverse and ever-changing, with a large proportion of mature students studying at the institution, but also a remarkable increase in the number of school-leaving students who enrol at the university full-time (Alpaslan & Lombard, 2011).

Bezuidenhout (2018), who conducted a study at the same ODL institution, explained that since the ODL institution is situated in a developing country, available resources are constrained, and academic employees are under pressure to spend government funding effectively and are perpetually held accountable. She continues by stating that academic employees' work is becoming increasingly complicated and multifaceted (Bezuidenhout, 2018).

The university offers various study options, reaching from degrees up to doctoral level, diplomas to short courses and certificate programmes (Gerber, 2019). These courses are presented in a mixed-mode approach (paper-based and electronically), but e-learning is generally used for postgraduate students (Manyike, 2017). All qualifications offered by the ODL institution are accredited and internationally recognised (Institution A, 2019d). The ODL

institution has won many awards, recognitions, and honours as one of the leading research institutions on the African continent (Institution A, the leading ODL university).

Like the other public universities in SA, this ODL institution can be defined by and distinguished from other HEIs in terms of research, which is a unique feature of a university (Institution A, Research Report, 2008). Universities are not only characterised by this endeavour, but also carry the duty or responsibility to create knowledge through research and to disseminate the knowledge resulting from research (Institution A, Research Report, 2008). For this reason, research and innovation is regarded as one of the central business areas of the university (Institution A, home, research). While acknowledging the importance of all three business areas of the university, attention was paid to research and innovation at the ODL institution, in line with the focus of this thesis.

The research and innovation unit of the ODL institution is responsible for the promotion and realisation of exceptional research and innovative solutions that speak to important national and global questions, and contribute to the economic, cultural, environmental, and social welfare of SA and the African continent (Institution A homepage, research). According to the ODL institution's Annual Report (2013), the university is committed to the development, the facilitation, the management, and the monitoring of research structures, policies, and procedures of high quality in order to align itself with these national research policy directives, international benchmarks, and best practices of research.

Complementing this vision of the university, the strategic plan of the ODL institution was updated in 2015, and several goals and strategies were identified which speak directly to this vision (Institution A, Strategic Plan, 2015). The strategic plan has several goals and objectives. Each of these goals speaks to the anticipated outcomes, whereas the objectives specify which aspects contribute to the achievement of these goals (R&I strategy, 2013-2015). Considering the scope of this thesis, Goal 2, as documented in the research and innovation strategy (2013-2015), is highlighted. This goal has a specific focus on increasing innovative research and research capacity (Institution A, 2015 Strategic Plan, 2015).

GOAL 2: Foster a supportive, enabling research environment

This goal is consistent with the ODL institution's focus on people and servant leadership. It is a recognition that its success in research and innovation can only be materialised if the university has the right people, as well as a supportive and enabling environment for them to succeed (R&I strategy, 2013-2015).

Objective 2.1: Implement effective research policies, procedures and incentives to maximise research, including community engagement research, knowledge transfer and commercialisation

For academic researchers to be productive, an environment is needed which provides institutional support that promotes research over administration (R&I strategy, 2013-2015). At the same time, the environment should adhere to good governance principles to avoid the university being made vulnerable (R&I strategy, 2013-2015).

With the analysis of this goal and the specific objective, it is undeniable that research ethics processes, procedures and adherence to the ODL institution's Policy on Research Ethics should be regarded as an integral part of this strategic priority.

4.6 CHALLENGES ACADEMIC EMPLOYEES FACE AT WORK

The role of academic employees across the globe has always been multidimensional, including teaching, administrative tasks, research responsibilities, and community service originating from those teaching and research activities (Mpofu & Maphalala, 2019; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016; Stewart, 2007; Shaw, 2009). Likewise, academic employees in SA have the responsibility to teach certificate programmes and diplomas, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, and up to the level of doctoral degrees (De Hart *et al.*, 2015; Matsolo, Ningpuanyeh & Susuman, 2018). It is also imperative for academic employees to further their research skills and publish scientific articles in international journals, as it is associated with career advancement opportunities (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014) (see Section 4.5.5.3 for a detailed discussion). However, academic employees' reality is that they are frequently caught-up in the burdens of administration, meetings, 'managing through statistics', and performance management activities (Bezuidenhout, 2013; Hardinga, Forda & Gough, 2010).

The national aim, in accordance with the vision of the National Development Plan (NDP) and the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, is to increase the total number of student enrolments to 1.6 million by 2030 (DHET Annual report, 2015). However, a large percentage of students who enrol for university qualifications are inadequately prepared for the academic demands of university courses, which results in an increased workload for academic employees in SA (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Cameron & Drennan, 2017; CHE, 2016b). With students who are not adequately prepared for university, academic employees need to offer additional support for student development and individual support to students (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; CHE, 2016b).

Over the last 30 years, academic employees across the globe who work at HEIs have been subjected to significant changes and challenges (Chapman & Lindner, 2016; Kyvik, 2013b; Mouton *et al.*, 2013; Portnoi, 2015; Subbaye, 2018). Also, in SA, academic employees are exposed to extensive changes and face numerous challenges (CHE, 2016b; Mark & Smith, 2018, Subbaye, 2018), including the massification of HEIs; the marketisation of HEIs; the internationalisation and globalisation movement; the accountability and quality movement; the introduction of new technologies and artificial intelligence in the workplace; steady decline in public funding; mergers of institutions; pressure to improve graduation rates; demands for increased research outputs; changing student profiles; student protests about tuition fees; dissent over meaningful knowledge; and heightened competition for good quality students and staff (Allais, 2017; Butler-Adam, 2018; CHE, 2016b; Erdem, 2016; Han *et al.*, 2019; Jansen & Motala, 2017; Kyvik, 2013a; Kyvik, 2013b; Motala, 2017:16; Ngambi, 2011; Prinsloo & Coetzee, 2013; Sabagh *et al.*, 2018; Subbaye, 2018). These changes and challenges are frequently accompanied by reduced authority in academic decision-making and a more submissive stance towards the leadership and management of HEIs (CHE, 2016b). Indeed, a general consensus exists that the future of academic employees is uncertain, complicated, and will be demanding (Mouton *et al.*, 2013; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016).

Despite the challenges that academic employees face, they need to fulfil a vital role in the educational and social development of South Africans (Mpofu & Maphalala, 2019; Van den Berg *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, it is comforting that HEIs are adapting to meet these demands and academic employees are a crucial human resource in this drive (Diedericks, 2017). Almost two decades ago, Coetzee and Rothmann (2005) already emphasised the importance of HEIs' human resources, which comprise administrators, support staff, and lecturers, and stressed that they should be looked after. In particular, academic employees at HEIs are of critical importance and the success of any university is dependent on these human resources (Aberbach & Christensen, 2018; Bezuidenhout, 2018; Erdem, 2016).

These and many other expectations cause academic employees to experience significant pressure in their workplaces. Fulfilling multiple roles can lead to role overload (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2006) and the fact that academic employees function in a global environment with demanding stakeholder expectations, causes tension and hinders their ability to meet a plethora of demands (CHE, 2016b; Ngambi, 2011). The many demands experienced by academic employees may also lead to stress, exhaustion of personal resources, fatigue, cynicism, reduced self-efficacy, feelings of being overwhelmed, overworked and incompetent (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010; Diedericks, 2017). However, the negative process (the health impairment process) that can lead to burnout, as a result of prolonged exposure to the plethora

of job demands that academic employees face, can be mitigated by supporting academic employees with sufficient resources. This is because resources can support employees to handle their job demands (cushion the impact thereof) and realise their work tasks (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Park *et al.*, 2019). The challenges (job demands) that academic employees face are discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

4.6.1 Massification of universities

Massification can be understood as the process by which mass HE is achieved. It is a well-known concept that has received a lot of attention from both policymakers and researchers across the globe (Tight, 2019). Massification is not a foreign concept, but it is at a 'more intense stage' of the ongoing transformation in HE and should be reflected on in different ways (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009).

In the beginning, HE systems wrestled just to cope with demand, which included the need for an increase in infrastructure and bigger teaching bodies (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). From there, systems started to struggle with the implications of diversity and contemplate which subgroups are still excluded and inappropriately provided for (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). Massification has also been widely critiqued on issues such as the effect of employment opportunities for graduates, the quality of service provision, the impact of widening participation and equity, and the students' perceptions of their experience (Tight, 2019:98). While some policymakers and researchers maintain that mass HE has an overall negative influence on the experience of HE, other authors hold a more positive or nuanced view of massification (Tight, 2019).

In the last 20 years, SA HEIs, mirroring the global trend of massification, experienced a considerable increase in student enrolments (Cameron & Drennan, 2017; CHE, 2016b; Manyike, 2017; McAreavey & Muir, 2011; Sabagh *et al.*, 2018). The SA massification of HE was also spurred on by the need for transformation and social justice in a newly found democratic society (Cameron & Drennan, 2017). This upsurge in student numbers was coupled with a substantial change in their demographic profiles (CHE, 2016b). With the opening up of HE, the remunerations of previously disadvantaged groups could be increased, and inequality could be lessened as a result (Bhorat & Pillay, 2017). The massification of HEIs therefore seems to complement the country's National Development Plan (NDP 2030). The NDP commenced in 2012 with the objective to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030 by prioritising, *inter alia*, education, including HE (Bhorat & Pillay, 2017). This view is supported by Browning *et al.* (2017), McAreavey and Muir (2011), who maintain that governments are keen to encourage mass HE, but these authors also acknowledge the

consequences and state that universities function in a progressively globalised economy, competitive work settings, and funding pressures (Browning *et al.*, 2017; McAreavey & Muir, 2011).

Another important feature associated with the massification of HEIs is the increase of what is generally referred to as an 'audit culture' in HE systems (CHE, 2016b). HEIs in SA did not escape the development of this audit culture, given the increase in external monitoring and measurements, for example, external quality assurance and enrolment planning, and performance management systems, internally and externally; for instance, the National Research Foundation's rating system (CHE, 2016b). The rationale for such an audit culture is to bring about the required improvements in the system's efficiency and effectiveness to cater for larger numbers of students, without a comparable increase in the provision of academic employees (CHE, 2016b). However, this audit culture opened many complex questions regarding academic freedom and institutional autonomy (CHE, 2016b; Pather & Remenyi, 2019).

The upsurge of institutional ranking systems in which HEIs pursue higher rankings on league tables, which predominantly rank institutions based on quantitative measures in terms of output, has also increased pressure on academic employees to perform in a prescribed way (CHE, 2016b; Waring, 2013). Subbaye (2018) maintains that several literature sources agree that the opening up of the SA HE system has placed enormous pressure on HEIs at macro-level and on academic employees at micro-level. Features of massification of HE that are particularly noticeable in SA include changes in university structures; the staff to student ratio in HEIs; the expectation of students to obtain free HE; and the reduction of financial aid by government. These changes have caused an increase in the job demands experienced by academic employees, and have been established as one of the main reasons for burnout (Bakker *et al.*, 2014). In turn, burnout is related to numerous forms of negative consequences among employees to their work, which include, *inter alia*, dissatisfaction with their jobs, depleted organisational commitment, and negative organisational outcomes (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Maslach, 2017). However, the negative outcomes that could be caused by burnout can be alleviated by supporting academic employees with adequate resources. The different features of massification in the SA HE landscape are discussed in the sub-sections below.

4.6.1.1 Changes to university structures

The profile of HEIs in SA looked vastly different before the democratisation of the country. However, with the realisation of democracy in SA, the HE landscape, as it is known today,

was set in motion. Currently, HEIs in SA are classified into traditional universities, universities of technology, and comprehensive universities (merging academic and vocational degrees) (Portnoi, 2015). These institutions offer certificate and diploma programmes, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate degrees up to the level of doctoral degrees, with over a million students registered in 2018 at the public HEIs in SA (Matsolo *et al.*, 2018). The demand to obtain such qualifications at HEIs in SA far exceed the supply available to offer it (Ramdass & Masithulela, 2016). In comparison to past generations of academic employees, these employees have to deal with progressively more demanding workloads in the contemporary university setting (Coetzee, Maree & Smit, 2019; Zábrodská *et al.*, 2018).

Thus, as the landscape of work continues to change for academic employees, they also need to adapt and evolve accordingly to meet these demands (Berebitsky & Ellis, 2018). In an ever-changing work environment, academic employees are frequently confronted with the reality that their skills and competencies become obsolete in the workplace, and new skills need to be acquired (Bezuidenhout, 2018). Such changes in the environment, necessitating academic employees to adapt, have a direct and/or indirect impact on the wellbeing of employees and subsequently on the organisation as a whole (Moshoeu & Geldenhuys, 2015). Scholars and administrators alike need to be equipped with an understanding of how best to support academic employees in these endeavours (Berebitsky & Ellis, 2018).

As stated in Section 4.5, within the (then) newly founded democratic society, several changes, transformations, and mergers of HEIs took place. The ODL institution where the study took place also merged with two other educational institutions (Van Niekerk & Schmidt, 2016). This merger was not without challenges, since the employees from these different institutions had to compete for employment positions, and the three HEIs had diverse organisational cultures (Van Niekerk & Schmidt, 2016).

Changes in the organisation can be understood in terms of the job demand placed on employees (Day, Crown & Ivany, 2017). In a study conducted by Burnes (2005), it was discovered that organisational changes resulting from mergers and restructuring (e.g., the ODL institution) lead to increased work pressure, an increase in task responsibilities, and experiences of ambiguity within the organisation. Also, Harney, Fu and Freney (2018) maintain that organisational changes create work demands in the form of work intensity. In turn, employees' work intensity can lead to exhaustion and reduced job satisfaction (Harney *et al.*, 2018). Matthysen and Harris (2018) elaborate on the work of Burnes (2005), stating that mergers and organisational restructuring can further result in changes to the organisational culture, thus contributing to the uncertainty experienced by employees. However, when

employees experience WE, they are better equipped to handle job demands, in particular during organisational change (Matthysen & Harris, 2018). In the work of Harney *et al.* (2018), they found that feelings of exhaustion and dissatisfaction due to organisational change (job demands) can be mitigated by clear communication and consultation with employees (job resources). When employees experience their work environments as supportive and autonomy is encouraged, these job resources can support employees to buffer the job demands that are placed on them due to organisational changes (Day *et al.*, 2017).

4.6.1.2 Student to staff ratio

Within a democratic society, the SA government opened access to HE for millions of individuals who were previously prevented from attending HEIs because of a number of reasons, including a lack of funding, their demographic characteristics, or the inadequate quality of primary and secondary education they received (Portnoi, 2015). These historical discriminations that were addressed by government, catalysed the increase of students of diverse backgrounds currently entering HE (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Pillay, 2020). The cause for this drastic increase in student numbers includes the belief that a HE qualification will result in personal benefits of increased employment opportunities, a potential rise in income, and the capacity to invest and save money (Hornsby & Osman, 2014) – opportunities that were previously not accessible to all. The demand for HE is also spurred on with the arrival of the knowledge economy and globalisation (Motala, 2017).

This increase of student numbers entering HEIs far outweighs the number of academic employees, resulting in increases in the workload of these employees (CHE, 2016b; Kyvik, 2013a; Pillay, 2020). This pressure is further complicated by insufficiently prepared students – due to inadequate primary and secondary education because of a poor schooling system in SA – who enter the HE system, resulting in major discrepancies in the levels of preparedness of students to take on undergraduate and postgraduate studies (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Cameron & Drennan, 2017; CHE, 2016b; Motala, 2017).

In fact, several authors maintain that the high student drop-out rate observed in SA occurs because students are in many instances not academically prepared for tertiary learning. These issues can be traced back to basic education where students were not sufficiently prepared (Matsolo *et al.*, 2018; Ramdass & Masithulela, 2016; Portnoi, 2015). This is true for the student profiles at the ODL institution as well. Furthermore, in many instances, students who are registered at Institution A have limited proficiency in English, since it is not their first language, thus adding to the challenges and pressures experienced by academic employees in their

work endeavours (Van Biljon & De Villiers, 2013). In an ODL environment (distance education), academic employees also have to consider that students are dispersed across the globe and differ in terms of their backgrounds, previous schooling and abilities (Van Biljon & De Villiers, 2013).

A study by Portnoi (2015) revealed that several academic employees are alarmed by the level of effort and amount of time required to work with under-prepared students. These continued efforts by academic employees to assist under-prepared students continue despite the disheartening fact that several students will never complete their qualifications (Portnoi, 2015). The high student drop-out rate, estimated at 45%, is one of the major challenges HE in SA face (Matsolo *et al.*, 2018). Specifically, for Institution A, the figures are very bleak, with only 6% of students graduating within five years, and it is estimated that 78% will never graduate (Cloete, 2016). Another challenge that academic employees who work at ODL institutions frequently encounter, is dealing with two categories of students simultaneously; the one group of students being more mature, sometimes in full-time employment, and the other group being students who are under-prepared and frequently only recently finished school (Diedericks, 2017).

This massive increase in student numbers with the accompanying challenges discussed above is, however, not the only work responsibility academic employees have. Academic employees are also pressured to deliver research (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010; Pillay, 2020; Van den Berg *et al.*, 2008), which is associated with career development opportunities, thus further adding to the work pressures experienced by academic employees (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014:323; Pillay, 2020). It is therefore clear that the ratio between academic employees and students entering tertiary education is adding to the job demands academic employees face in a contemporary HE environment. While excessive job demands can lead to burnout among employees, this negative spiral (health impairment process) can be mitigated by sufficient resources (see Section 3.4.3). The job demand that is brought on by increased student numbers can thus be alleviated by providing academic employees with the needed resources to manage this, and other work responsibilities, including resources related to research ethics. Numerous studies have demonstrated that job resources (e.g., social support, personal and job development opportunities, feedback on work performance, and autonomy) can mitigate the impact of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Breevaart & Bakker, 2018).

4.6.1.3 Student demands for free education

A qualification in HE is believed to be beneficial to the graduate personally and can also have a significant impact on changing the economy of the country by means of skills acquisition and retention (Matsolo *et al.*, 2018). Because of such beliefs, students in SA are fighting for free HE (Jacobs *et al.*, 2019). The unemployment rate is exceptionally high in the country (Jacobs *et al.*, 2019) but access to HE is seen as an opportunity to escape unemployment. This belief is based on the fact that the unemployment rate for matriculates is 25.5%, while the unemployment rate for graduates is considerably lower at only 5.1% (Jacobs *et al.*, 2019). HE qualifications are also seen by the wealthy (“haves”) as the pathway to remaining privileged and by the poor (“have-nots”) as a method of escaping poverty (Cloete, 2016). However, expensive tuition fees prevent numerous individuals from obtaining the required training to shrink income inequality and create a more equal society (Cloete, 2016).

The high costs associated with hindering access to HE has ignited dialogues on free HE, particularly for the poor (Jacobs *et al.*, 2019). The revenue of universities in SA comes from three sources, which predominantly include government funding and student tuition fees, and to a smaller extent, private sources (benefactors, fund-raising etc.) (GroundUp, 2015; PWC, 2015). However, over the past ten years, the government subsidies, as part of the income received by universities, have declined (Jacobs *et al.*, 2019) (Government funding and the role of National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is discussed in more detail in Section 6.3.1.4). In order to alleviate these shortfalls, universities have been increasing tuition fees (CHE, 2016a; GroundUp, 2015; Jacobs *et al.*, 2019; Moolman & Jacobs, 2018). Students’ discontent in SA is understandable, given that the increases in tuition fees are significantly higher than the country’s inflation rate, thus essentially limiting the opportunity to obtain a HE qualification (Jacobs *et al.*, 2019).

Given this context, the HE landscape of SA was dominated by student protests in recent years in calls for #Fees Must Fall (Benatar, 2016; Calitz & Fourie, 2016; CHE, 2016a:6; Grobler & Horne, 2017; Postma, 2016). The main objection of the #Fees Must Fall student protests, which started in 2015, was the proposed fee increase of universities for the following academic year (Calitz & Fourie, 2016; Moolman & Jacobs, 2018). The protesting students maintained that a university degree became unattainably expensive (Calitz & Fourie, 2016). The student protests, to a large extent, began peacefully within many universities and were supported by academic employees and other stakeholders, but when the protest actions turned violent, the support came to an end (Langa, 2016). Although most individuals could understand the sentiments that underpinned the protests of obtaining more equitable access to HE, there was

considerable disagreement and distress regarding the approaches, tactics and outcomes of these protests (Hornsby, 2019).

Towards the end of October 2015, the former SA president, Mr Jacob Zuma, announced that the tuition fees of public universities would not increase for 2016 (Calitz & Fourie, 2016; CHE, 2016a; Moolman & Jacobs, 2018; USAf, 2018). This announcement, together with the financial losses already experienced by universities due to protest actions, placed further financial strain on these institutions. Individuals who did not support the protests reasoned that the sacrifices made to guarantee these achievements (no increase in tuition fees) came at too great a cost (Hornsby, 2019). These 'costs' included the traumatisation of universities' students and employees; the destruction of buildings and other infrastructure; and books and artwork being destroyed by fire (Allais, 2017; Hornsby, 2019). This violent behaviour by aggravated students also necessitated that several works of art and monuments had to be removed from university campuses for safekeeping (Benatar, 2016).

These student protest actions caused more than R786 million worth of damages between 2015 and 2018 (Daniel, 2018; Kahn, 2018). In a comprehensive report submitted to the presidency by the then Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Naledi Pandor indicated that the total damages equalled R492.4 million between 2015 and 2016; R237.7 million between 2016 and 2017; and R56.5 million between 2017 and 2018 (Daniel, 2018). The North West University, specifically the Mahikeng campus, experienced the most damages when protesting students set buildings alight (Daniel, 2018). The campus had to be closed for a month, and students had to be dispersed with the use of rubber bullets (Chernick, Exstrum, & Molosankwe, 2016). The North West University experienced a R198 million loss, while the University of Johannesburg experienced a loss of R144 million, and the University of KwaZulu-Natal experienced a loss of R100 million (Kahn, 2018). These figures are equal to an annual grant provided by government to a small university (Kahn, 2018). Several sources noted that the capital allocated to restore damaged infrastructure could have been used for alternative operational costs, such as scientific research, or alternatively, students could have been educated (Chernick *et al.*, 2016).

The student protests had massive ramifications and practically brought the HE system to a standstill, along with disruption and postponement of examinations (Allais, 2017; Benatar, 2016). When university campuses did reopen, the presence of private security and police officers were obvious, and violent conflicts between students and these officers were frequent, together with the ongoing destruction of buildings and university property (Allais, 2017).

Although the amount of empirical research data available to demonstrate the relationship between violent protests and emotional trauma are limited (Szabo, 2016), popular media suggest that many students and university staff either did or still do suffer from trauma, anxiety, depression and mental illnesses because of the student protests. It is also stated that the psychological and emotional effects experienced from the protests are permanent (SAfm News, 2018). One event that received wide media coverage, was the suicide by the leading SA cardiologist, Professor Bongani Mayosi, Dean of Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town. Professor Mayosi was an A-rated National Research Foundation (NRF) researcher and received the Order of Mapungubwe in 2009 (SABC News, 2018). The Order of Mapungubwe is SA's highest honour and is granted by the President of SA to SA citizens for excellence and exceptional achievements (SA Gov., 2019).

The death of Professor Mayosi, who struggled with depression, awakened a debate regarding accusations that student protesters pressured him and that he suffered several insults from angry students (SAfm News, 2018). In a media statement by the Vice-Chancellor at the same university, Professor Phakeng indicated that Professor Mayosi and numerous other academic employees were negatively affected by the #Fees Must Fall protests (SABC News, 2018). She mentioned that the two-week occupation of the Faculty of Health Sciences, where he served as dean, affected him badly (SABC News, 2018). She further mentioned that Professor Mayosi was not alone in his suffering and that many employees were struggling and hurting (SABC News, 2018). Professor Phakeng stated that although Professor Mayosi was the only mortality suffered at the university, other employees had heart attacks but were fortunate to still be alive (SABC News, 2018). The physical and emotional wellbeing of employees at universities, including academic employees, were thus undoubtedly adversely affected by these student protests. What is more, the Council on HE (CHE) in SA predicts that student protests related to financial concerns will become a common feature within the country's HE landscape, and is likely to increase in intensity and take place on a more frequent basis (CHE, 2016b).

Szabo (2016) denotes that it is possible that individuals who were engaged in violent situations or directly exposed to such situations could experience emotional distress. In more vulnerable individuals, for example individuals who have an anxious disposition, this might result in the development of an acute stress disorder (Szabo, 2016). Individuals who were not directly exposed to the trauma can also experience indirect traumatisation (Szabo, 2016). While the damage to HEI infrastructure was substantial and a cause for concern, the USAf (2018) upholds that the most disconcerting aspects of these protests were the negative impact thereof on university employees and students.

A study conducted by Kula (2017) found that employees who feel that their work environment brings about stress, experience lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of burnout. In order for academic employees to deal with stress related to their work environment, they should be supported with sufficient resources. This is because resources can support employees to better manage their job demands (see Section 3.4.3) and because job resources are positively related to WE (see Section 3.4.2). WE, in turn, is positively related to the better mental and physical health of employees (Schaufeli, 2018).

4.6.1.4 Government funding of higher education institutions

There have been major advances in massifying the HE system, but the system in its totality has not been capable of coping with the lack of funding and the demands to broaden access to HE (Swartz *et al.*, 2019). The provision of HE has been changing from an elite system to one advocating universal access, resulting in a need for the reassessment of HE financial frameworks (Motala, 2017). Debts experienced by HEIs is a threat to their sustainability (Commission of Inquiry, 2017; Pillay, 2017b). HE is essential in the distribution of knowledge needed for development, and a strong relationship exists between financial contributions to HE and levels of development within society (Jacobs *et al.*, 2019; Rensburg *et al.*, 2015).

The cost of tuition for students has increased substantially, therefore making HE too expensive for the average SA citizen (Swartz *et al.*, 2019). The escalation of tuition fees for HE studies can be subscribed to several reasons, including a deficiency of increased third-stream funding (Swartz *et al.*, 2019); operational costs that continuously increase at above inflation rates (Commission of Inquiry, 2017; Jacobs *et al.*, 2019); challenging growth objectives and student enrolments (Moolman & Jacobs, 2018; Ngambi 2011); financial losses due to student protest actions; and the poor SA economy since expensive academic material and computer equipment needs to be imported (Jacobs *et al.*, 2019). However, the most significant reason for the increase in tuition fees over the last 20 years is brought about by the lack of government funding, the largest source of university income (Calitz & Fourie, 2016; Commission of Inquiry, 2017; Jacobs *et al.*, 2019; Swartz *et al.*, 2019).

Currently, the revenue for public HE in SA comes from three main sources, which include tuition fees, private sources, and government (Allais, 2017; Borat & Pillay, 2017; Calitz & Fourie, 2016; GroundUp, 2015; PWC, 2015). Nevertheless, within the last decade, there has been a decrease in the government subsidies as part of the income received for HE (Bhorat & Pillay, 2017; Calitz & Fourie, 2016; Jacobs *et al.*, 2019; GroundUp, 2015). In contrast, students' fees have increased as a form of university income from 24% to 31% during the last

decade (GroundUp, 2015). This yearly decline in government funding per student headcount clarifies why universities are forced to increase tuition fees at higher than inflation rates (Allais, 2017; Moolman & Jacobs, 2018). However, it is not sustainable to move the increased costs of HE in SA to students (Jacobs *et al.*, 2019).

At this stage, universities experience year-on-year deficits because of increased operating costs and a steady increase of student numbers, without the accompanying escalation in financial support from the government (Allais, 2017; CHE, 2016b; Jacobs *et al.*, 2019). These institutions are also confronted with challenging growth objectives set out by the SA government (Moolman & Jacobs, 2018; Ngambi, 2011). In the absence of adequate funding, universities are forced to either increase tuition fees or HE's quality will be compromised (Jacobs *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, with the limited funding available, it is inevitable that financial support for research will also be adversely affected (Rensburg *et al.*, 2015).

Jacobs *et al.* (2019) highlight two possible scenarios of how compromised HE can influence the future of SA. In the first scenario, prospective students (the professionals of tomorrow) may leave SA to study at respectable institutions abroad and eventually work there, thus weakening the economy further (Jacobs *et al.*, 2019). Or alternatively, the compromised quality of HE in SA may result in students ending up with useless degrees and diplomas, student debt, and the risk of still having no employment prospects (Jacobs *et al.*, 2019).

In stark contrast to the continued reduction of government funding to HEIs, as discussed above, the government committed to increasing funding for students, in response to student protests (see Section 4.5.1.3). The additional funds made available were added to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to financially support HE students (Langa, 2016; Swartz *et al.*, 2019). The difference lies therein that the funds made available were allocated to different stakeholders in the HE context. The NSFAS replaced the Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa (TEFSA), which was formed as an NGO to provide financial aid to HE students (Commission of Inquiry, 2017). In 1999, the state took over TEFSA with the proclamation of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme Act (Act 56 of 1999) (Commission of Inquiry, 2017:210). The NSFAS scheme was founded as a state institution in line with section 3 of the NSFAS Act (Commission of Inquiry, 2017).

NSFAS was established to provide financial aid to eligible students who meet the criteria for admission to a public further education and training programme, or a HE qualification (Commission of Inquiry, 2017; Langa, 2016). According to the Commission of Inquiry (2017), the procedures applied to universities stipulated that NSFAS financed the full fee for the

qualification (i.e., fees for tuition, accommodation, meals and learning support materials). It further stipulated that there was no obligation to reimburse the loan during the duration of study; the obligation to repay the loan started only after the recipient was gainfully employed; NSFAS had the option to change up to 40% of the loan to a bursary on certain conditions, and if the student passed all final-year modules the final-year loan was converted to a 100% bursary; and the loan remained interest free for the duration of the study plus one year thereafter, when interest on the loan was charged at 80% of the interest rate (Commission of Inquiry, 2017).

Despite the fact that NSFAS funding has grown from R1.3 billion in 1996 to about R9 billion in 2014 (CHE, 2016b) and to R17 billion in 2017 (Motala, 2017), NSFAS is still under-funded and tuition fees continue to increase more than the NSFAS funding available, causing the average amount awarded to recipients to be far below the actual cost of studies (Bassier *et al.*, 2015; CHE, 2016b; Commission of Inquiry, 2017; Motala, 2017). Besides the fact that the NSFAS financial aid scheme was under-funded – thus leaving a shortfall for adequate funding – certain HEIs implemented a procedure known as ‘top-slicing’ (Commission of Inquiry, 2017). This practise was initiated in view of the inadequate NSFAS funding in order to widen the access to eligible students (CHE, 2016b; Commission of Inquiry, 2017). The allocation of these NSFAS funds to all eligible students ensured that all students received some funding, but the amount received was less than recommended by NSFAS (Commission of Inquiry, 2017). NSFAS-funded students who failed to complete their qualifications indicated that the practice of top-slicing was one of their reasons for terminating their studies, since these students were unable to make up the shortfall in funding required to continue their qualifications (Bassier *et al.*, 2015; CHE, 2016b).

A further 40% of HE students face similar difficulties because they are the ‘missing middle’ students and struggle to find loans (Bassier *et al.*, 2015). The concept of the ‘missing middle’ students can be understood as those individuals who do not meet the criteria for NSFAS funding, but whose socioeconomic status excludes them from gaining access to HE (Motala, 2017). These students are typically from lower-middle-income households that are excluded from financial aid since the household income of their parents or guardians is above the R122 000 per annum threshold, but they are too poor to be funded by their parents or obtain loans at commercial banks (DHET, 2016). In essence, these students continue to be excluded from obtaining the needed funding, and they are consequently excluded from HE altogether (CHE, 2016b:29) or face crippling debt reimbursements (Bassier *et al.*, 2015). The frustration and difficulties experienced by these ‘missing middle’ students contributed to the student protests (DHET, 2016).

Then, on 16 December 2017, the former president of SA, Mr Jacob Zuma, made a startling announcement that the SA government would phase in “fully subsidised free higher education and training for poor and working-class South Africans over a five-year period” (Bursaries SA, 2019; DHET, 2018:1). In response to the announcement, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) Bursary Scheme was established for poor and working-class students to access studies at public HEIs (Bhorat & Pillay, 2017; Bursaries SA, DHET, 2018). This announcement made by the former president had implications going forward for the funding of both continuing NSFAS-eligible HE students and new first-time applicants (DHET, 2018).

4.6.2 The marketisation of higher education institutions

Marketisation can be understood as the notion of offering HE as a service in a market context, where the demand and supply of academic research, educating students, or other university doings are balanced through a price system (Brown, 2015). Pucciarelli and Kaplan (2016) are also of the view that the marketisation of HE causes universities to offer education as a service in a complex and competitive knowledge marketplace. These authors maintain that the implication is that HEIs can no longer be regarded as non-profit organisations free from market influences and with unambiguous social mandates of offering education as a public good (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). Even so, marketisation is a reality that academic employees must accept, irrespective of whether they see it as advantageous or disadvantageous (Furedi, 2011). Individuals in favour of marketisation maintain that the expansion of the market into academic institutions will guarantee that HEIs will be more efficient and responsive to the requirements of students, society and the economy, and therefore offer better value for money (Brown, 2015; Furedi, 2011). Supporters of marketisation reason that this process elevates HE into a more adaptable, accommodating and efficient institution (Furedi, 2011).

One aspect of marketisation within the HE sector that might be cumbersome, is the endeavour to alter the relationship between academic employees and students to the framework of a service provider and customer (Bhana & Bayat, 2020; Furedi, 2011). For many, HE is regarded as an investment that can boost national development, enhance personal wealth, and lessen poverty (Fomunyam, 2018). And so, universities are held accountable for the teaching and learning offered (Fomunyam, 2018). Within the marketisation context, students who are required to pay tuition fees view themselves as the clients of universities and, as such, their needs must be satisfied (Fomunyam, 2018). If the HEI fails to respond to the needs of the student as customer, they run the risk of losing students to other HEIs (Brown, 2015). The student, fulfilling the role of a customer, is thus seen as the embodiment of market pressures on universities (Bhana & Bayat, 2020; Furedi, 2011).

In accordance with the position taken by marketisation, the customer is always right, and the position of the university is thus to listen to the student (Brown, 2015; Furedi, 2011). Students' increased expectations that academic employees should constantly be available for consultation place additional pressure on these employees (Kyvik, 2013a; Waring, 2013). The implication is thus that the number of job demands placed on academic employees is increasing, yet the number of resources available to academic researchers is not increased, making it difficult to engage in their work activities, including research ethics.

4.6.3 The internationalisation and globalisation movement

According to Rensburg *et al.* (2015), globalisation and internationalisation are frequently regarded as one and the same and are used interchangeably. However, Altbach *et al.* (2009) maintain that while the terms 'globalisation' and 'internationalisation' in HE is closely related and commonly used interchangeably, it actually speaks of two distinct phenomena. Globalisation refers to the economic, technological, and scientific movements that directly influence HE and are essentially unavoidable in the modern world (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). Conversely, internationalisation speaks to the specific policies and programmes undertaken by governments, academic structures and institutions, and specific departments to cope with and manage globalisation (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). A major distinction between globalisation and internationalisation is the notion of control (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). Globalisation and the consequences thereof are beyond the control of any single role player or group of role players (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). Conversely, internationalisation can be regarded as a strategy or approach taken by societies and institutions in response to the many demands placed upon them by globalisation, and as a method for HEIs to prepare their students for engagement in a globalised world (Altbach *et al.*, 2009).

In a contemporary society, the internationalisation of HE is unavoidable for most universities across the globe. And even though internationalisation has become an unavoidable feature of contemporary HE, it should be acknowledged that it creates opportunities as well as challenges (Rensburg *et al.*, 2015). All universities wish to attract the strongest students from around the world for learning and research (Pucciarelli & Kaplan 2016; Rensburg *et al.*, 2015). To this end, universities are important motivators of globalisation and internationalisation, and globalisation and internationalisation are of equal importance to direct change in HE (Rensburg *et al.*, 2015).

With the increase of interdependence of economies, the advancement of information and communications technologies, the opening up of new opportunities for access to knowledge,

the distribution of data and research, and the use of the English language as a global means of conveying information on the internet and elsewhere, HE has steadily become part of a global setting (CHE, 2016b). The growing demand for HE, due to globalisation and the knowledge economy awakening, is mirrored in the rapidly student growing enrolments sub-Saharan Africa (Motala, 2017). The HE strategy towards internationalisation in SA specifically involves employee and student exchanges, shared degrees, research collaborations, online DE, harmonising qualification structures, and the growing inclusion of international, intercultural and global aspects in curriculums (Rensburg *et al.*, 2015).

4.6.4 New technologies and the fourth industrial revolution

Current changes in the world of work are characterised by new technologies and the arrival of the fourth industrial revolution (Hirschi, 2018). These technologies include, *inter alia*, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, biotechnology, nanotechnology, 3-D printing, and genetics (Hirschi, 2018). While some of these technologies might seem foreign, others are already becoming indispensable in our lives, such as location detection technologies, cloud computing, and the use of smartphones (Abbott, 2019). The potential benefits that can be harvested because of the arrival of the fourth industrial revolution are manifold, but several challenges will also become evident because of these changes in the work environment (Xu, David & Kim, 2018). For HRM practitioners, it will thus be important to stay informed of and analyse how developments and changes in technology can influence the industries in which they work, to enable them to support the wellbeing of employees and the successful functioning of the organisations (Abbott, 2019).

The arrival of the fourth industrial revolution creates a great deal of uncertainty in terms of its impact on the future world of work, and disagreement exists on whether it will contribute to more employment opportunities or lead to the loss of employment opportunities (Butler-Adam, 2018; Hirschi, 2018). Yet, because of the great speed at which it is occurring, these advancements in technology cannot be ignored (Xu *et al.*, 2018). It is inevitable that the fourth industrial revolution will change the workplace's requirements from task-based skills and attributes to human-centred skills and attributes (Xing & Marwala, 2017). Labour markets will be flooded with redundant competencies, while a shortage of specific competencies will exist if these rapid technological changes are not taken seriously (Butler-Adam, 2018; Lee *et al.*, 2018; Rensburg *et al.*, 2015). Competencies and or skill sets that will, however, remain essential in this new era will include innovative problem-solving and interactions in complex social settings, for instance, managers, technicians, teachers, and academic employees (Hirschi, 2018).

With these unavoidable changes in the world of work, society will have to change and adjust to the fourth industrial revolution, and HE needs to fulfil the crucial role of shaping and guiding these transitions (Gleason, 2018; Xing & Marwala, 2017). As mentioned, the fourth industrial revolution will result in a move away from task-based skills and will increasingly lean more towards human-centred skills, which will necessitate an increase in interdisciplinary teaching, research, and innovation (Xing & Marwala, 2017). These changes are already evident with the rapid development of ICT and the internet, and how these technologies significantly influenced HE with regards to how research is conducted and how teaching and learning is undertaken (CHE, 2016b; Hockridge, 2013; Maphalala & Adigun, 2021; Njiro, 2016; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016).

Challenges associated with these changes nationally, and in the international HE context, have complicated the roles of academic employees dramatically (Maphalala & Adigun, 2021; Ngambi, 2011). The academic employees who work at Institution A feel overwhelmed, overworked and frequently incompetent as a result (Diedericks, 2017). Martins and Ungerer (2015), who conducted a study at the same university, also expressed their concern over the limited experience, skills, and proficiency of academic employees to harness the advantages of technology-enhanced learning. The truth is that these academic employees are under constant pressure to unlearn redundant competencies and learn new skills and obtain knowledge and experience in a constantly changing ODL work environment (Bezuidenhout, 2018). Both Bezuidenhout (2018), Martins and Ungerer (2015) underscored the need for these ODL academic employees to receive the needed training to obtain the required proficiency to use technology-enhanced teaching and become pedagogical specialists in an online teaching environment. However, because of the challenges related to technologically advanced teaching and learning (poor internet connections, lack of ITC support, insufficient training initiatives, etc.), academic employees experience reduced optimism and are not enthusiastic about the opportunities that could arise because of virtual learning (Maphalala & Adigun, 2021). In order for academic researchers to become enthused and optimistic about virtual learning possibilities, they need to be supported with sufficient resources. Appropriate job resources can be psychological, social, physical, or structural in nature (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001:501).

4.6.5 The accountability and quality movement for higher education institutions

In a setting of continuous change in HE globally, quality assurance became a rapidly growing concern (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). Over the past 20 years, universities' function has been under meticulous scrutiny (Swartz *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, the quality of HE is an age-old issue and has been a subject that received much attention for decades (Fomunyam, 2018). The fundamental role fulfilled by HE in societal development, poverty alleviation, social transformation and social justice underscores the demand for quality HE (Fomunyam, 2018). In a contemporary society, 'customers' or 'stakeholders' have a substantial impact in regulating quality assessment and procedures (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). Students who pay for their education, professional bodies, employers, politicians, and funding organisation are all articulating their specific expectations of what a degree or diploma should represent (Abu Teir & Zhang, 2016; Altbach *et al.*, 2009). Contemporary concepts such as 'transparency', 'performance indicators', and 'outcome measures' significantly feature in these discourses (Altbach *et al.*, 2009).

Countries are frequently pushed to design quality assurance systems that mirror international practices, while considering and upholding unique local needs and limitations (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). This is true for SA as well. To define and govern quality on a pragmatic level has become more complicated and problematic (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). Systems to appraise the quality of HEIs and curriculums in HEIs are not standardised or conformed in their focus, objectives, scope, or impact (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). To this end, countries frequently depend on the quality assurance systems utilised in other countries as assurances of quality; first, to validate their national HE system in its own right, and second, to support a variety of international movements; for example, student mobility, shared degree programmes, and the validation of professional qualifications (Altbach *et al.*, 2009).

For academic employees, the implication of these accountability movements is that, besides the numerous academic-related tasks they have to fulfil, these employees are required to meet the demands of increased administration, compliance and accountability reporting (CHE, 2016b). The expectations for academic employees of HEIs have become more complex, comprehensively mirroring the complexities of the HE landscape (Altbach *et al.*, 2009).

Without a clear quality assurance system or framework, the scope of the subsequent sections is limited to the role of skilled employees, the workload of employees, the pressure to publish

and academic freedom, and how these aspects could contribute or deduct from high quality HE. The quality assurance and accountability discourse in HE poses a significant concern for the wellbeing of academic employees who work in this already stressful work environment (Han *et al.*, 2019).

4.6.5.1 Skilled employees

In order for universities to compete in a globalised world, they need to be able to recruit, retain, develop, and promote high-quality academic employees (Browning, Thompson & Dawson, 2017). However, HEIs in Africa, including SA, grapple with developing and retaining academic employees (Rensburg *et al.*, 2015). A critical brain drain problem exists in SA, placing further constraints on the urgent need to develop and renew infrastructure and the advancement of technology and other facilities (Rensburg *et al.*, 2015). Specifically, SA universities are confronted with the reality that there is a shortage of qualified and experienced academic employees (Bezuidenhout, 2013; Ngambi, 2011).

The reality of massification is that even though the access for students has increased quickly over recent years, a concurrent increase in the number of academic employees has not happened (CHE, 2016b; Kyvik, 2013a; Van Niekerk & Schmidt, 2016). To this end, a deficit exists in the number of skilled academic employees available to educate this large number of students. A shortage of a skilled workforce will place further strain (job demands) on academic employees in an already strenuous work environment. Employees' WE is supported when they have access to sufficient resources, such as supervisor support, training opportunities, career and personal development opportunities, and performance feedback (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; O'Connor, 2014; Schaufeli, 2012a). It is therefore critical to provide academic employees with these resources, as it will initiate the motivational process, which can lead to the WE of academic employees. Moreover, when employees are engaged in their work, it will result in positive organisational outcomes.

4.6.5.2 Workload

Academic employees' work responsibilities are vital to the productivity of a university and their performance cannot be understood without considering their workloads (Kenny & Fluck, 2017). Normally, the work of academic employees comprises a combination of tasks related to teaching, research, administrative and public service responsibilities (Botha & Swanepoel, 2015; Edgar & Geare, 2013; Kenny & Fluck, 2017). These roles are in continuous friction with

each other at different levels (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). Academic employees' performance agreements typically involve these four categories to evaluate their performance (Botha & Swanepoel, 2015). Yet, the reality for academic employees is that they are frequently caught-up in the burdens of administration, meetings, 'managing through statistics', and performance management activities (Bezuidenhout, 2013; Hardinga *et al.*, 2010). Pather and Remenyi (2019) also noted that the level of support given to academic employees in their research endeavours are not always consistent. For example, in instances where academic employees have a heavy teaching workload, it is more demanding and strenuous to find time to conduct academic research (Pather & Remenyi, 2019).

Besides the varying support given to academic employees, Botha and Swanepoel (2015) mention that academic employees' workload has increased substantially in recent years, in terms of capacity and difficulty. Contemporary academic employees face the reality of heavier workloads with less support, resulting in an increase in time and energy required for any work task (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Bezuidenhout, 2013; Bezuidenhout & Cilliers 2010; Botha & Swanepoel, 2015; Van den Berg *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, academic employees frequently bemoan the difficulties they face at work when attempting to complete any one task properly because of excessive demands and work overload (Kyvik, 2013a). The changing work expectations and increasing workloads can result in depression, stress and burnout (Bezuidenhout, 2014). Since the work of an academic employee is quite extensive, a profound sense of dedication and resilience is needed to successfully complete these various work tasks (Pather & Remenyi, 2019). This belief by Pather and Remenyi (2019) therefore alludes to the need for academic employees to experience WE. WE is defined as a "positive fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002:74). This definition thus presupposes that in order for academic employees to successfully fulfil their work responsibilities, they need to be engaged in these undertakings.

4.6.5.3 Pressure to publish

Research is regarded as a central priority for universities since a well-established research infrastructure is essential in a highly competitive environment shaped by knowledge and information (Pather & Remenyi, 2019; Teferra & Altbach, 2004). Several scholars reason that the teaching of students is the most important function of universities, while others contend that research and knowledge creation is the most important function (Kyvik, 2013b). Be it as it may, the dilemma is situated in the fact that several academic employees maintain that the call for an increase in research productivity and output comes at the expense of teaching

(Ngambi, 2011; Pillay, 2017b). Furthermore, Johnston (2010) and Pillay (2017b) maintain that the perception exists that since teaching is not as esteemed or as acknowledged as research, and because it is difficult to measure, many academic employees do not regard the teaching side of their work as seriously as they regard the research side. Truth be told, for the majority of academic employees, research is the part of their work that they value the most and want to give precedence to (Grimes *et al.*, 2018; Kyvik, 2013b; Pather & Remenyi, 2019).

Not only are universities rated on research output and productivity, which then determines their status and government funding, but academic employees are also measured and appraised on their research performance and outputs (Johnston, 2010; McAreavey & Muir, 2011; Mouton *et al.*, 2013; Pather & Remenyi, 2019). This perspective is possibly furthered since academic employees are rewarded and acknowledged for scientific research, as previously mentioned (Al-Khatib, 2016; Browning *et al.*, 2017; Chen, 2011; Johnston, 2010). This perspective is supported by Ballyram and Nienaber (2019), who state that incentives that reward researchers have resulted in raised publication rates by these academic employees.

In reality, in the academic arena, the expression 'publish or perish' is more than a clever remark. Instead, it echoes the reality that academic employees are under enormous pressure to continuously produce outputs, with career progression dependent on such performances (Ballyram & Nienaber, 2019; Grimes *et al.*, 2018; Pather & Remenyi, 2019; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). The pressure experienced by academic employees to constantly conduct research is further intensified with the dilemma that most HEIs are severely challenged to cope financially, and research outputs are increasingly seen as a 'business product' supporting the sustainability of these institutions (Pillay, 2017b).

In the SA HE context, there is a clear emphasis on research productivity (Johnston, 2010). In fact, research productivity is incentivised by the DHET who awards subsidies for the publications of books, chapters in books, and articles in accredited SA and international ISI and IBSS-accredited journals (Ballyram & Nienaber, 2019). This intense drive to produce research output among academic researchers who do not have the required skills, knowledge or experience can unintentionally cause ethical challenges and may result in research misconduct (Ballyram & Nienaber, 2019). Conversely, more experienced academic researchers might be tempted to identify 'gaps' in the publication process and manipulate the system for their personal gain (Chen, 2011).

In addition, the pressures academic employees are faced with to produce research outputs has resulted in an unintentional effect where researchers rush their research projects to limit

the possibility of the research hypothesis or enquiry being scooped (Grimes *et al.*, 2018); decreasing the quality of research due to 'salami slicing' of their research findings; fraudulent applications for research funding; and submitting articles to journal-publishing syndicates where 'peer review' is purchased instead of appropriately and autonomously conducting the review (CHE, 2016b). Other risks include rushing research studies and, in the process, compromising the quality of conducting the study; the reporting thereof; failing to give credit to all contributors; and following questionable article submission and review procedures (Chen, 2011).

These unintended consequences of lessening the quality of research occur since academic employees realised that it is more advantageous to 'salami slice' the same work and publish it in various small sections, instead of one definitive article (CHE, 2016b). The motivation to thoughtlessly pursue publications is to increase their number of publication outputs and increase their research portfolio to be considered for career advancement opportunities (Al-Khatib, 2016).

The concern therefore exists that rewarding academic researchers primarily on publication outputs generates a contrary motivation, permitting thoughtless and fraudulent conduct to increase such outputs (Grimes *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, although research publications have increased significantly, the growing number of publicised works does not mean that the level of trustworthiness of publications has advanced (Grimes *et al.*, 2018). Another consequence of the pressure to continuously produce scientific research publications is situations where some authors have fallen prey to predatory journals (Al-Khatib, 2016). Especially novice authors, who are at the onset of their academic careers, with limited knowledge to differentiate between genuine peer-review journals and fraudulent peer-review journals, can easily fall prey to them (Al-Khatib, 2016). The insistent drive to produce research outputs can also cause a setting where the focus becomes skewed to merely deliver outputs, and the effort to conduct research that is to the benefit of larger society, are overlooked (Pather & Remenyi, 2019).

To be a successful academic researcher necessitates motivation and dedication, more than what would be deemed normal in numerous alternative professions, and institutions need to invest in these employees (Browning *et al.*, 2017). Bezuidenhout (2018) also maintains that academic employees should be provided with the necessary support to learn the required skills to appropriately conduct academic research. In this 'publish or perish' dogma, the need to ensure a clear understanding of what procedures promote the rigour of research findings is therefore of utmost importance to counteract any harmful consequences that could occur because of hurried research practices (Grimes *et al.*, 2018).

4.6.5.4 Academic freedom

According to Benatar (2016), social systems comprise of a multitude of fragments, and universities form part of these systems with a unique function and character. Their role within society is to safeguard, generate and distribute knowledge, and within this role, they form the basis of welfare for humanity (Benatar, 2016). The role fulfilled by universities (safeguarding, generating, and distributing knowledge) is generally understood to be the result of individual innovation and creativity (Aberbach & Christensen, 2018).

Within these societies, the right to freedom of speech is indispensable, and it is within this context that academic freedom can be justly fulfilled (Benatar, 2016). Freedom of speech recognises the importance of the preservation of independence of thought and beliefs (Benatar, 2016). Freedom of speech and academic freedom are related in the sense that both concepts relate to having control over rights; in the narrow sense of legal rights, but also in the broader sense as human or moral rights (Benatar, 2016).

A university's main tasks are to discover and distribute knowledge and promote independent thinking through research and teaching, and this can only be achieved with academic freedom (Benatar, 2016). The idea of academic freedom is therefore to provide academic employees with the guarantee that they can teach without restrictions, embark on research in their field of interest, and disseminate results, findings and ideas openly and without fear of negative consequences or discrimination (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). This freedom of choice on what one wishes to teach and conduct research on also entails the freedom to recognise various viewpoints and having the choice to follow or disregard these varied views (Aberbach & Christensen, 2018). Academic freedom thus provides the platform to differ in viewpoints and is accordingly imperative to uphold an academic and scholarly culture (Benatar, 2016:385; Teferra & Altbach, 2004).

The academic freedom of a country (or HE institution) can be determined by the level of tolerance of open and frank discussions, criticisms, and commentaries displayed by society (Benatar, 2016:383; Teferra & Altbach, 2004). Many academic employees in SA believe they have limited academic freedom (Ngambi, 2011). Academic employees believe they had academic freedom in the past but maintain that in the current HE environment, this freedom is restricted because of universities' increasingly managerial approaches (Pather & Remenyi, 2019). Waring (2013) maintains that a discord exists in the notion of permitting academic employees the time, space and freedom to engage in the creative facets of their work, yet following a market approach where employee performances are evaluated, and paraphernalia

of budgeting within HEIs apply. In the current HE environment, academic research is associated with red tape and bureaucracy, where academic researchers frequently need to obtain consent to conduct research (Pather & Remenyi, 2019). In this context where a managerial approach is commonplace, academic researchers are subjected to oversight where concerns are raised, and any creative or 'risky' research is apprehended. Academic employees are forced to follow the managerial approach in accordance with a specified performance agreement (Waring, 2013).

4.7 THE ROLE OF HRM PRACTITIONERS AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE PROMOTION OF ENGAGEMENT

Advancing from the previous sections, it was increasingly clear that the contemporary HE landscape is complex and riddled with various changes and challenges; some of which are global, while others are unique to the HE landscape of SA. If universities wish to stay relevant in an ever-changing environment, on national and international level, these institutions must deliver high-quality educational services, and the main role players to achieve these objectives are the employees (Abu Teir & Zhang, 2016). Indeed, many scholars maintain that HEI employees are the most valuable strategic assets of these institutions (see Abu Teir & Zhang, 2016; Jouda *et al.*, 2016).

Sultana and Hussain (2016) uphold that the success of these HEIs is dependent on the effective management of these strategic assets (the valuable human resources). The authors therefore agree with Abu Teir and Zhang (2016:68), and also maintain that it is the human resources of the HEI that enable it to achieve its objectives (Sultana & Hussain, 2016). As a result, HEIs increasingly value HRM practitioners as strategic role players in these knowledge-driven organisations in the fulfilment of their position as educational service providers (Abu Teir & Zhang, 2016; Edgley-Pyshorn & Huisman, 2011).

Additionally, HEIs play a critical role in the economic development of societies, and this role is fulfilled with the presentation of high-skilled graduates (Jouda *et al.*, 2016). In order to achieve this objective, it is important that students be taught by excellent academic employees (Jouda *et al.*, 2016). In this regard, HRM practitioners also have a vital role to fulfil. It is the duty of HRM practitioners who are employed at these HEIs to be effective and prolific in their course of action to recruit, retain, develop, and promote high-quality academic employees

(Browning *et al.*, 2017; Jouda *et al.*, 2016; Oloolube *et al.*, 2016; Shekhawat, 2019; Waring, 2013).

In order for academic employees to become thriving researchers, HEIs need to build their capacity, offer support, provide development opportunities, mentor, ensure that job resources are available, and nurture and invest in them from the outset, since these individuals need to demonstrate dedication and perseverance beyond what would be considered normal in many other occupations (Browning *et al.*, 2017). Also, in this capacity, HRM practitioners hold the responsibility to provide the structures and support for employees, and establish and fulfil these learning and development needs (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015; Waring, 2013). When HRM practitioners provide the preferred work environment and suitable training and development opportunities to academic employees, they enable WE to manifest among these academic employees (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015).

Academic employees who experience WE would be better equipped to cope with their various job demands, as discussed in Section 4.6. Furthermore, because WE is associated with positive organisational outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, organisational commitment, motivation and the promotion of health and wellbeing of employees (Chughtai & Buckley, 2008; Converso *et al.*, 2019; Han *et al.*, 2019; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), it is vital that HRM practitioners support employees' WE. Recognising that academic employees are central to the functioning of HEIs, a lack of suitable support (to enable academic employees to experience WE) is thus detrimental to the success of these HEIs (Berebitsky & Ellis, 2018). As a point of departure, HRM practitioners can use the JD-R theory to establish the levels of WE experienced by academic employees (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015).

In a study conducted by Bezuidenhout (2018) at the same ODL institution where the present study was conducted, she established that the work of academic employees is continuously intensifying in complexity. This means that the job demands they experience are amplified. Bezuidenhout (2018) therefore draws attention to the increasing need for HRM practitioners to provide strategic support to academic employees (Bezuidenhout, 2018). Also, Barkhuizen *et al.* (2014) uphold that the increasing evidence of work overload and the negative influence thereof on academic employees amplify the need to increase these employees' WE. The roles that HRM practitioners need to fulfil at HEIs are manyfold, but in light of the preceding paragraphs, it can certainly be reasoned that their role to support employees' WE remain one of their most critical functions.

4.8 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Chapter 4 set out to gain a better understanding of how the contemporary HE environment supports academic employees' WE. This objective was achieved by conducting a narrative literature analysis. The chapter was structured to first analyse HE in a contemporary world, and also the HE landscape of SA. With the aid of the narrative literature analysis, I was able to thoroughly explain several changes that occurred over the last 30 years in the HE landscape globally and in SA. With this insight and better comprehension, the discussion turned to DE and ODL. In order to contextualise the setting of the study, the particular ODL institution where this study was conducted was also discussed.

In order to gain a better understanding of how the contemporary HE environment supports academic employees' engagement, it was essential to obtain a better understanding of their lived experiences at work. To this end, the challenges that academic employees face at work were identified and discussed. With an analysis of the various facets that play a role in the lived experiences of academic employees, a deeper understanding was afforded to the reader of how the current HE landscape in SA supports the engagement of academic employees.

The second objective of this chapter was to obtain a better understanding of HRM practitioners' role at HEIs in support of academic employees' WE. In Chapter 3, HRM practitioners' role in organisations (in general), in the promotion of WE, was analysed. For this chapter, the narrative literature analysis focused on the role of HRM practitioners, specifically at HEIs, in the promotion of academic employees' WE. The understanding I obtained in Chapter 3 served as a foundation and supported me in deepening my comprehension of HRM practitioners' role in the promotion of WE at HEIs specifically. To this end, I realised the second objective of this chapter. Chapter 5 will form the final narrative literature analysis chapter, and will focus on research ethics regulation within the social sciences context.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH ETHICS REGULATION INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES (PHASE ONE)

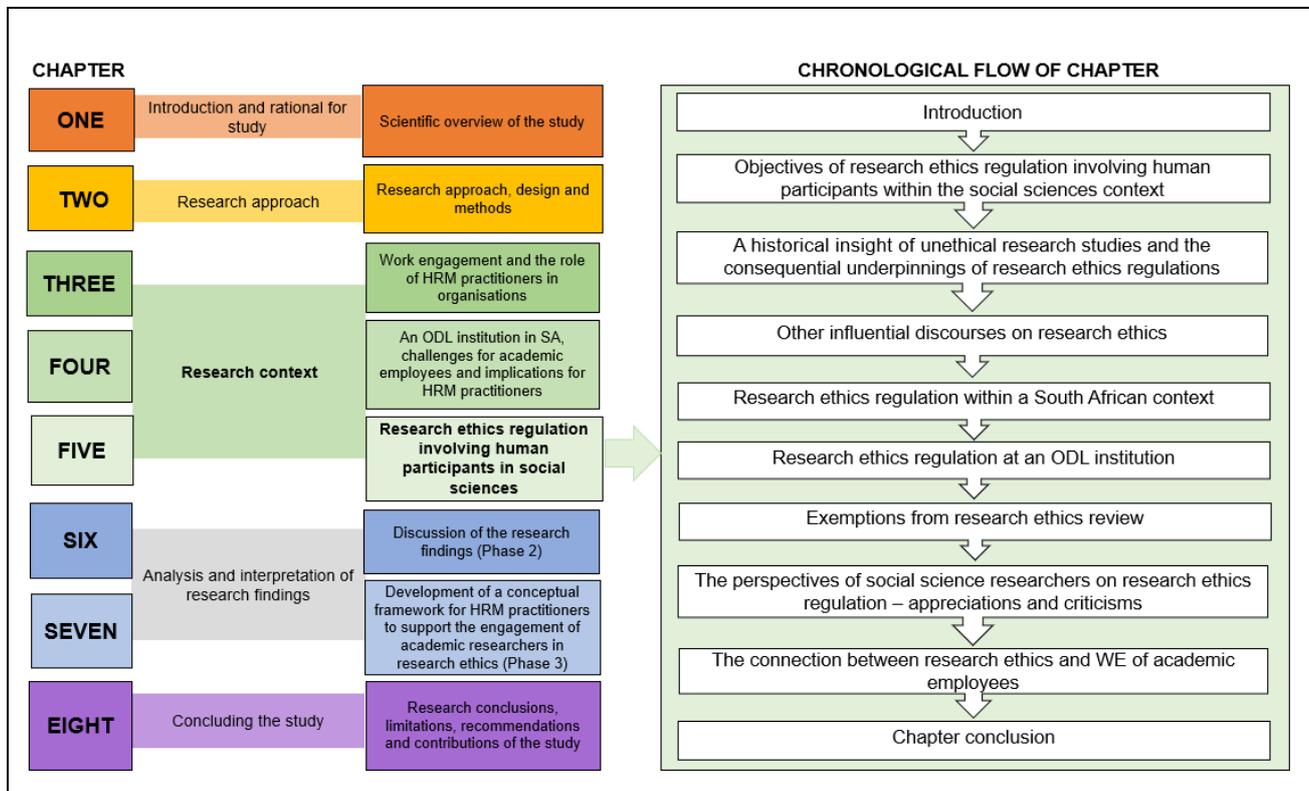


Figure 5.1: Structure of Chapter 5

Source: Own compilation

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the reader's focus is turned to obtaining a deeper understanding of the connection between research ethics and the WE of academic employees conducting social sciences research. To achieve this objective, the narrative literature analysis commenced by first explaining the objectives of research ethics regulation involving human participants within the social sciences. From there, the focus shifted to an analysis of historical cases where unethical research practices were exercised in different subject areas (biomedical and social sciences). By analysing these unethical research cases, the foundations for the regulation of research ethics were described. Thereafter, contemporary international codes, declarations and regulations of research ethics where human participants are involved, were identified and discussed. Research ethics regulatory discourses were also acknowledged and discussed.

Turning inwards, a SA perspective on research ethics regulation, specifically within HEIs, was considered. Specific attention was also given to the regulation of research ethics within the specific ODL institution, as the chosen research site for this thesis.

Although the changes and challenges experienced by academic employees at HEIs were considered in Chapter 4, academic employees, in their role as 'academic researchers' and their perceptions of research ethics regulation (within social sciences), have not received attention in previous chapters. To this end, Section 5.8 is devoted to academic researchers' appreciations and criticisms of research ethics regulation within the social sciences. Upon reflecting on academic researchers' views regarding research ethics regulation, the connection between research ethics and academic employees' WE in social sciences is considered, and a deeper understanding is obtained.

5.2 OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH ETHICS REGULATION INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS WITHIN SOCIAL SCIENCES

Ethics relates to what is meant by right and wrong or good and bad. It provides specific justifications guided by rational systems of what kind of individual you should be and what an individual should do (Lefkowitz, 2007; Barsky, 2019). Therefore, Lefkowitz (2007) argues that when this principle is applied to the context of ethics in research, the concern should relate to the researcher's proper treatment and protection of human participants. 'Human participants' refer to living individuals about whom the researcher, who conducts the scientific study, obtains data through interaction or intervention with these persons or identifiable, confidential, or personal information (Rice & Bernard, 2018). Davis *et al.* (2012) explain that an ethical researcher is someone who does what they stated they are going to do. The design and execution of the academic research takes place in such a way that it is sound, trustworthy and justifiable. The overall objective of research ethics regulation is, therefore, to ensure that the interest of the research study never surpasses the wellbeing or dignity of the research participants (Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012). Also, ethical considerations and evaluations should be more comprehensive than merely protecting potential participants; it should ensure that a process is followed where genuine voluntary informed consent is possible. Moreover, harm must be minimised, risks must be mitigated, and confidentiality must be guaranteed as far as possible (De Wet, 2010; Heale & Shorten, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014).

Recognising that there can be grave consequences if research is not conducted ethically, it logically follows that research involving human participants should be regulated (Al Tajir, 2018; Beckmann, 2017). ERCs should review planned research studies, and the committee's task is to review applications meticulously and critically to protect potential participants from harm that could have been avoided (Beckmann, 2017; Davis *et al.*, 2012; Heale & Shorten, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Rice & Bernard, 2018; Weiss, 2015). For researchers, it is also important to understand that conducting ethical research is an essential part of ensuring the highest quality data and findings will be applied in practice (Heale & Shorten, 2017). The committees that fulfil this function operate under different names, including institutional review boards (IRBs), institutional ethics committees, research ethics committees, or ethical review boards (Heale & Shorten, 2017; Rice & Bernard, 2018). At the ODL institution where the study took place, the recognised term for this committee is 'Ethics Review Committee' (ERC) (Research Ethics Policy, 2016). Irrespective of the title assigned to these committees, they all have a common purpose, which is to consider the ethical aspects of research studies where human participants will be involved (Al Tajir, 2018; Rice & Bernard, 2018).

There are three widely acknowledged research ethics codes in the international arena for the regulation of research ethics. These include the Nuremberg Code (Kruk, 2013; Monreno, 2017; Rice & Bernard, 2018; Rice, 2008); the Declaration of Helsinki (Kimmelman, Weijer & Meslin, 2009; Kruk, 2013; Monreno, 2017; Rice, 2008; WMA, 2019); and the Belmont Report (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice, 2008; Rice & Bernard, 2018). Research involving human participants should also be conducted in accordance with and in compliance with certain government laws, codes, rules and regulations associated with ethical research practices (Kruk, 2013). In SA, ethics regulation of research involving human participants is compulsory (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012; Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). Also, within the ODL institution, research ethics is formally regulated in accordance with the guidelines stipulated in the Policy on Research Ethics (2016).

Research ethics regulations that guide the processes that evaluate the ethicality of social science research studies originated from the directives employed in biomedical sciences (Dingwall *et al.*, 2017; De Wet, 2010; Kruger *et al.*, 2014). Biomedical research has inherent risks of harm to participants that can sometimes be lethal, which justifies strict ethical and scientific protocols (De Wet, 2010; Schoeman, 2019). Some critics have argued that social science research holds far less risk than biomedical research and, as such, they question the necessity of research ethics review (De Wet, 2010; Kruger *et al.*, 2014). One proposed justification for exemption from ethics review is that, with these research studies, the interaction between the researcher and the participant is limited (i.e. interference is minimal)

(Pienaar, 2010). Thus, social sciences research is frequently described as 'minimal risk research' compared to biomedical research (Pienaar, 2010; Schoeman, 2019). Furthermore, the ethics clearance procedures followed in biomedical research or clinical trials are often 'tick boxes' that must be adhered to, but in social science research, this approach is difficult to mimic (De Wet, 2010). These inherent differences between biomedical research and research within the social sciences context could suggest that this approach to research ethics review might be insufficient or inappropriate (Kruger *et al.*, 2014).

The potential danger posed by research conducted in social sciences cannot be directly compared to biomedical research, since non-medical science research is typically not physically intrusive or life-threatening (Pienaar, 2010; Schoeman, 2019). Still, this cannot justify exempting social sciences studies from research ethics review (Kruger *et al.*, 2014, Pienaar, 2010; Schoeman, 2019). Drawing the assumption that social science research does not pose any risks of harm is dangerous (De Wet, 2010; Wessels & Visagie, 2019). Any research can potentially cause harm, even if it is not as direct or visible, as is the case with biomedical research, where participants might sustain physical injury (De Wet, 2010; Wessels & Visagie, 2019). Examples of potential risks of harm that may occur in social sciences research include psychological distress, unsatisfied expectations, deception, unforeseen or inaccurate representation, damages to participants' financial standing, criminal or civil liability; employability, social standing, adversely affected professional or professional relationships, and diverse interpretations by the participants (De Wet, 2010; Wessels & Visagie, 2019). Concerns about social science research also relate to coerced participation, threats to privacy, confidentiality, and stigmatisation (Kruger *et al.*, 2014).

To this end, research ethics regulation for social science studies where human participants are involved are increasingly becoming compulsory across the globe (Schoeman, 2019; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012). The research ethics review process can also be a valuable contribution to a proposed study, by preventing harm to participants, protecting participants' rights, endorsing justice, and protecting researchers against adverse consequences (Mamotte & Wassenaar, 2009; Kruger *et al.*, 2014).

Currently, all research involving human participants needs to be approved by ERCs (Heale & Shorten, 2017; Weiss, 2015), and most journals require proof of this approval prior to consideration for publication (Heale & Shorten, 2017; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012; Weiss, 2015). These measures serve as evidence of the development of the scientific community and society at large, in the efforts made to ward off the abuse of human participants (Weiss, 2015).

5.3 A HISTORICAL INSIGHT OF UNETHICAL RESEARCH STUDIES AND THE CONSEQUENTIAL UNDERPINNINGS OF RESEARCH ETHICS REGULATIONS

Research ethics regulations currently adhered to by the majority of scientific researchers across the globe were developed in response to exploitations and violations against participants by numerous researchers around the world, over an extended period (Davis *et al.*, 2012; Heale & Shorten, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014). The layout of Section 5.3.1 therefore commences with some of the most prominent or widely discussed ethical transgressions that took place in the name of science, in both biomedical and social sciences research. Cases of unethical research are ample; however, the cases discussed below were carefully selected to demonstrate how each of these ethical transgressions influenced research ethics regulation, where human participants are involved, in a specific way. Building on the discussion of Section 5.3.1, Section 5.3.2 focuses on the subsequent regulations that emerged in reaction to these ethical transgressions.

5.3.1 When science turns ugly: A history of unethical research

In earlier eras, some scientific researchers believed that there should be no limitations in the pursuit to advance knowledge, and it is because of such beliefs that human participants were subjected to unethical research (Al Tajir, 2018). As mentioned earlier, several historical research studies were so profoundly unethical that these events were instrumental in the realisation of research ethics regulations being designed to protect human participants (Al Tajir, 2018; Heale & Shorten, 2017; Ndebele *et al.*, 2014). Table 5.1 presents a synopsis of some of the most notorious cases of unethical research studies. Each of these cases is discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections (Sections 5.3.1.1 – 5.3.1.8). The identified cases are from both biomedical and social sciences fields of study. Yet what is imperative to observe is that all of these cases included human participants who were unprotected against unethical research practices. The risk of harm to research participants is thus not limited to a specific field of study. Instead, it should be realised that any study which involves human participants has the potential to be harmful if the research is not conducted ethically. The discussion of these cases further demonstrates that simply because scientific research findings have the potential to be significant, it does not mean it is ethical (McArthur, 2009; Pienaar, 2010). Therefore, the inclusion of Section 5.3.1 was purposefully done to explain the consequential foundations for the regulation of scientific research studies involving human participants.

The cases referred to are presented in chronological order. The date that determined the sequence was not the date of inception of the scientific study, but rather the date when an intervention occurred or the study was terminated. Table 5.1 is therefore arranged by the date of intervention. Even so, some dates did overlap, although the layout aimed to sketch a chronological order of events. It is also important to emphasise that the cases presented in this specific order by no means intended to categorise the events in terms of the gravity of the transgressions experienced by participants. Some cases had wider ramifications, received greater attention, or had a more ‘definitive impact’ on research ethics regulation, as clarified under Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2.

Table 5.1: Case studies of unethical research: A synopsis of events

THE CASE AND FIELD OF STUDY	ONSET YEAR(S) OF STUDY	THE ETHICAL TRANSGRESSION(S)	YEAR(S) OF INTERVENTION	AFTERMATH AND INFLUENCES ON RESEARCH ETHICS REGULATION
Medical experiments by Nazi physicians in concentration camps during World War II Biomedical sciences	World War II 1939 - 1945	Cruel and numerous lethal medical experiments in concentration camp (Weiss, 2015).	1946 -1947	Nuremberg trials (Moreno, 2017).
			1948	Nuremberg Code (Rice & Bernard, 2018).
			1964	The Declaration of Helsinki (Kruger <i>et al.</i> , 2014).
The Wichita Jury Research Study Social sciences	1954	Deception of jurors by recording them in secret for research purposes in a situation where privacy and confidentiality are supposed to be obvious (Rice & Bernard, 2018).	1956	U.S. Congress voted in a law banning the recording of federal jury discussions (Cornwell, 2010; DeMatteo & Anumba, 2016).
	1961		1965	Significant impact on the conceptualisation of

THE CASE AND FIELD OF STUDY	ONSET YEAR(S) OF STUDY	THE ETHICAL TRANSGRESSION(S)	YEAR(S) OF INTER-VENTION	AFTERMATH AND INFLUENCES ON RESEARCH ETHICS REGULATION
<p>The Milgram Obedience Studies</p> <p>Social sciences</p>		<p>Deception of participants (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018).</p> <p>Participants were exposed to severe emotional distress (Amdur & Bankert, 2011).</p> <p>Participants were unable to withdraw from participation (retract consent) (Zetzer, 2017).</p> <p>Inadequate debriefing of participants (McArthur, 2009).</p>		<p>deception within the scientific and regulatory arena (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018).</p> <p>Awareness created by this study, which will prevent equivalent studies from being executed in contemporary society because of safeguards put in place for research involving human participants (Zetzer, 2017).</p>
<p>Tuskegee Syphilis Study</p> <p>Biomedical sciences</p>	<p>1932</p>	<p>Participants were not fully informed of the purpose of the research (Rice, 20087).</p> <p>Selected participants were a vulnerable group (Amdur & Bankert, 2011).</p> <p>Treatment of disease was withheld, resulting in fatalities of the majority of participants (Alsan & Wanamaker, 2017).</p>	<p>1972</p> <p>1978</p>	<p>Termination of the research study after it became widely known, and ethical concerns were raised (Cave & Holm, 2003).</p> <p>Belmont report (Amdur & Bankert, 2011).</p>

THE CASE AND FIELD OF STUDY	ONSET YEAR(S) OF STUDY	THE ETHICAL TRANSGRESSION(S)	YEAR(S) OF INTERVENTION	AFTERMATH AND INFLUENCES ON RESEARCH ETHICS REGULATION
		<p>Participants were deceived as they were under the impression that they received treatment (Alsan & Wanamaker, 2017).</p>		
<p>Humphreys' Tearoom Trade Study</p> <p>Social sciences</p>	<p>Mid - 1960s</p>	<p>Participants were unaware that they were being studied for research purposes at any stage of the research study (Amdur & Bankert, 2011), thus covert research.</p> <p>The findings presented contained such a level of detail that certain participants' identities were revealed (Amdur & Bankert, 2011).</p> <p>Disregard for persons' autonomy, privacy, dignity or reputation (Amdur & Bankert, 2011).</p>	<p>1968 & 1970</p>	<p>Humphreys conducted the research to complete his PhD, which was completed in 1968. His study was published as a book in 1970 (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018).</p> <p>When colleagues within the academic department learned about the research only after its completion, it was disputed that the study was unethical, invading participants' privacy and potentially threatening their social standing, jobs, marriages, etc. (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018).</p> <p>A number of these colleagues lobbied the student's degree should be withdrawn (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018).</p>

THE CASE AND FIELD OF STUDY	ONSET YEAR(S) OF STUDY	THE ETHICAL TRANSGRESSION(S)	YEAR(S) OF INTER-VENTION	AFTERMATH AND INFLUENCES ON RESEARCH ETHICS REGULATION
				Approximately 50% of the department's staff resigned and took up employment at other universities (Sieber, 1978).
<p>Fabrication and falsification of breast cancer research by Bezwoda</p> <p>Biomedical sciences</p>	1990	<p>Fabrication and falsification of data on breast cancer research (George & Buyse, 2015).</p> <p>Several patients were illiterate black women, and no voluntary informed consent forms could be found for their participation (Ana <i>et al.</i>, 2013).</p> <p>Research ethics approval for the study was never granted (Martín, 2001).</p> <p>Deception of vulnerable, sick women, who partook in treatment regimens, based on falsified data (Webb, 2016).</p> <p>The fraudulent and deceptive results reported by Bezwoda caused many</p>	2001	<p>Bezwoda admitted his fraudulent activities to the ERC (Martín, 2001).</p> <p>Bezwoda was dismissed from the HEI where he was employed (George & Buyse, 2015).</p> <p>Several scientific journal publications had to be retracted (Ana <i>et al.</i>, 2013).</p> <p>Bone marrow transplantation for the treatment of advanced breast cancer patients were discontinued (Ana <i>et al.</i>, 2013), with the negative repercussion that the possible usefulness of this therapy will never be known (Martín, 2001).</p>

THE CASE AND FIELD OF STUDY	ONSET YEAR(S) OF STUDY	THE ETHICAL TRANSGRESSION(S)	YEAR(S) OF INTERVENTION	AFTERMATH AND INFLUENCES ON RESEARCH ETHICS REGULATION
		<p>women around the world to subject their bodies to toxic treatment (Martín, 2001).</p> <p>This treatment took the life of some patients and greatly increased the gravity of side-effects in many patients (Webb, 2016).</p>	2004	<p>Nationally binding research ethics guidelines for health research in SA were published by the DoH (Israel, 2017).</p>
<p>The Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal</p> <p>Social sciences</p>	2015	<p>Gaining access to and utilising data of unsuspecting Facebook users (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018).</p> <p>Voluntary informed consent was not obtained to use the data of these participants (Aiello, 2018)</p> <p>Deceptive psychological strategy and subtle manipulation to influence voters during 2016 US elections (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; Van Wyk, 2018).</p> <p>Violation of people's privacy (Regmi <i>et al.</i>, 2018).</p>	2018	<p>Diminished public trust in the use of social media platforms, and some Facebook users deleted their online profiles (Pagoto & Nebeker, 2019).</p> <p>Cambridge Analytica - Business closure (Ingber, 2018).</p> <p>Facebook, Inc. suffered massive share losses after the scandal became known (Dillet, 2018).</p> <p>Concerns regarding power imbalances between researcher and participants and their lack of autonomy (Vanacker, 2018).</p>

THE CASE AND FIELD OF STUDY	ONSET YEAR(S) OF STUDY	THE ETHICAL TRANSGRESSION(S)	YEAR(S) OF INTER-VENTION	AFTERMATH AND INFLUENCES ON RESEARCH ETHICS REGULATION
				<p>Voluntary informed consent and autonomy are not always possible because of the 'new' methods of collecting, storing, and utilising data, in particular, 'big data' (Graham, 2018).</p> <p>Traditional policies and regulatory frameworks might not be sufficient to protect research participants in the future (Graham, 2018).</p>

Source: Own compilation

5.3.1.1 Medical experiments by Nazi physicians in concentration camps during World War II

One of the most cited examples of horrendous research practices conducted in the name of science, was the medical experiments by doctors in Nazi Germany during World War II (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012; Weiss, 2015). Davis *et al.* (2012) maintain that the history of human participants' protection began with the Nazi Germany medical war crimes, since these ethical transgressions were particularly disturbing and in violation of human dignity. In the name of research and science, these doctors conducted horrendous medical experiments on unwilling concentration camp prisoners (Davis *et al.*, 2012; Dhai, 2014; Monreno, 2017; Weiss, 2015). This research and scientific experimentation went beyond the frequently believed scope, with a minimum of 15,754 known victims (Weindling *et al.*, 2016).

These infamous human experiments, which commonly resulted in death, included:

- Exposing participants to freezing temperatures (Annas & Grodin, 2018; Craig & Desai, 2015; Davis *et al.*, 2012; Rice, 2008; Weindling *et al.*, 2016).

- Conducting high-altitude experiments, where people were forced into chambers simulating high-altitude conditions of up to 200 km [just over 200km (68000 feet)] (Annas & Grodin, 2018; Craig & Desai, 2015; Mark, 2006).
- Taking sections of bone, muscle tissue, and nerves for transplanting purposes, as well as amputating the entire leg of patients at the hip in order to transplant the limb to another concentration camp captive (Craig & Desai, 2015; Mark, 2006).
- Women were subjected to coerced sterilisation (Davis *et al.*, 2012; Mark, 2006; Weindling *et al.*, 2016).
- Depriving concentration camp prisoners of food and water (Davis *et al.*, 2012).
- Intentional wounding of two limbs, after which only one received treatment with sulfanamide antibiotics, while the other limb did not receive treatment (Mark, 2006).
- The brains of civilian prisoners were dissected (Davis *et al.*, 2012).
- Body parts of small children were used for psychiatric research (Weindling *et al.*, 2016).
- In order to collect skeletons, 112 Jewish prisoners were executed and de-fleshed (Mark, 2006; Weindling *et al.*, 2016).
- Evaluating the effectiveness of inoculations after exposing the prisoners to transmittable diseases, including cholera, hepatitis, malaria, and smallpox and typhus (Craig & Desai, 2015; Rice, 2008; Weindling *et al.*, 2016).
- Injecting concentration camp prisoners with gasoline (Davis *et al.*, 2012).
- Exposing concentration camp prisoners to Sulfur mustard, generally referred to as mustard gas, a chemical agent used in warfare, that caused serious burning of the skin, eyes and respiratory tract (Davis *et al.*, 2012; Mark, 2006).
- Subjecting children to twin research studies (Weindling *et al.*, 2016).

Even though news reports of the Nazi concentration camps did reach the western world, the horrific reality of these camps only became obvious after the surviving prisoners were released at the end of the war (Craig & Desai, 2015). These medical studies demonstrated the ruthless cruelty and inhumane behaviour visible in warfare and the dangers of forceful, involuntary abuse of vulnerable people; these facts cannot be emphasised enough (Craig & Desai, 2015; Dhai, 2014).

At the end of World War II, former Nazi leaders were prosecuted at the War Crimes Tribunal at Nuremberg, frequently referred to as the Nuremberg trials, to bring those who had committed inhumane war crimes in their treatment of civilian prisoners to justice (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Davis *et al.*, 2012). These trials were driven by moral outrage and shock. The offenders of these crimes against humanity were thus prosecuted (Craig & Desai, 2015;

Weiss, 2015). A substantial part of these hearings focused on Nazi medical doctors' prosecution, as they forced prisoners to undergo appalling, inhumane procedures for research purposes (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Dhai, 2014; Rice, 2008; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012; Weiss, 2015). The specific Nuremberg trials that focused on Nazi medical doctors' prosecution are also referred to as the Doctors' Trial. For this trial, doctors from the US worked alongside US lawyers to bring Nazi doctors to justice, for the suffering they caused and the killing of civilian prisoners, allegedly for human experimentation and research purposes (Annas & Grodin, 2018). With the final examination, nearly all the experiments conducted for 'research purposes' were considered to be contaminated with the researchers' racial hatred towards the experiments' subjects (Weiss, 2015).

At the time of the Nuremberg court hearings, there were no laws, regulations, codes, or formal documents which regulated ethical standards for human-subjects research (Rice, 2008; Rice & Bernard, 2018). Consequently, a document that speaks to the basic requirements for conducting research in such a way that research participants' fundamental rights are respected, was compiled (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Davis *et al.*, 2012; Rice, 2008; Rice & Bernard, 2018). This document is referred to as the Nuremberg Code (Amdur & Bankert, 2011:8; Davis *et al.*, 2012; Rice & Bernard, 2018). (The Nuremberg Code is discussed in detail in Section 5.3.2.1).

5.3.1.2 The Wichita jury research study

The next breakthrough in the history of research ethics regulation was with the publication of the Wichita jury research study findings (Frimpong, 2016). In 1955, social science researchers from the University of Chicago conducted a research study in Wichita, Kansas, to obtain a better understanding of decision-making processes during criminal trials by jury members (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Cornwell, 2010, Davis *et al.*, 2012; Lefkowitz, 2007, Rice, 2008; Rice & Bernard, 2018). The research involved audio-recording the jury members' deliberations during the trials. To avoid influencing their behaviour, neither the accused nor the jurors were informed that the jurors were being recorded in their deliberation or that these individuals formed part of a research study (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Cornwell, 2010; Lefkowitz, 2007; Rice & Bernard, 2018; Rice, 2008). However, the judges and the lawyers were aware of the research study and approved jury deliberations' recordings (Cornwell, 2010).

After the completion of the research, the researchers published the study findings (Frimpong, 2016). Debates arose, which focused on the unethical nature of deceiving people by secretly recording them for research purposes within a context where privacy and confidentiality were

expected and important (Rice, 2008; Lefkowitz, 2007; Rice & Bernard, 2018). The concerns raised were not essentially related to the particular details of this case but rather the problem of deceiving people for research purposes in a setting where privacy and confidentiality were essential (Amdur & Bankert, 2011). Not long thereafter, in 1956, the US Congress marked the establishment of legislation for the regulation of human participant research by passing a federal law banning the recording of jury deliberations (Cornwell, 2010; DeMatteo & Anumba, 2016; Rice & Bernard, 2018). This federal law was the very first legislation related to human participant research (Rice, 2008).

5.3.1.3 The Milgram obedience studies

The Milgram experiments are possibly one of the best-known research studies involving deception, where the research participants were deceived into believing they formed part of a study involving the impact of negative reinforcement on learning (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Griggs, 2017; Zetzer, 2017). However, the actual purpose of the study was to test obedience to authority and the degree to which ordinary individuals were prepared to inflict pain on others when commanded to do so (Patten, 1977; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018).

In 1961, people living in New Haven, Connecticut, were invited via a newspaper advertisement to participate in a research study conducted by Yale University (Haslam & Reicher, 2017). The advertisement stipulated that participants would be compensated \$4 for the hour of involvement (approximately R 60.00 in 2019). Financial aid was also offered for transportation to be part of the research that tested the use of punishments to encourage learning (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018). The study involved almost one thousand participants, who were deceived by the researcher (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Patten, 1977). As mentioned earlier, the actual purpose of the study was to determine the degree to which ordinary individuals would follow instructions and were prepared to inflict pain on others when commanded to do so (Haslam & Reicher, 2017; Patten, 1977; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018; Zetzer, 2017). The focus and objective of Milgram's experiments were to obtain a better understanding of why ordinary individuals would follow instructions by authority figures, despite the instructions being morally wrong or harmful to recipients (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; McArthur, 2009). Milgram wanted to gain a better understanding of the genocide demonstrated with the Holocaust during World War II, where supposedly 'ordinary people' took part in horrendous wrongdoings (McArthur, 2009; Amdur & Bankert, 2011).

On the day of the participants' involvement, they were instructed by the 'researcher' to administer shocks to the 'student' whenever he made mistakes on a word-recall task (Amdur

& Bankert, 2011; Haslam & Reicher, 2017). The actual research participant was thus requested to be the 'teacher', while the two other individuals were Milgram's confederates (McArthur, 2009; Zetzer, 2017). The supposed researcher was dressed in a lab coat and read out words that the 'student' had to learn, and when he got the 'recollection' incorrect, he responded to the 'electric shocks' as if he was experiencing pain (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018). However, the 'student' (a confidant of Milgram) did not actually receive electrical shocks and simply pretended to experience pain when the electric shocks were administered by the teacher (Cave & Holm, 2003; Patten, 1977).

As the experiment progressed, the actual participant was commanded by the 'researcher' to give increasingly stronger shocks for punishment to the 'student' (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Zetzer, 2017). Witnessing the 'pain' of the 'student' because of the 'electric shocks' administered by them, many of the participants wanted to stop their participation (Zetzer, 2017). But the 'researcher' commanded them to continue, stating that it was essential to continue for the purposes of the research study. As an authority figure, he was able to prevent many participants from withdrawing (Zetzer, 2017). Lefkowitz (2007) similarly explained that most participants remained obedient to the 'researcher' even when the 'student' who were 'being punished' was 'in considerable pain' and they were experiencing great discomfort and uncertainty themselves about what they thought they were doing.

The study's central critique related to Milgram and his confederates' willingness to expose participants to severe emotional distress and possible psychological harm (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; McArthur, 2009; Zetzer, 2017). Several participants demonstrated emotional distress through behaviour such as quivering, sweating, anxious laughter, chewing on their lips, or digging their fingernails into their palms (Zetzer, 2017). Amdur and Bankert (2011) also stated that the emotional distress experienced by participants is undeniable, since several of the participants indicated after the conclusion of the study that their actions and the cruelty they were forced to inflict were extremely upsetting.

A second critique was that participants received only limited debriefing after the completion of the research (McArthur, 2009; Zetzer, 2017). Milgram merely told the research participants that the study was a hoax afterwards (Cave & Holm, 2003; Zetzer, 2017) and that no electrical shocks were actually administered to the 'student' (Cave & Holm, 2003; Patten, 1977). The debriefing did entail an explanation of the actual purpose of the research, but this was done with the purpose to reinforce participants' self-confidence and support the cause of their behaviour (Cave & Holm, 2003). The emotional distress experienced by participants was thus not adequately addressed or alleviated.

The final critique that became apparent after the publication of the research was that participants did not have the right to withdraw participation, since the 'researcher' commanded them to continue for the sake of the research, despite requests to discontinue in the administration of electric shocks (Zetzer, 2017). Despite many debates and deliberations surrounding this study, what is evident is that the research and consequential critical responses affected academic and regulatory conceptualisations of deception, and accordingly compelled scientists to recognise the ethical implications of deception (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018).

5.3.1.4 Tuskegee syphilis study

Together with the Nazi research conducted during World War II (discussed in Section 5.3.1.1 above), the Tuskegee syphilis study is one of the best-known scientific studies where appalling research practices were conducted, and researchers deliberately disregarded research participants' dignity and welfare (De Wet, 2010; Rice & Bernard, 2018; Weiss, 2015).

For four decades, between 1932 and 1972, a study which was funded by the US Public Health Service to observe the natural progression of untreated syphilis, monitored approximately 400 African American, underprivileged sharecroppers in Alabama (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Alsan & Wanamaker, 2017; Davis *et al.*, 2012; Cave & Holm, 2003; Rice & Bernard, 2018). At the outset of the research study, the general concept and purpose of the research could be justified, as no effective treatment for syphilis existed (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice & Bernard, 2018). However, Penicillin, known for the successful treatment of the illness, was discovered while the research project was still in progress (Rice & Bernard, 2018; Weiss, 2015).

During the study period, which lasted for several years, the physicians observed the progress of the illness while withholding treatment, with the knowledge that the antibiotic penicillin is commonly available and obtainable to treat patients living with syphilis (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice, 2008; Rice & Bernard, 2018). This conduct was defended by the researchers explaining that they did not want to interrupt the study's findings (Rice, 2008). In 1972, the study became publicly known when ethical concerns of the Tuskegee research appeared in a well-known newspaper, resulting in the termination of the study (Alsan & Wanamaker, 2017; Cave & Holm, 2003; Rice & Bernard, 2018). By then, the greater part of the unknowing participants had died, several due to syphilis-related causes (Alsan & Wanamaker, 2017).

The most pertinent issue of this research relates to the fact that the selected population was a very vulnerable group in society, consisting of illiterate, African American sharecroppers in

Alabama living with this disease (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice, 2008). These research participants did not have a clear understanding of the study to which they agreed, and that the doctors were not attempting to treat them for their illness but simply observed them to track the progression of the illness (Rice, 2008). In fact, most participants believed they were receiving beneficial medical treatment for a diagnosis referred to as 'bad blood' by doctors (Alsan & Wanamaker, 2017; Rice, 2008; Rice & Bernard, 2018). Participants did not receive any treatment and were subjected to numerous procedures and examinations, exclusively for research purposes, which included spinal taps (Alsan & Wanamaker, 2017; Rice, 2008; Rice & Bernard, 2018), blood being drawn, and ultimately, autopsies (Alsan & Wanamaker, 2017). Furthermore, the compensation for participating in this study included the provision of meals, 'treatment' for 'bad blood', and covering funeral expenses (Alsan & Wanamaker, 2017).

This study raised three major ethical concerns: participants were not fully informed, they did not gain access to available treatment, and advantage was taken of a vulnerable population (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Cave & Holm, 2003; Rice & Bernard, 2018). The principle of justice, as stipulated in the Belmont Report (discussed in Section 5.3.2.3), resulted primarily because of the infamous Tuskegee research study (Amdur & Bankert, 2011).

5.3.1.5 Humphreys' tearoom trade study

In the 1960s, the social scientist, Laud Humphreys, conducted an intensive sociological study on male homosexual behaviour in public bathrooms. The research formed part of his PhD thesis (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Warwick, 1973) to obtain unbiased insight into who these men are and what influences them to seek out quick, impersonal sexual pleasure (Sieber, 1978). To answer this question, Humphreys decided to observe these men and conduct structured interviews (Sieber, 1978). Although these encounters could take place in various settings, Humphreys decided to choose 'tearooms' as the preferred location for observational purposes (Humphreys, 1970); the jargon used in the homosexual subculture for public bathrooms where these activities occur.

For his research, Humphreys was able to fulfil the role of a 'watchqueen' (a person who keeps guard) outside public bathrooms where people met to engage in secret homosexual activities (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018). Given that such sex was against the law at that stage, Humphreys offered to fulfil this task, and his role involved coughing when a stranger approached the bathroom, or a police vehicle was spotted close by (Sieber, 1978; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018). After observing these encounters, Humphreys would then make a record of the men's vehicles, their registration numbers, and a description of the men

observed (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018). This information was later used to trace their residential addresses in order to visit them at their homes for the second part of his research (structured interviews) (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Humphreys, 1970; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018).

In order to conceal his identity (prior capacity of 'watchqueen'), Humphreys changed his hairstyle, clothing and vehicle, and waited one year between phase 1 and phase 2 of the research (Humphreys, 1970). At the stage of the intended interviews, Humphreys was also involved as a researcher in a social health survey study (Humphreys, 1970; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018). Accordingly, he conducted interviews for his research as part of the social health survey with the prior identified men (Humphreys, 1970). In this capacity, he was able to collect information about the participants' background and family life (Amdur & Bankert, 2011), and interview them in order to profile the characteristics of men in the 'tearoomtrade' (Humphreys, 1970).

The ethical concerns raised with the publication of the research findings was that the men who participated in these activities did not know they were being observed or interviewed for research purposes, thus deceiving them (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018). Many of these men were living with their families under circumstances where it would have been detrimental if their homosexual behaviour came to light (Amdur & Bankert, 2011). Being exposed could also have had damaging effects on these men's careers, their reputations within society, and they could have been arrested (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018). In fact, Amdur and Bankert (2011) claimed that the findings published by Humphreys contained such a level of detail that certain participants' identities were indeed revealed.

It is worth noting that the research study was conducted prior to the existence of ERCs (Sieber, 1978) but that the study did receive approval from the PhD committee (Sieber, 1978; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018). This approval included authorisation to collect the vehicles' registration numbers for sampling purposes (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018). However, when colleagues within the same department learned of this study after its completion, they argued that it was not ethical and that Humphreys disregarded peoples' autonomy, privacy, dignity, and reputation (Sieber, 1978; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2018). These colleagues appealed to the president of Washington University to retract Humphreys' PhD degree (Sieber, 1978), but this was not done. This resulted in the resignation of about 50% of the department's staff who took up employment at other universities (Sieber, 1978). The resignation of those academic employees demonstrates that they understood the harm that could transpire because of this unethical study. By distancing themselves from the academic department and the HEI, these

social science researchers unmistakably exhibited their disapproval of the unethical study and the gravity of the occurrence.

5.3.1.6 The fabrication and falsification of breast cancer research by Bezwoda

Bezwoda, a professor at the University of Witwatersrand, and the Haematology and Oncology's departmental chair (George & Buyse, 2015), published fraudulent clinical trial data that 'discovered' that an exceptionally aggressive chemotherapy treatment programme in combination with bone marrow transplant therapy, improved the survival rate for women with advanced breast cancer (Dhai, 2005; Webb, 2016).

Towards the end of 1990, Bezwoda commenced with trials evaluating the effectiveness of a specific high-dose chemotherapy treatment regime (Dhai, 2005). This research compared the use of conventional chemotherapy treatment regimes for breast cancer patients, with an alternative, more aggressive chemotherapy treatment programme combined with bone marrow transplant therapy to improve survival rates (Martín, 2001). The publication of some of the trial data that presented such positive 'results', with considerably better survival rates (Dhai, 2005), urged some oncologists to adopt this aggressive course of therapy as standard practice (Weiss, 2000). Between 1991 and 1999, approximately 40 000 breast cancer patients around the globe received toxic and potentially lethal treatment – because of this fraudulent data (Ana *et al.*, 2013, Martín, 2001; Webb, 2016).

At the 1999 annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, doctors presented the results of clinical trials on the treatment of cancer. Four studies' results on the aggressive chemotherapy treatment programme in combination with bone marrow transplant therapy were presented, two from the USA, one from Sweden, and one from SA (Howard *et al.*, 2011; Rettig, Jacobson, Farquhar & Aubry, 2007; Weiss, 2000). Apart from the findings presented by Bezwoda, none of the other researchers found that there was a survival advantage for patients using this aggressive treatment regime in comparison to the conventional treatments available (George & Buyse, 2015; Howard *et al.*, 2011; Rettig *et al.*, 2007). Bezwoda's findings were noteworthy in terms of the positive findings he reported to improve the survival rate of breast cancer patients, but also because his findings were in stark contrast with the findings presented by other researchers in the same session (George & Buyse, 2015). The treatment procedures reported by Bezwoda did vary in certain aspects from the other studies presented, which was accepted as a possible explanation for the contradicting results (George & Buyse, 2015).

Soon after the American Society of Clinical Oncology meeting, in the hope to launch a bigger and more definitive trial to confirm Bezwoda's findings, an independent audit team was identified to conduct an onsite review of records from Bezwoda's trial study (Ana *et al.*, 2013; George & Buyse, 2015; Webb, 2016). The audit results turned out to be unsettling, as several problems were identified by the auditing team (Ana *et al.*, 2013; George & Buyse, 2015). The most pertinent concerns raised by the team included that:

- For many of the participants, no medical records were available (George & Buyse, 2015; Webb, 2016).
- The ERC of the University of Witwatersrand did not approve the study, nor were they made aware of the study at any stage (Ana *et al.*, 2013; Martín, 2001; Webb, 2016).
- No proof could be found that voluntary informed consent was obtained from the trial participants (George & Buyse, 2015; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Martín, 2001).
- Many of the patients treated by Bezwoda were 'barely literate' black women, thus making voluntary informed consent difficult, and no consent forms for these women could be found (Ana *et al.*, 2013).
- The data presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology meeting were inconsistent with the data made available on site (Martín, 2001; Weiss, 2000).

The results of the audit found that Bezwoda was fraudulent, and he manufactured data for this study (Howard *et al.*, 2011; Rettig *et al.*, 2007; Webb, 2016; Weiss, 2000). A previous trial published by Bezwoda was audited thereafter, and was also found to be fraudulent (Howard *et al.*, 2011; Rettig *et al.*, 2007). As a result, Bezwoda's publications were retracted, and bone marrow transplantation was terminated as a treatment option for breast cancer patients (Ana *et al.*, 2013). Soon after the audit report findings were made available, Bezwoda confessed his fraudulent actions to the ERC (Martín, 2001). The University of Witwatersrand released him from his position as head of department and scientific researcher (George & Buyse, 2015), and he was formally dismissed in March 2001 (Webb, 2016). The aftermath of this scientific misconduct led to the formulation of nationally binding research ethics guidelines for health research for SA in 2004, applicable to all research involving human participants (including social sciences research) (Israel, 2017).

5.3.1.7 The Facebook-Cambridge analytica scandal

The rapid development of technology can be exciting, but these developments should be developed in such a way that it is not to the detriment of the user (Pagoto & Nebeker, 2019).

Recent social media scandals have highlighted understandable unease about how technology, and indeed data, can be utilised (Pagoto & Nebeker, 2019). A renowned example of a data breach in social media was the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal, one of the biggest incidents since the inception of the social media network (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; Rosenberg, Confessore & Cadwalladr, 2018). When the occurrence became public knowledge in 2018, its users were unnerved (Aiello, 2018; Van Wyk, 2018). What is more concerning is Fuller's (2019) observation that this scandal was only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the potential abuses possible with access to 'big data'.

The Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal is alarming for two distinct but related reasons. First, Cambridge Analytica collected the personal data (personal information) of millions of Facebook user profiles without their consent (Aiello, 2018; Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; Solon & Laughland, 2018). Second, this harvested data was utilised to develop a software program to initially predict, and thereafter influence, this oblivious audience with personalised political advertisements as part of the 2016 election campaign in the USA (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; Ingber, 2018; Meyer, 2018; Neuman, 2018; Pagoto & Nebeker, 2019; Prokop, 2018; Van Wyk, 2018).

In 2014, Aleksandr Kogan, a psychology professor at Cambridge University, developed a personality quiz app called "thisisyourdigitallife" [this is your digital life] for Facebook (Keach, 2018; Latham, 2019; Meyer, 2018; NBC News, 2018). This app was developed in Kogan's personal capacity, independent from his work at Cambridge University, at his company Global Science Research (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). Facebook users were offered money by Global Science Research (GSR) to partake in a personality quiz (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; NBC News, 2018; Van Wyk, 2018). These consenting Facebook users shared information about themselves (Keach, 2018) but were under the impression that the data were collected for academic purposes (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). Approximately 270 000 Facebook users downloaded the app and voluntarily took the personality quiz (Latham, 2019; Keach, 2018; Meyer, 2018; NBC News, 2018; Van Wyk, 2018). However, in addition to the data collected from voluntary participants, the app also collected data from the Facebook friends of these participants without their permission (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; Graham, 2018; Ingber, 2018; Keach, 2018; Latham, 2019; Meyer, 2018; NBC News, 2018; Van Wyk, 2018). This app enabled Kogan to harvest psychometric information which included, among other things, fair-mindedness, reliability, political beliefs, self-disclosure, and 'striking interests'. These included militarism (interest in weapons including guns), violent occultism, intellectual activities, wholesome interests (camping, gardening, hiking) (Van Wyk, 2018), religious beliefs, relationship information, and

personal information, including photos and the location of each individual (Solon & Laughland, 2018).

Facebook permitted the collection of friends' data, however the social media giant maintained that they were under the impression that the data were collected for academic purposes (Rosenberg *et al.*, 2018). Facebook upheld that Kogan was the party who acted unethically when he sold the data obtained from the app (“thisisyourdigitallife”) to Cambridge Analytica (Keach, 2018), in violation of Facebook's policies (Graham, 2018; Latham, 2019; Prokop, 2018; Solon & Laughland, 2018). The scandal was thus triggered by data that were shared with a third party for supposedly academic purposes, but which was in truth not earmarked for such purposes (Graham, 2018). Vanacker (2018) raised his concern on how easily Facebook (a social media platform, with access to 'big data') was deceived into sharing data for non-approved usage. Such effortless deceit raises alarms regarding the safety of other information stored about individuals by such media platform companies (big data) (Vanacker, 2018).

Cambridge Analytica worked with Donald Trump's election team and used this data to develop a system that could profile American voters in order to pursue them with personalised political advertisements on Facebook (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; Ingber, 2018; Keach, 2018; Meyer, 2018). The app also facilitated further political interference, since the political candidate could campaign in specific areas, with a particular approach, to appeal to these groups of potential voters (Dillet, 2018; Rosenberg *et al.*, 2018; Van Wyk, 2018).

According to Cambridge Analytica, they obtained the data of 30 million Facebook users (Badshah, 2018; NBC News, 2018), but the company held Kogan responsible for violating Facebook's policies (Rosenberg *et al.*, 2018) and rejected any transgressions on their side (Solon & Laughland, 2018). However, several sources contested the figures and reported that Kogan harvested and then sold the private data of approximately 50 million profiles to Cambridge Analytica (Keach, 2018; Meyer, 2018; Rosenberg *et al.*, 2018; Solon & Laughland, 2018, Van Wyk, 2018). Facebook later confirmed that the data of up to 87 million social media users of this platform could have been obtained by Cambridge Analytica (Badshah, 2018; NBC News, 2018; Pagoto & Nebeker, 2019).

Facebook only learned that Kogan had shared data with Cambridge Analytica in 2015 (Solon & Laughland, 2018). However, after this discovery, Facebook failed to communicate the data breach immediately to its platform users, and the social media giant's efforts to recover and safeguard the data of millions of people was by no means sufficient (Aiello, 2018; Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018; Rosenberg *et al.*, 2018). Facebook declared that there was a

breach of trust between Kogan, Cambridge Analytica, and Facebook (Solon & Laughland, 2018); that the app was removed from the social media platform after the discovery of the data breach; and that the company insisted Kogan and any other associations delete the data (Graham, 2018; Meyer, 2018). Facebook relied on Cambridge Analytica's assurance that it was, in fact, deleted (Solon & Laughland, 2018), and Cambridge Analytica confirmed that they deleted the data (Rosenberg *et al.*, 2018). It was later discovered that Cambridge Analytica never deleted the data and still had access to almost all the data (Rosenberg *et al.*, 2018; Solon & Laughland, 2018). These occurrences clearly demonstrated that the process of 'data mining' is an effective method to obtain information about the users of social media platforms even though such actions should be perceived as taking advantage of peoples' privacy (Regmi *et al.*, 2018).

The outcome of the Facebook-Analytica scandal was that Cambridge Analytica had to shut down all operations because of legal expenditures and the loss of clientele due to the controversy surrounding the organisation (Ingber, 2018; Keach, 2018; Solon & Laughland, 2018). For Facebook, the ramifications were just as severe, with the deteriorated public trust, evident with the trending hashtag #deleteFacebook after the scandal became public (Pagoto & Nebeker, 2019). Towards the end of July 2018, Facebook disclosed that 3 million users abandoned the social media network after this scandalous event (Neate, 2018). Such actions by Facebook users serve as a clear demonstration that they felt deceived, disrespected, and fearful of future exploitation.

The day after the data scandal became public knowledge, Facebook faced the largest one-day drop in any company's market value (Dillet, 2018; Neate, 2018; Rodríguez, 2018). Shares fell to \$174.89, with a drop of just under 20%, and the company experienced a downward growth of \$119 billion from a record high of almost \$630 billion the previous day (Dillet, 2018; Neate, 2018). Stated differently, a company that was worth approximately \$629.6 billion the previous day was worth just under \$510 billion one day later (Dillet, 2018; Neate, 2018). Facebook experienced further financial losses when the UK information commissioner fined them £500,000 for data law breaches (Neate, 2018), and in the USA, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) fined Facebook approximately \$5 billion for the company's role in the privacy infringements of Facebook users (Wong, 2019).

The ethical challenges that came to the fore because of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal is, that in a context where 'big data' are collected, informed consent is no longer possible (Graham, 2018). 'Big data' are generally collected for future research studies and, for the most part, such studies are not even devised when the data are harvested, meaning that

it is not possible to say precisely how the personal data of participants will be used (Graham, 2018). Yet, in our traditional understanding of consent, the research participant needs to be fully informed of the purpose of the study, and the person should have decision-making capacity (Graham, 2018). In a changing societal context, our traditional understanding of autonomy and informed consent is challenged and must be reevaluated (Graham, 2018).

A concern that was highlighted by Vanacker (2018) is that this data breach is not only representative of the fact that data were collected without the consent of Facebook platform users, but is also demonstrative of the extent of the information retrieved. This can result in power distortions, where such information can be used to manipulate consumer behaviour, public discourse, and even democratic practises. The fact that such information can be used without consent, brings the perception of fairness and the violation thereof into question (Vanacker, 2018).

Two other ethically concerning aspects raised by Vanacker (2018) were the delayed response from the CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, regarding the alleged data breaches and how it would be rectified. Such conduct demonstrates a lack of transparency in the company's communication with media platform users (Vanacker, 2018). Second, when data are collected and distributed without the consent of the participant, the autonomy of such individuals is violated because they lose control over their reputation and social identities (Vanacker, 2018).

The Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal is only one of many 'big data' research scandals (see e.g. 2014 Facebook emotional contagion study (Kramer, Guillory & Hancock, 2014) and the 2016 geographic profiling technique to identify the artist 'Banksy' (Hauge, Stevenson & Rossmo, 2016)). This demonstrates the ethical concerns with the increase of big data research projects. In reaction to these concerns, several universities have developed policies and procedures of how to conduct ethical research involving big-data. Also, the ODL institution where this study was conducted was in the process of developing and approving such a policy at the time of this thesis.

5.3.2 Contemporary international guiding principles on research ethics

As previously alluded to, the research ethics regulations that guide academic researchers in a contemporary environment was reactive in nature. Therefore, certain unethical events occurred, and in reaction, various codes, policies and other documents were formulated that guide academic researchers in conducting ethical research (Davis *et al.*, 2012; Heale & Shorten, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014). In the preceding section, some of the most notorious

unethical research studies, with an indication of how it influenced the regulatory context, were discussed to provide the reader with contextual information. These cases resulted in the development of each of these distinguished documents.

5.3.2.1 Nuremberg Code

At the end of World War II, the Nuremberg trials were conducted to prosecute Nazi leaders, including medical doctors, who conducted biomedical experiments on concentration camp prisoners (Al Tajir, 2018; Belmont Report, 1978; Rice & Bernard, 2018) (discussed in Section 5.3.1.1). From the doctors' trials, the Nuremberg Code of research ethics was developed in 1946 as a set of standards and rules of conduct for human experimentation (Belmont Report, 1978; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Monreno, 2017). The three fundamental requirements set out in the Nuremberg Code are voluntary and informed consent; a favourable risk-benefit analysis; and participants' right to withdraw participation without negative consequences (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Monreno, 2017; Rice & Bernard, 2018).

The Nuremberg Code significantly shaped the international research ethics environment and is, without fail, denoted as a primary reference point in almost all advances in the protection of human participants (Annas & Grodin, 2018). This code became the foundation for many later ethical codes involving human participants to ensure that research is conducted in an ethically sound manner (Al Tajir, 2018; Belmont Report, 1978; Craig & Desai, 2015; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Rice & Bernard, 2018). The Nuremberg Code also resulted in the promulgation of the Declaration of Helsinki by the World Medical Assembly in 1964 (Al Tajir, 2018; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Monreno, 2017) (discussed in Section 5.3.2.2).

5.3.2.2 The Declaration of Helsinki

In 1964, a document was drafted by the World Medical Association (WMA) which outlined the required standards that medical doctors should follow in order to conduct ethical research involving human participants (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Dhai, 2014; Rice & Bernard, 2018; Rice, 2008). The title of the declaration, 'the Declaration of Helsinki', alludes to the location where it was drafted. The assembly of the WMA was held in Helsinki, Finland (Rice & Bernard, 2018; Rice, 2008). The WMA was founded in 1946, and the first General Assembly was held in 1947 (Dhai, 2014). The original version of the Declaration of Helsinki was the first formal declaration of the WMA, and was adopted only after a 12-year debate (Dhai, 2014).

The Declaration of Helsinki can be regarded as a document that complements the Nuremberg Code of 1948 (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice, 2008). In addition to the standards set out in the Nuremberg Code for ethical research involving human participants, the Declaration of Helsinki provided two additional key elements (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice, 2008; Rice & Bernard, 2018). First, the participant's interest and welfare should always be given higher priority than those of science, society or the researcher (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Heale & Shorten, 2017; Rice & Bernard, 2018). Second, every participant involved in clinical research should get the best-known treatment (Amdur & Bankert, 2011; Rice & Bernard, 2018).

The Declaration of Helsinki is continuously updated (Al Tajir, 2018; Dhai, 2014; Kruk, 2013; WMA, 2019). It is the WMA's most recognised policy statement (WMA, 2019) and is regarded as one of the most important declarations on essential standards for ethical research involving human participants in the world (Al Tajir, 2018; Kimmelman *et al.*, 2009). Because of these continuous updates, the declarations remain relevant and advance alongside science and technology (Dhai, 2014). From its original formulation in 1964, it has been updated seven times; the most recent update was in October 2013 (Dhai, 2014; WMA, 2019). The present version of the declaration is the only officially recognised document, and all previous versions are replaced and should not be used or referred to, apart from referencing it for historical purposes (WMA, 2019).

5.3.2.3 The Belmont Report

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Belmont Report was officially promulgated in 1979 to address three key principles which are currently accepted as the minimum requirements that must be adhered to for ethical research with human participants (Al Tajir, 2018; Rice & Bernard, 2018; Rice, 2008; Weiss, 2015). Indeed, the Belmont Report is one of the most widely utilised codes across biomedical and social science research fields to offer guidance on ethical research (Wessels & Visagie, 2017). Al Tajir (2018) maintains that when academic researchers incorporate the three main ethical principles of the Belmont Report into their research, and they ensure that the study is approved by an ERC, they set the tone for responsible and ethical research conduct. These three ethical principles include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Belmont Report, 1978).

The Belmont Report was developed with the intention to provide a supportive structure that guides academic researchers to find acceptable solutions when faced with ethical concerns arising from research involving human participants (Belmont Report, 1978). Indeed, Schoeman (2019) alludes to the wide-ranging applicability of the report and upholds that the

Belmont Report bridged the gap between biomedical and social science research, since the principles are universal enough to guide ethical conduct in both spheres. Apart from providing the three ethics principles, the Belmont Report also includes explanations of the procedures which should be followed to realise each principle (Belmont Report, 1978; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012).

For this study, I embraced the Belmont Report's internationally recognised principles (1978), which were adopted by the ODL institution for all research involving human participants. The principles of respect for persons, beneficence and justice (Belmont Report, 1978), together with the procedures followed to actualise these principles, were discussed in greater detail in Section 2.6 of Chapter 2.

5.4 OTHER INFLUENTIAL DISCOURSES ON RESEARCH ETHICS

Section 5.4 is dedicated to offering insight on other influential discourses related to research ethics regulation. The discourses discussed in this section include the Singapore Statement (2010) on Research Integrity (Resnik & Shamoo, 2011; Singapore Statement, 2010); the New Brunswick Declaration (Iphofen, 2017); San Code of Research Ethics (Chennells & Schroeder, 2018; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019); Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings (GCC) (Boardman, 2019; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019); and finally, the most recent addition to this dynamic study area, the Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices (ASSAf *et al.*, 2019).

5.4.1 Singapore Statement on research integrity

The Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010) was drafted at the Second World Conference on Research Integrity in Singapore in 2010. The statement is an important step towards encouraging responsible conduct among scientists worldwide (Resnik & Shamoo, 2011). According to Wessels *et al.* (2015), the Singapore Statement benchmarks the first international endeavour to encourage the development of unified policies, guidelines and codes of conduct with the long-term objective of cultivating greater research integrity worldwide. The introduction of the Singapore Statement speaks to the need for integrity in research since the worth and benefits of the research are subject to such integrity (Singapore Statement, 2010). This statement acknowledges that national or disciplinary differences in research can occur in terms of how the research is structured and executed, but maintain that there are nevertheless principles and professional responsibilities that are central to the

integrity of research, irrespective of the context where the research is done (Resnik & Shamoo, 2011; Singapore Statement, 2010).

The Singapore Statement offers four principles that should guide the conduct of all researchers, regardless of the field of investigation: honesty in all facets of research; accountability in the conduct of the research; professional consideration and fairness in working with others; and good stewardship of research on behalf of others (Singapore Statement, 2010). The professional responsibilities of researchers endorsed by the Singapore Statement (2010) are presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Singapore Statement (2010): Professional responsibilities fundamental to research integrity

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS TO REALISE THE IDENTIFIED PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY
Integrity	Take responsibility for the trustworthiness of your research.
Adherence to Regulations	Be aware of and obey regulations and policies related to your research.
Research Methods	Use appropriate research methods, base conclusions on detailed analysis of the evidence, and report findings and interpretations comprehensibly and objectively.
Research records	Preserve clear, accurate records of all research in manners that will allow verification and replication of your work by others.
Research Findings	Share your data and findings openly and promptly, as soon as you have had a chance to determine priority and ownership rights.
Authorship	Take responsibility for your contributions to all publications, funding applications, reports and other representations of your research. Lists of authors should include all those and only those who meet applicable authorship criteria.

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS TO REALISE THE IDENTIFIED PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY
Publication Acknowledgement	Acknowledge in publications the names and roles of those who made significant contributions to the research, including writers, funders, sponsors, and others, but do not meet authorship criteria.
Peer Review	Provide fair, prompt and rigorous evaluations and respect confidentiality when reviewing others' work.
Conflict of Interest	Disclose financial and other conflicts of interest that could compromise the trustworthiness of your work in research proposals, publications and public communications as well as in all review activities.
Public Communication	Limit professional comments to your known expertise when engaged in public deliberations about the relevance and importance of research findings, and clearly distinguish professional remarks from opinions based on personal opinions.
Reporting Irresponsible Research Practices	Report any suspected research misconduct to the relevant authorities, including fabrication, falsification or plagiarism, and other irresponsible research practices that undermine the trustworthiness of research, such as carelessness, dishonestly listing authors, neglecting to report conflicting data, or the use of deceptive analytical methods.
Responding to Irresponsible Research Practices	Research institutions, journals, professional organisations and agencies that have commitments to research should have procedures for responding to suspected misconduct and other irresponsible research practices and procedures to protect those who report such behaviour in good faith. When misconduct or other irresponsible research practices are established, suitable actions should be taken as soon as possible, as well as rectifying the research record.

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS TO REALISE THE IDENTIFIED PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY
Research Environments	Research institutions should enable and uphold settings that encourage integrity through education, unambiguous policies, and realistic standards for advancement, while cultivating work environments that support research integrity.
Societal Considerations	You and the research institution should comprehend that you have an ethical obligation to evaluate societal benefits against risks inherent in your work.

Source: Singapore Statement (2010)

According to Resnik and Shamoo (2011), the Singapore Statement is not a regulatory document. They nevertheless suggest that HEIs, scientific journals, funding organisations, and other scientific establishments should endorse the Singapore Statement and develop regulations and guidelines for ethical conduct consistent with the statement's principles. Also, Kleinert (2010) advocated that governments, professional associations, research organisations, funders, and other stakeholders in the research arena should publish standards and guidelines based on the principles and responsibilities defined in the statement (Kleinert, 2010). Like several other HEIs in SA, the ODL institution where the study took place, endorses the Singapore Statement and mentions the importance of adhering to these principles and responsibilities in the Policy on Research Ethics (Institution A, 2016c).

5.4.2 The New Brunswick Declaration: A declaration on research ethics, integrity and governance in the social sciences

In 2012, a number of social science scholars who have critically written on research ethics regulation for social sciences were invited to join in an alternative kind of ethics conference in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada (Iphofen, 2017; Van den Hoonaard, 2013a; Van den Hoonaard, 2013b). The summit's primary objective was to explore feasible options for research ethics regulation, specifically within the social sciences milieu (Van den Hoonaard, 2013a), as an alternative to the rigid approach of research ethics regulation originating from biomedical research models (Iphofen, 2017). To this end, the New Brunswick Declaration, a declaration on research ethics, integrity and governance, was drafted at the first summit of

this nature and approved on 4 February 2013 (Van den Hoonaard, 2013b; Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014).

The rationale for the need for such a declaration, according to Van den Hoonaard (2013a), is that the regulation of research ethics should not mirror a bureaucratic function of control but rather focus on the core value of ethics, which is centred on human relationships. Iphofen (2017) maintained that the traditional perspective for the regulation of research ethics is restrictive, inhibits innovative methodologies, and the review process is one of scrutiny, focusing on the avoidance of risk, the protection of institutional reputations, and dogmatism. He validated his position and mentioned that he was not the only scholar who attended the summit to mention that the conventional approach to research ethics review is a frustrating obstruction before the actual research project can commence (Iphofen, 2017). Therefore, the propositions modelled in the New Brunswick Declaration are closely linked to these issues or challenges highlighted by social scientists (Israel, 2015). Van den Hoonaard and Tolich (2014) nevertheless maintain that the New Brunswick Declaration on research ethics does not contempt the traditional research ethics governance approach, but propose a softer, more accommodating alternative for research ethics regulation.

The New Brunswick Declaration on research ethics, integrity, and governance proposed the following research ethics principles:

- 1) Seek to promote respect for the right to freedom of expression** (Tolich & Ferguson, 2014; Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014). An essential component of a democratic society is the right to, and importance of, freedom of expression; including conducting authentic research (Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014; Van den Hoonaard, 2013b)

- 2) Affirm that the practice of research should respect persons and collectivities, and favour the possibility of benefit over risk** (Iphofen, 2017; Tolich & Ferguson, 2014; Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014; Van den Hoonaard, 2013b). Promote constructive relations between researchers, participants, publishers, research institutions, regulatory boards, other stakeholders, as well as the broader community, with the objective to develop a greater understanding of the principles and practices of ethical research (Tolich & Ferguson, 2014; Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014; Van den Hoonaard, 2013b).

- 3) Believe that researchers should be held to professional standards of competence, integrity, and trust** (Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014). This belief includes the expectation that the researchers will act reflexively and responsibly if new ethical challenges arise before,

during, and even after research projects are completed (Iphofen, 2017; Tolich & Ferguson, 2014; Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014; Van den Hoonaard, 2013b). These standards should be founded in the professional codes of ethical practice embraced by the variety of professional associations to which those who study human experience belong – including the arts and humanities; behavioural; and health and social sciences (Iphofen, 2017; Tolich & Ferguson, 2014; Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014).

4) Encourage various ways of advancing ethical conduct, which involves a wide range of stakeholders (Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014). These stakeholder parties should, *inter alia*, include government and non-governmental organisations, professional associations, academic journals, academic institutions, national supervisory bodies, participant communities, and research ethics oversight committees (Iphofen, 2017; Israel, 2015; Tolich & Ferguson, 2014; Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014; Van den Hoonaard, 2013b).

5) Encourage regulators and administrators to foster a regulatory culture that offers researchers the same level of respect researchers should offer research participants (Israel, 2015; Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014). Urge regulators and administrators to encourage a regulatory culture that gives researchers the same level of respect they should give to research participants (Iphofen, 2017; Tolich & Ferguson, 2014; Van den Hoonaard, 2013b).

6) Seek to promote the social reproduction of ethical communities of practice (Tolich & Ferguson, 2014). Effective ethics education works in socially grounded settings and with a bottom-up approach. It is dependent on strong mentoring, experiential learning, and guidance when involving students and beginner researchers in ethics in research situations (Israel, 2015; Tolich & Ferguson, 2014; Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014).

7) Be committed to ongoing critical analysis of new and revised ethics regulations and systems (Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014). This can be achieved by highlighting typical and innovative research ethics review procedures; identifying pressures and contradictions between various elements of research ethics governance; and seeing that every setting devoted to discussing proposed ethics guidelines embraces critical analysis and research regarding research ethics governance (Iphofen, 2017; Tolich & Ferguson, 2014; Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014; Van den Hoonaard, 2013b).

8) Work together to create new experiences, insights, and expertise supporting these principles, goals, and mechanisms (Iphofen, 2017; Tolich & Ferguson, 2014; Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014).

The declaration recognises the importance of human relationships as a vital element of the research ethics review process, irrespective of whether this is done in a formal or informal manner, continuing that human relationships are not merely a consideration of the process (Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014). Although the New Brunswick Declaration was developed to be aspirational, the idea was to prevent unreasonably burdensome obligations that might be problematic to sustain (Israel, 2015). Van den Hoonaard and Tolich (2014) also acknowledge that the current review structure will not easily be abandoned or discarded in the current audit-oriented, risk-opposing society. Although the ODL institution where this study was conducted does not deny the New Brunswick Declaration's potential value, the principles underlying the declaration is not explicitly set out in the institution's research ethics policy.

5.4.3 The San Code of Research Ethics

For many years academic researchers across the globe have conducted research involving the San people of Southern Africa (Chennells & Schroeder, 2018; Kekulawala & Johnson, 2018; Rakotsoane & Nicolaidis, 2019; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019). In fact, Schroeder, Chatfield and Edwards (2020) believe that the San community is one of the most researched populations on earth. San peoples have held the interest of academic researchers for several reasons, but mainly because of their valuable traditional knowledge, existence as hunter-gatherer peoples (until fairly recently), and the unique genetic properties they hold as descendants of what is believed the oldest traces of humankind (Chennells & Schroeder, 2018; Kekulawala & Johnson, 2018; Schroeder *et al.*, 2020; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019).

Because of their traditional lifestyles of living in smaller communities in isolated areas, they were particularly susceptible to exploitation by others, including academic researchers (Schroeder *et al.*, 2019). With increasing exposure to the 'outside world', San leaders came to the realisation that most academic research on their communities was conducted without permission, their peoples did not receive any meaningful protection, and it was not to the benefit of their communities (Chennells & Schroeder, 2018). In fact, it caused frustration, unhappiness, and even actual harm to the San community in some cases (Chennells & Schroeder, 2018).

The increasing awareness eventually resulted in the San Code of Research Ethics publication in 2017, which requires all academic researchers planning to engage with San communities to commit to four central values set forth in the code (Chennells & Schroeder, 2018; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019). The values to which researchers need to commit, include:

- 1) Respect (Kekulawala & Johnson, 2018; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019).
- 2) Honesty (Kekulawala & Johnson, 2018; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019).
- 3) Justice and fairness (Kekulawala & Johnson, 2018; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019).
- 4) Care (Kekulawala & Johnson, 2018; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019).
- 5) Process (Kekulawala & Johnson, 2018; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019).

The commitment to honour these central values are accompanied by an uncomplicated process of community consent, as stated in the San Code (Chennells & Schroeder, 2018; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019). This entail that the community leaders should give their consent before any individual community member may be approached to participate in academic research (Rakotsoane & Nicolaidis, 2019).

The San Code of Research Ethics signifies the first ethics code developed and released by an indigenous population in Africa (Rakotsoane & Nicolaidis, 2019; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019). Besides this benchmark, this code, in contrast to traditional research ethics codes, is not focused on the superior conduct of academic researchers, but rather a protective mechanism, a plea for fairness, respect, care and honesty by academic researchers (Schroeder *et al.*, 2020). This approach of the San code is a significant initiative, as academic researchers are guided to conduct research in accordance with the ethical principles, values, and parameters of the indigenous cultures of the San peoples (Rakotsoane & Nicolaidis, 2019).

SA is not mistakenly referred to as the rainbow nation, and this country is home to several indigenous communities. The San Code of Research Ethics thus laid the foundation for these communities to empower themselves and ensure that they are not exploited for research purposes, a view which should be supported and embraced by all academic researchers. In addition, the ODL institution where this study was conducted has a clear vision to lead the way in offering HE with an African perspective and, as such, should embrace the values put forth by the San Code as an authentic African perspective to research conduct.

5.4.4 Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings

The Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings (GCC) can be understood as the sister code of the San Code of Research Ethics, and endorse very similar values, which include fairness, respect, care and honesty (Boardman, 2019; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019). The central objective of the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings (GCC) is to avoid ethics dumping (Boardman, 2019; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019). Ethics dumping is a concept that is used to describe practices where unethical research from high-income countries are moved to low and middle-income countries to avoid ethical safeguards (Boardman, 2019; GCC, 2019; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019).

Ethics dumping can typically include situations where researchers from high-income countries conduct research without taking the culture of the indigenous communities, and the need to obtain community approval or conducting high-risk research on research participants, into consideration – with the knowledge that these participants will not benefit from the research findings (Boardman, 2019). As a rule, research that would be prohibited in a high-income country should also not be permitted in low and middle-income countries (Boardman, 2019). As a safety measure, the GCC therefore stipulates that researchers need to obtain research ethics clearance from a relevant ERC in their countries of origin and research ethics approval from the appropriate bodies in the country where the research will be conducted (Boardman, 2019).

According to the official policy document, the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings sets out to counter research ethics dumping through the following measures:

- Providing guidance across all research disciplines (GCC, 2019; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019).
- Presenting clear, short statements in simple language to achieve the highest possible accessibility (GCC, 2019; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019).
- Focusing on research collaborations that entail considerable imbalances of power, resources and knowledge (GCC, 2019; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019).
- Using a new framework based on the values of fairness, respect, care and honesty (GCC, 2019; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019).
- Offering a wide range of learning materials and affiliated information to support the Code (GCC, 2019; Schroeder *et al.*, 2019).

The ODL institution where the study was conducted forms part of the low and middle-income countries that could be subjected to ethics dumping. Indeed, in the past, SA was not spared from ethical transgressions (Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Schoeman, 2019). The country is also a fascinating research location because of its socioeconomic, educational, political and social development condition (DoH, 2015). It is therefore important for academic researchers to be aware of this Code and endorse the values set forth by the Code. This is particularly true in instances where academic researchers intend to conduct collaborative research with high-income countries and act as custodians in the protection of all communities in SA. To this end, this Code is endorsed by the ODL institution.

5.4.5 Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices

At the time of writing this thesis, the ‘Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices’ was the most recent addition to the research ethics and scientific integrity dialogue evident in SA. Given the novelty of the statement, the scholarly literature pertaining to the statement was fairly limited. It is also yet to be established how this statement will be received and applied by the academic community.

Since the adoption of the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity by the global research community, precisely a decade ago, academic researchers’ commitment and adherence to these principles have not improved (ASSAf *et al.*, 2019). One of the first sessions at the 2019 conference on HE, hosted by Universities South Africa, paid particular attention to the dire state of ethical research practices observed worldwide, and also in SA (Anstey, 2019).

The severity and degree of unethical research are of such great concern that on 31 July 2019, the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), the Council for Higher Education (CHE), the NRF, the DHET and Universities South Africa (USAf) signed the Joint Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices (Anstey, 2019; Qhobela, 2019; Veldsman, Gevers & Crewe, 2019).

The signatories of this joint statement considered it essential to reiterate the underlying principles of academic research and the publication thereof to academic audiences in SA and abroad (ASSAf *et al.*, 2019). An appeal was accordingly made to these audiences to make every effort to advance research integrity (ASSAf *et al.*, 2019). This statement’s principles that should inform ethical research and scholarly publishing practices are reiterated in the section below to familiarise the reader with its contents. This statement is recognised by the ODL

institution and is included in the ERC application forms to promote academic researchers' adherence.

Table 5.3: Statement on ethical research and scholarly publishing practices (2019)

PRINCIPLE	APPLICATION OF EACH PRINCIPLE
Responsibility	It is the responsibility of individual researchers, postgraduate students, academic societies, journal publishers and boards, universities, all university staff (including research support services), and all organisations supporting research and knowledge generation, to be aware of and adhere to regulations related to research, to actively maintain academic and research integrity, and to report or act on any unethical practices they may discover. At an institutional level, requisite policies and procedures for monitoring, investigating, censuring and reporting unethical practices must be developed. The anonymity of those reporting such practices must be protected.
Ethics and integrity	Researchers are responsible for their own research, and for research performed under their supervision, and must take due care to ensure the publication only of authentic, accurate and reproducible findings, including findings that do not support their working hypotheses.
Methodology and data	Researchers must use appropriate research methods, assess all outcomes critically, maintain a full record of the research, including all supporting data, and objectively interpret and report findings.
Authorship	All authors who made an intellectual contribution to the research publication, and only those authors, must be included as contributing authors. The sequence of authors should follow discipline-specific practices. All authors must read and approve the final draft prior to submission.
Acknowledgement of contributions	As well as acknowledging all authors, researchers must acknowledge all those who made a material contribution to the research or publication but who do not meet authorship criteria. This includes indigenous originators of the knowledge, funders, sponsors, manuscript editors and language reviewers. In addition, all knowledge (published or unpublished) used in the research must be appropriately referenced/cited and acknowledged.

PRINCIPLE	APPLICATION OF EACH PRINCIPLE
Peer review	Peer-reviewers must be sufficiently qualified for the role, and the process of review must be fair, objective, and rigorous, while respecting anonymity and confidentiality where this is applicable. All research publishers and funders of research must avail their peer-review policies to authors.
Social awareness	Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible.
Conflicts of interest	All possible conflicts of interest, whether financial or personal, must be declared and preferably avoided in research and other scholarly activities such as peer review, research proposals and public comment.
Editorial	In cases where editors or members of editorial boards submit manuscripts to their own journals, editorial handling of the papers concerned must be independent of the author in process terms, up to and including the decision to publish or not, as the case may be.
Research publishing environment	Research institutions (including agencies supporting and funding research) must ensure an environment that encourages ethical research practices through education, stewardship, and clear and fair policies and practices that promote research ethics, integrity and compliance. This includes the way in which research funding or research incentives are allocated and spent. Care has to be taken to ensure that the research funding system does not incentivise perverse research and publication practices that compromise research integrity.
Predatory journals and unethical editorial practices	Researchers are responsible for avoiding falling victim to predatory publishing or unethical editorial practices. The onus is on an individual or group of researchers, and institutional processes of scrutiny, to ensure that the avenues selected for publishing their research are authentic and credible.
Quality over quantity	Researchers are reminded that publishing the outputs of their research in good quality, high impact journals, is always preferable from a longer-term career perspective, to the publication of incremental outputs in low-quality

PRINCIPLE	APPLICATION OF EACH PRINCIPLE
	journals. ‘Salami slicing’ of outputs to increase publication numbers should be avoided.

Source: ASSAf *et al.* (2019).

With the endorsement of the principles as set out in the Joint Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices (ASSAf *et al.*, 2019), the ODL institution thus demonstrates the importance of remaining relevant in the HE milieu, in SA and internationally. The incorporation of the Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices (ASSAf *et al.*, 2019) therefore creates an opportunity for the ODL institution to advance the research integrity of academic researchers.

5.5 RESEARCH ETHICS REGULATION WITHIN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

SA is regarded as an attractive research location for several disciplines, including social science researchers, because of the country’s socioeconomic, educational, political and social development condition (DoH, 2015). These interests and consequential research activities did not automatically initiate enhancements in research ethics regulation for research involving human participants (Schoeman, 2019). In reality, SA, like most countries on the continent, were not left untouched by ethical transgressions (Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Schoeman, 2019). The current research ethics regulation structures in SA developed from biomedical research ethics (Israel, 2017). In 2004, the DoH released national ethical guidelines regulating all health research in SA (Wassenaar & Slack, 2016), and in 2005, the National Health Act (61 of 2003) was operationalised (Wassenaar & Slack, 2016). After the introduction of the National Health Act, ethics oversight of research projects, including social sciences, became compulsory (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). Prior to this national statutory requirement, social sciences researchers were not compelled to subject their planned research studies to research ethics reviews (Israel, 2017).

Even though deliberations and discussions of research ethics regulation in social sciences are already comprehensively covered in international settings, SA was somewhat behind in joining the debate (Wassenaar & Slack, 2016). A possible reason for this late entry to the debate could be that the National Health Act that governs the research ethics review of health

sciences was only implemented in 2005 and, as already mentioned, the national guidelines regulating health research in SA were implemented in 2004 (Wassenaar & Slack, 2016). These nationally obligatory ethical guidelines for health research were issued by the DoH in response to a scandalous clinical trial involving breast cancer research (see Section 4.3.1.6), as well as the National Health Act that stipulated that all research involving human participants are included in the scope of the Act (Israel, 2017). Since the National Health Act was created for the needs of health research specifically, the scope of the Act could cause confusion (Israel, 2017), but this uncertainty is clarified with the understanding that health research include, *inter alia*, biomedical, clinical, psychological, or social processes in human beings (National Health Act, 61 of 2003; Schoeman, 2019; Wassenaar & Slack, 2016). Universities answered the call of the National Health Act and revised research ethics review processes and procedures to include humanities and social sciences (Israel, 2017). At the ODL institution, the earliest draft of the research ethics policy was approved by Council in 2007, with the latest revision approved by the University Council in 2016 (Institution A, 2016c) (see Section 5.4.1).

The DoH issued a second edition of the guidelines in 2015, which supersedes the 2004 guidelines. This edition is entitled “Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Structures” (DoH, 2015; Israel, 2017). These guiding principles for ethical research include beneficence and non-maleficence, distributive justice, and respect for persons (DoH, 2015). These national guidelines support the ethical principles stipulated in the Belmont Report, the Declaration of Helsinki, the Singapore Statement, the Medical Research Council: Guidelines on Ethics for Medical Research, and the Human Heredity and Health in Africa Initiative (DoH, 2015).

In addition to developing these guidelines, the National Health Act also created the National Health Research Ethics Council (NHERC), with the duty to oversee local ERCs and scientists (DoH, 2015; Israel, 2017). In terms of the NHERC, every organisation or institution, health society and health establishment where health and health-related research are conducted involving human participants must set up or have access to a registered ERC (DoH, 2015). In addition, these established ERCs are compelled to register with the NHERC (DoH, 2015). Therefore, it is evident that social science research studies involving human participants, by law, must be submitted to research ethics applications to ERCs for review purposes (Wassenaar & Slack, 2016).

Research ethics regulation at the ODL institution is compliant with national legislation, ensuring that all academic research involving human participants, including social sciences research conducted at the institution, are reviewed by relevant ERCs.

5.6 RESEARCH ETHICS REGULATION AT AN ODL INSTITUTION

Research ethics regulation within the ODL institution is primarily governed by the Policy on Research Ethics (Institution A, 2016), with the purpose of informing researchers of their responsibilities to conduct ethical research studies; support researchers to understand and promote adherence to all relevant procedures; and protect the rights of all stakeholders (Institution A, 2016c). The document consists of four classifying parts: the general guidelines for ethical research; guidelines for research involving human participants; guidelines for animal, plant, molecular and cell research; and guidelines for community-engaged research (Institution A, 2016c). Part 2 of the policy document is of particular importance in terms of the focus of this study; Part 2 offers guidelines for research involving human participants, thus regulating social science academic researchers' conduct as well (Institution A, 2016c).

In terms of international guiding principles and benchmarks for ethical research, the ODL institution Policy on Research Ethics (2016) endorses the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (Institution A, 2016c) (the statement was discussed in Section 5.4.1) and the Belmont Report (1978) (the report was discussed in Sections 2.6 and 5.3.2.3) (Institution A, 2016c). Although social science academic researchers have criticised the use of the Belmont Report (1978), it is widely used in HEIs (including this ODL institution) as a guiding framework for ERCs (Van Heerden, Visagie & Wessels, 2016).

The ODL institution acknowledges and adheres to SA legislation and other regulatory documents. In particular, the National Health Act 61 of 2003, the Intellectual Property Amendments Act 28 of 2013, the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013, Ethics in Health Research Principles, Processes and Structures (2015), and the South African Medical Research Council Guidelines on Ethics for Medical Research: General Principles (Book 1) (2002). Finally, the policy credits the research ethics policy documents of other HEIs in SA that were consulted in the development of this policy document (Institution A, 2016c).

Besides the Policy on Research Ethics (2016), another policy document that is relevant at the ODL institution for the regulation of research ethics involving human participants is the Policy for Conducting Research Involving Employees, Students and Data (Institution A, 2016). The

policy was first approved by the University Council in 2006 and has undergone four revisions since then (Institution A, 2016b). This policy was last updated in 2016 (Institution A, 2016b) and is operationalised with the SOP to obtain permission to conduct research involving employees, students or data. The SOP was implemented in 2016 (Institution A, 2016d) and should be read in combination with this policy (Institution A, 2016d). The objective of this document is to protect the ODL institution's students and employees from any form of research-related harm and safeguard the interests of the ODL institution (Institution A, 2016a).

In addition to the SOP to obtain permission to conduct research involving employees, students or data (Institution A, 2016d) (mentioned above), the ODL institution developed some other SOPs as well. All these SOPs are aligned with the national policy guidelines entitled "Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Structures" set out by the Department of Health to ensure ethical and responsible research (DoH, 2015). An SOP that is of particular significance for this study speaks to the standardised means for evaluating risks of harm related to proposed research projects. The Research Ethics Risk assessment SOP stipulates that "the concept 'risk' denotes the possibility that research may cause varying degrees of harm to any participants and/or related contexts, including human participants, animal participants, the respective research institution(s), communities, the environment and society. Any such risks must be considered before commencing research" (Institution A, 2018b). What this implies in the context of this study is that social science academic researchers who apply for research ethics clearance should identify, estimate and evaluate the potential risks and benefits of their proposed research undertakings and declare this to the ERC (Institution A, 2018). The potential risks and benefits related to the study must also be included in the participation information letter (Institution A, 2018).

Moreover, adding to these official policies guiding research ethics regulation involving human participants, the library of the ODL institution offers several electronic resources to assist academic researchers in conducting ethical research (Institution A, 2019b). While the objective of this electronic portal is noble and hypothetically a beneficial resource to consult when any ethics-related uncertainties arise, it is difficult to find this website. It is hidden in an unexpected location, as a subfolder of "Research Data Management". If researchers are not already aware of the resource, it is doubtful they will find it. I discovered this resource by accident, but when I wanted to revisit the site, it took some time to find it. On the webpage itself, several of the buttons offered to enter additional information, policies documents, or research ethics application forms result in an error report appearing, while others are restricted and only available to the ODL institution staff members (Institution A, 2019b). Admittedly, a disclaimer is placed on the webpage stating that sharing some of the documents is restricted

due to contractual or licensing agreements (Institution A, 2019b). Still, these limitations are counterproductive to the objective of empowering academic researchers to conduct research in an ethically sound manner.

Also, two portals exist for this particular webpage. One seems to be a trial version (pilot) and the only content made available on this page is a link to the ODL institution's research ethics policy, which was not working (Institution A, 2019a). Yet both sites (duplicated) are operational, resulting in confusion and frustration. Although these challenges are most likely only affecting postgraduate students of the ODL institution and not the academic employees (who have access to the internal network), it is worth mentioning this concern. The ODL institution has made significant progress in regulatory support since 2007, but it would be expected that electronic support is readily available for both staff and students as a dedicated distance learning institution. Given that this matter was beyond the scope of this study, the problem was not further investigated.

A final aspect that should be noted about the organisational context is that the research ethics regulatory framework followed at the ODL institution is decentralised. This governing approach seemed most fitting for an institution of that size, and was accordingly adopted by the executive management of the university (Visagie, 2020). The implication of a decentralised research ethics governance approach is that responsibility is shifted to subunits, such as ERCs operational within faculties, institutes and centres at the university (Visagie, 2020). These ERCs (subunits) are then required to report back to a central (University-wide) ERC (Visagie, 2020).

5.7 EXEMPTIONS FROM RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW

Certain kinds of studies would be exempted from research ethics review in almost all countries (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012), but the guiding principles for these types of studies are, to a certain extent, unclear and confusing (Pritchard 2001; Wassenaar & Slack, 2016). The best examples are those that are related to information available in the public domain (DoH, 2015; Haggerty, 2004; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012), studies where no human participants are involved (Haggerty, 2004; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012), or information available through legislation or regulation (DoH, 2015). Although these research studies are exempted from research ethics review, they are not excused from ethical considerations for the research studies (DoH, 2015). Notably, research that is based on institutional records or personal data

from medical records is not exempted from research ethics review, even though no participants are directly involved in the research study (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012).

The present biomedical research ethics regulations stipulate that a single case account (not more than 3 patients) is generally exempted from research ethics approval (DoH, 2015). The reason being that in the physical and biological sciences, research is understood as a systematic inquiry, generally employing quantitative data collection to generalise newly acquired information (DoH, 2015). The study is therefore exempted from research ethics review since a single case cannot be utilised for generalisation (DoH, 2015). However, in contrast to biomedical research, social sciences research studies utilise both qualitative and quantitative methods and methodical frameworks to generate scientific knowledge (DoH, 2015). Thus, within the social sciences research arena, a single case study is considered a completely acceptable research activity (DoH, 2015). Therefore, it is unlikely that such a study would be exempted from consideration for approval from an ERC (DoH, 2015).

Also, in the ODL institution where this study was conducted, there are instances where research studies do not require full research ethics review. These studies include those involving secondary data (in the public domain) and conceptual research studies. Although the national guidelines state that certain studies are exempted from research ethics approval, it does not imply that these types of studies are excused from ethical considerations (DoH, 2015). This implies that academic researchers cannot exempt their own research undertakings (Al Tajir, 2018).

Even though these studies do not have to obtain research ethics clearance from the relevant ERC, the ODL institution still requires these researchers to submit a specific form for consideration from an ERC. As explained in Section 5.6, the ODL institution developed an SOP that speaks to the standardised means for evaluating risks of harm related to proposed research projects (Institution A, 2018). The protocol forms submitted for these types of studies include a risk assessment section. In order to be exempted from research ethics review from a relevant ERC, the risk assessment should confirm that the study holds only negligible risk of harm. According to the SOP, negligible risk can be understood as “research that does not involve human participants at all or involve human participants indirectly. The probability or magnitude of risk of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research is unlikely and not greater in itself than that ordinarily experienced in daily life” (Institution A, 2018). For the administrator or chairperson of the relevant ERC to conduct the screening and establish whether the application meets the requirements for negligible risk, the application form should be accompanied by relevant supporting documents (Institution A, 2018). Such documentation will

typically include a proposed research protocol, permission to access information, and previous ethics clearance certificates (Institution A, 2018).

5.8 PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCHERS ON RESEARCH ETHICS REGULATION

Even though research ethics regulation in social sciences research is mandated by legislation in SA, it has been severely criticised and met with unyielding resistance from many social science academic researchers (Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Sheehan, Dunn & Shan, 2018). In fact, research ethics review within these scientific fields is a contentious issue, where some scholars support the practice while others criticise it as a practise with several weaknesses (Human-Vogel & Coetzee, 2011; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012; Van Heerden *et al.*, 2016). The next section provides an overview of the most prevalent critique in the scholarly literature involving research ethics regulation in the social sciences ERC.

5.8.1 An appreciative view of research ethics regulation in social sciences

The most important characteristic of an academic researcher is that of accountability, and it is this virtue that will determine the trust that society will have in academic researchers (Beckmann, 2017). For this reason, not all academic researchers are unsatisfied with the role capabilities, skills and procedures of ERCs (Keith-Spiegel, Koocher & Tabachnick, 2006; Sheehan *et al.*, 2018). Some academic researchers reason that research ethics review is an essential practice that strengthens the accountability of HEIs and individual academic researchers to the society they serve (Human-Vogel & Coetzee, 2011). These academic researchers maintain that research ethics should not be seen as an add-on to academic research, but instead form a central part of academic research activities (Lategan, 2005).

According to Kruger *et al.* (2014), the role of ERCs is foremost to protect the welfare of human participants in research studies and guard the integrity of the academic research community. McAreavey and Muir (2011) elaborate on this view and state that the role of the ERC is to review research ethics applications where human participants are involved, to safeguard the dignity, rights and wellbeing of those participants. In this quest, it is also important that the ERC functions as an independent body, without outside influences (McAreavey & Muir, 2011).

Academic researchers conduct research to advance their careers (as explained in Section 4.5.5.3) and satisfy the longing to remain at the forefront of their subject areas (Remenyi,

1996). But academic researchers did not always have an ethical predisposition in research undertakings and, in the past, some scientific researchers opined that nothing should stand in the way of knowledge creation. Such beliefs resulted in the abuse of human participants in the name of scientific investigation (as explained in Section 5.3) (Al Tajir, 2018; Ells, 2011). Also, Remenyi (1996) maintains that knowledge creates power, and without ethical insight, such power can be misused and have a negative influence on individuals and society at large. Although it is distressing that unethical research occurred, it also created awareness, and in the contemporary HE environment, research ethics regulation is no longer a novel idea to the academic research community. This is demonstrated with the vast amount of ethics codes, policies, procedures and best practice regulations (Lategan, 2012). Today, academic researchers understand that research should not be conducted if it is not founded on a solid ethical framework, even if such research can contribute to the expansion of the knowledge economy (Ells, 2011; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Lategan, 2012).

Henry *et al.* (2016) underscore the value of ERCs and explain they are essential for research undertakings; their knowledge, insight and experience are critical to navigate grey areas and guarantee that academic research is conducted in an ethically sound manner. Also, Wassenaar and Mamotte (2012) uphold that ERCs do have an important role to fulfil in social science academic research undertakings. They explain that although it is unlikely that research studies in these disciplines will cause direct physical harm to research participants, some risks remain a reality, including confidentiality breaches, emotional trauma, humiliation, deception, labelling, stigmatisation, and it is these risks of harm that should be evaluated and prevented by ERCs (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012).

A 2009 study by Mamotte and Wassenaar (2009), which focused on social science researchers' experiences with their ERCs, revealed that most research ethics applicants had a positive experience with their ERC in the research ethics review process. Furthermore, the participants of this study indicated that the research ethics review process constructively contributed to the refinement and quality of their research design, heightened their awareness and consideration of ethical aspects of their study, and the application process was trouble-free (Mamotte & Wassenaar, 2009).

Within the ODL institution where this study took place, academic employees' engagement in research ethics can support their understanding of the positive influence research ethics regulation can have on safeguarding research participants, the standing of the ODL institution, and the integrity of academic researchers.

5.8.2 A critical and opposed view of research ethics regulation in social sciences

Most literature available on research ethics regulation in social sciences underscores the contentious relationship between academic researchers and ERCs, with the emphasis on researchers' frustrations and objections to research ethics regulation and challenges to the current status quo (Henry *et al.*, 2016; McAreavey & Muir, 2011; Mamotte & Wassenaar, 2009; Sheehan *et al.*, 2018). Frustrations that are frequently denoted in literature include:

- **Research ethics review in the social sciences originated from a biomedical research review perspective**

Many social science academic researchers' perspective is that the research ethics regulation and protocols are developed for biomedical research studies and are thus unsuited for the review of social science research studies (Hedgecoe, 2016; Iphofen, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Schoeman, 2019; Tolich & Ferguson, 2014; Van den Hoonaard & Tolich, 2014; Wassenaar & Slack, 2016; Zhang, 2017). Social science academic researchers maintain that the research ethics regulation adopted for their subject areas was developed without their involvement, and any objections or concerns raised are ignored and cast aside (Israel, 2017). Kruger *et al.* (2014), however, maintain that although biomedical sciences and social sciences differ and a biomedical framework was used to develop research ethics regulation in social sciences, the differences in the subject areas do not mean that a different set of moral principles and standards should be used for evaluating the ethical aspects of social science studies.

- **Time-consuming process**

To obtain research ethics clearance is time-consuming, which causes frustration as it delays the progress of the proposed research undertaking (Beckmann, 2017). Human-Vogel and Coetzee (2011) explain that ERCs' reviews of research projects are hampered by challenges associated with the official requirement for review, the informed consent procedure, the design of the study, the sample selection, and the consideration and mitigation of power relationships. After the research ethics application is submitted to the ERC, the committee needs to review and either approve or provide feedback on the application, which is a lengthy process resulting in slow turnaround times (Beckmann, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Sleeboom-Faulkner *et al.*, 2017; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012; Wassenaar & Slack, 2016).

- **Research ethics regulation is an administrative burden and a hurdle to overcome**

Academic researchers perceive the application process for research ethics clearance – just like an application for financial support – as an administrative challenge, a hurdle to overcome in terms of time and effort required before the onset of a research project (Beckmann, 2017; Hammersley, 2009). Also, Doyle, Mullins and Cunningham (2010) maintain that ERCs mirror the bureaucratic environment in which academic employees operate, and these committees have several ideas that must be adhered to, thus making the research ethics application process a hurdle to overcome. Advocates of research ethics regulation attempt to rationalise and justify this administrative burden, stating that ERCs' requirements are reasonable since academic researchers should engage in these methodological and ethical considerations in any event, with which sceptics obviously disagree (Hammersley, 2009).

- **Research ethics regulation is a restriction on academic freedom**

A key concern for challengers of research ethics review in social sciences is the perceived restriction of academic freedom (Clapp, Gleason & Joffe, 2017; Hammersley 2009; Kruger *et al.*, 2014). Social science academic researchers feel frustrated and are reluctant to share their proposed research studies with ERCs fearing rejection because of the planned research topic, methodology, or both (Hedgecoe, 2016; Iphofen, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014). Yet despite this complaint by social scientists, the truth is that academic freedom cannot justify intellectual curiosity that requires research designs and procedures that will be to the detriment of ethical standards and in violation of human rights (Kruger *et al.*, 2014). Research participants' welfare is more important than any other interests related to a proposed research study (Kruger *et al.*, 2014).

- **Unclear research ethics application procedures**

Academic researchers sometimes do not have a clear understanding of the research ethics application and submission requirements, and they do not know the requirements for expedited reviews (Mamotte & Wassenaar, 2009). These academic researchers feel frustrated with inadequate information and communication regarding timelines related to research applications and feedback procedures (Mamotte & Wassenaar, 2009).

- **Risks related to social science research studies are lower than with biomedical research studies**

Some social science researchers reason that their research domain holds far lower risks than biomedical research (Doyle, *et al.*, 2010; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Pienaar, 2010) and, as such, they question the necessity of research ethics review (De Wet, 2010; Kruger *et al.*, 2014). This

argument is supported by reasoning that the time wasted on the unnecessarily research ethics review of low-risk studies endangers participants of high-risk studies because of ERCs' time and resource constraints, thus preventing comprehensive reviews of such high-risk studies (Kruger *et al.*, 2014). However, Wassenaar and Mamotte (2012) and Haggerty (2004) explain that although it is relatively unlikely that social science research would cause direct physical harm to participants (as would be the case for high-risk studies), the risk of confidentiality breaches, emotional trauma, humiliation, deception, labelling, stigmatisation still exist and should be evaluated and prevented.

- **Inconsistencies in research ethics regulation among different ERCs**

Discrepancies exist among ERCs in their review processes, and the varying perceptions held in terms of their exact responsibilities, cause frustration for academic researchers and contribute to the doubt regarding ERCs' ability to ensure the ethical conduct of research studies (Doyle *et al.*, 2010; Henry *et al.*, 2016; Kruger *et al.*, 2014).

While some academic researchers from social sciences disciplines uphold that ERCs are inconsistent in their review processes, which is caused by different perceptions with regards to the scope of authority of ERCs, the counter-argument is also true. Several authors have written on the responsibilities of ERCs. It is thus commonly understood that ERCs should consider the following ethical principles when evaluating a research ethics application:

- The academic researcher should indicate how the risk of harm to research participants will be mitigated during the research (Heale & Shorten, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Rice & Bernard, 2018).
- The academic researcher should clearly explain how informed consent will be obtained, what the role of the participants will be in the research, and confirm that participants will be made aware that participation is voluntary (Babb, Birk & Carfagna, 2017; Heale & Shorten, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Rice & Bernard, 2018).
- When informed consent is required, the researcher should ensure that they provide sufficient information regarding the study, that the potential participants understand the information, and consent is given based on the information shared by the academic researcher (Kruger *et al.*, 2014).
- Academic researchers should declare any benefits, rewards, demands and potential inconveniences for participants to the ERC (Babb *et al.*, 2017; Heale & Shorten, 2017; Rice & Bernard, 2018).

- Academic researchers should ensure that participants will be allowed to withdraw from the academic study at any stage if they choose to no longer participate (Heale & Shorten, 2017).
- ERCs should be informed of how the data will be retained and shared (Heale & Shorten, 2017).
- The academic researcher should explain the research design and the characteristics of the potential research participants (Rice & Bernard, 2018).
- ERCs should also consider the level of expertise of the academic researcher related to the proposed research design (Rice & Bernard, 2018).

Still, academic researchers' frustration with the inconsistencies in research ethics regulation among different ERCs is valid, and could be caused by a lack of competencies among ERC members. The frustration caused by incompetent ERC members is discussed in more detail below.

- **Research ethics review processes are subjective and concerned with institutional reputations**

ERCs are subjective in nature and prioritise institutional reputations. These ERCs seemingly have other considerations, besides the protection of the welfare of individual research participants, instead of permitting unbiased scientific investigations (Henry *et al.*, 2016; Iphofen, 2017).

- **Power imbalances between researchers and ERCs**

In their capacity of considering research ethics applications, ERCs have the power to approve proposed research studies, to refer the proposal back and request changes, or reject the proposed research altogether (Egan *et al.*, 2016). To this end, numerous researchers are justifiably hesitant to query the decisions made by ERCs, for fear that such an action might adversely affect their future research ethics applications (Henry *et al.*, 2016).

- **Incompetent reviewers in ERCs, resulting in inappropriate feedback**

Academic research in social sciences is extensive and multifaceted, and relates to a considerable variety of disciplines, methodologies, and epistemologies (Kruger *et al.*, 2014). For an ERC to be competent in its reviews of proposed social science research proposals, the committee needs ERC members that are well versed in social science methodologies, and have extensive knowledge of qualitative research approaches (Kruger *et al.*, 2014).

Many academic researchers believe that ERC members are not competent to review research ethics applications in social sciences. In the absence of competent and adequately trained ERC members for the evaluation of social science research studies, it can happen that ethical aspects of a study are overlooked or misinterpreted, or that social science methodologies, which can be important features for ethical consideration for the study, are misunderstood (Israel, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012). An example of this is the restrictions to the confidentiality of deliberations in focus group scenarios (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012). In addition, ERC members who are not adequately trained might feel incompetent and hesitant to approve complicated research ethics applications, even if it is well-designed. This is exacerbated by fear of exposure of their lack of knowledge, or unknown risks for potential research participants (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012).

- **ERCs are perceived as regulatory bureaucracies instead of enabling committees for ethical research**

According to Van den Hoonaard (2013a), the typical structures in research ethics regulation in HEIs are weak, because of the contentious relationship between academic researchers and ERCs who portray a structure of governance and control. In HEIs, the ethics review process followed by ERCs is widely known for being prescriptive and academic researchers are pressed to conform to a certain set of directives or recommendations (Zhang, 2017).

Academic researchers have raised their concerns regarding the controlling rules and regulations followed by ERCs instead of philosophical deliberations on principles, standards, ethics, moral values pertaining to proposed research studies (McAreavey & Muir, 2011). The role of ERCs is to enable and endorse ethical research proposed by academic researchers, by protecting the dignity and wellbeing of research participants; instead, these ERCs are perceived as regulatory bureaucracies unwilling to consider the needs of social sciences that differ from biomedical research (Babb *et al.*, 2017; Hoecht, 2011; Van den Hoonaard 2013a; Wassenaar & Slack, 2016).

- **The perceived distrust of academic researchers**

Another major objection to research ethics regulation is the perceived distrust of academic researchers. The recurring line of reasoning is that academic researchers are educated professionals, with integrity; they are trustworthy with well-developed internalised norms supporting correct behaviour, and therefore they should be trusted to make suitable judgements on ethical aspects of their research (De Wet, 2010; Gontcharov & MacDonald, 2016; Hoecht, 2011). The regulation of ethical research is thus regarded as inhibiting academic freedom, offensive and meaningless (De Wet, 2010; Mamotte & Wassenaar, 2009).

Zhang (2017) recommends that research ethics should act as a frame of reference for academic researchers and not as a set of rules that needs to be adhered to. The reality is that academic researchers can present a research proposal to an ERC that will satisfy their requirements, but that does not imply the person will be responsible or act with integrity (Zhang, 2017). Distrust in academic researchers, followed by more stringent research ethics regulations, will therefore not deter researchers' unethical conduct. It will be better if academic researchers consider research ethics in terms of the moral implications of their conduct (research ethics should act as a frame of reference) instead of simply complying with regulations (Zhang, 2017).

- **Lack of capacity to monitor the study once approved by ERC**

With the present approach to research ethics regulation in social sciences, the ethical consideration of the study occurs prior to commencement of the research (Gontcharov & MacDonald, 2016). However, because of a prospective approach, the responsibility is with the academic researcher to adhere to the promises made in their application. Due to a lack of capacity, the study cannot be monitored once it is approved by an ERC (Gontcharov & MacDonald, 2016; Kruger *et al.*, 2014).

- **Perceptions of the fairness of an ERC**

A study conducted by Keith-Spiegel *et al.* (2006) found that academic researchers are inclined to evaluate ERCs' competence based on their perception of fairness by the committee. They also suggest that researchers may undermine research ethics policies and procedures if they believe the ERC processes and procedures are unjust. Also, Martinson *et al.* (2006) found that researchers are more inclined to display conduct that could compromise the integrity of science when they think they are being treated unjustly.

When considering academic researchers' perceptions in terms of the JD-R theory, it becomes apparent that the frustrations voiced by academic researchers demonstrate academic researchers in social sciences associate the research ethics application process with a number of job demands. Examples of job demands include work overload, complex tasks, time pressure, role conflict, emotional dissonance, and red tape (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Hakanen & Bakker, 2017; Schaufeli, 2014). Excessive job demands, in turn, lead to burnout and psychological detachment (Han *et al.*, 2019). Burnout and psychological detachment among employees are directly associated with negative organisational outcomes (Bakker *et al.*, 2014), making it a concern for HRM practitioners working at the ODL institution where this study was conducted.

5.9 THE CONNECTION BETWEEN RESEARCH ETHICS AND ACADEMIC EMPLOYEES' WE

In Chapter 4, a comprehensive discussion was provided of the contemporary HE milieu and the significant changes it underwent in the last few decades (Sabagh, Hall & Saroyan, 2018). Attention was also focused on the changes and challenges that academic employees face at these institutions. Chapter 4 demonstrated several job resources and job demands of academic employees. As mentioned elsewhere in the study, academic employees' key functions are to teach, conduct and disseminate academic research, and deliver community service. Within the context of this study, closer attention was paid to literature pertaining to research, and research ethics specifically. Academic research, as a work responsibility, comprises several sub-roles that include networking, collaboration, conducting research, publishing research, and research evaluation (Kyvik, 2013b). Besides these tasks, academic researchers who wish to conduct research involving human participants should also apply for research ethics clearance (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). The objectives of research ethics regulation involving human participants within the social sciences context were explained in Section 5.2.

In Section 5.8, the social science academic researchers' perspectives of research ethics regulation were considered. Some appreciative perspectives were identified, however, the greater proportion of scholarly literature focuses on academic researchers' frustrations with research ethics regulation in social sciences (Henry *et al.*, 2016; Sheehan *et al.*, 2018). In Chapter 3, I selected the JD-R theory as the most appropriate theory to understand WE. According to the JD-R theory, the characteristics of any employment position, irrespective of the field of expertise, can be divided into two categories, which include job resources and job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). The scholarly literature pertaining to the critique of social sciences research ethics regulation was accordingly analysed by applying the JD-R theory's theoretical principles.

Academic researchers who have an appreciative perspective of research ethics maintain that research ethics should form a central part of academic research activities (Chen, 2011; Lategan, 2005). Wessels and Visagie (2017) explain that academic researchers in social sciences usually do not question the importance of research ethics on a values level; instead, they express dissatisfaction with the regulation thereof. In a contemporary HE context, academic researchers increasingly understand that research should not be conducted if it is not founded on a solid ethical framework, even if such studies can contribute to the expansion

of the knowledge economy (Ells, 2011; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Lategan, 2012). Academic researchers who support a formalised research ethics regulation process also justify their view by explaining that such regulations will increase academic researchers' accountability towards the communities they serve. The need to be accountable for the research studies that researchers conduct also relates to an ethically oriented value system.

As explained in Chapter 3, some job demands, known as challenging job demands, can create opportunities for personal development and goal achievement (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). While these challenging demands still cost energy, when employees overcome these aspects of their work they experience a sense of accomplishment (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Academic researchers who have an appreciation for research ethics do not deny that applying for research ethics approval is a challenging undertaking, but they perceive it as a challenging work demand. When an application is approved, or the regulation creates increased accountability for the scientific community, these academic researchers experience a sense of accomplishment. Therefore, even though academic researchers experience the ethical application process as a challenging job demand, it may potentially create an opportunity for personal development, growth and accomplishment, when the application process has successfully been completed.

As mentioned earlier, academic researchers conduct research since it is connected to their career advancement opportunities (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014) and they want to remain at the forefront of their subject areas (Remenyi, 1996). For these employees, conducting academic research can thus be seen as an opportunity for career and professional development and a learning experience (novel research findings). Opportunities for professional development, career advancement opportunities, and learning experiences are perceived as job resources that encourage WE among these employees (O'Connor, 2014; Sabagh *et al.*, 2018; Van Wingerden *et al.*, 2018).

As stated earlier, social science research involving human participants should be reviewed and approved by an ERC according to national legislation in SA (DoH, 2015; Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). Accordingly, this prerequisite is also adhered to at HEIs in SA (Zhang, 2017), including the ODL institution where the study was conducted. This implies that social science academic researchers who wish to conduct research involving human participants have no choice but to apply for research ethics approval from an ERC. Academic researchers who resist research ethics regulation in social sciences can thus experience a loss of autonomy. Such feelings could be aggravated when these persons voice their concerns that research ethics regulations used for biomedical research are unsuitable for social sciences

(Wassenaar & Slack, 2016; Zhang, 2017), but their objections or apprehensions are ignored and discarded (Israel, 2017).

According to the JD-R theory, sufficient job resources are imperative for WE (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). These resources include, *inter alia*, justice, support from both supervisors and co-workers, autonomy, participation in decision-making, and job control (O'Connor, 2014; Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Schaufeli, 2012a). When social science academic researchers experience a loss of control in their research activities, a sense of lost autonomy, no power to contribute to decisions that affect them, and limited support from colleagues or supervisors, it is reasonable to conclude that it would be difficult for these academic researchers to feel engaged in research ethics. The number of job demands placed on academic researchers thus seems to exceed the number of resources available to them, making it difficult to engage in research ethics.

Several studies indicate that academic researchers believe the role of ERCs should be to enable and endorse ethical research (act as a resource to academic researchers), yet the findings of these studies showed that academic researchers view ERCs in a negative light. Academic researchers perceive the ERCs in their institutions as regulatory bureaucracies who are prescriptive and want academic researchers to conform to pre-established parameters of what the committee believes is ethical research (Babb *et al.*, 2017; Wassenaar & Slack, 2016; Zhang, 2017). A further concern that emerged in the literature, is a perceived power imbalance between ERCs and academic researchers. Authors have documented that academic researchers feel all their power are relinquished to an ERC when a research ethics application is submitted for consideration. Academic researchers are hesitant to query outcomes of applications, since they are on the back foot and are dependent on the ERC to favourably consider applications (Henry *et al.*, 2016). By questioning an undesirable application outcome (referred back or rejected), they can compromise their esteem at the ERC, thus jeopardising the chances of future approvals of research ethics applications (Henry *et al.*, 2016).

As explained in Chapter 3, job demands are those aspects of work that require sustainable physical or mental energy from employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Hakanen & Bakker, 2017). Job demands typically include work overload, complex tasks, role conflict, emotional discord, role ambiguity, role stress and stressful events (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Hakanen & Bakker, 2017; Schaufeli, 2014). The emotional discord, role stress, stressful events and complex tasks (a health impairment process) that academic researchers face when applying for research ethics approval are clearly evident in the scientific readings. These (and many other) job demands significantly contribute to employees' burnout (Bakker *et al.*, 2014). Many

academic researchers have written on burnout and the consequential negative reactions of employees to their work, which include dissatisfaction with their jobs, decreased organisational commitment, intent to leave their employment, and negative organisational outcomes (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Maslach, 2017). Moreover, the process to obtain research ethics approval is time-consuming, which causes frustration for academic researchers as it delays the progress of the proposed research activity (Beckmann, 2017).

The literature analysis revealed that academic researchers' dissatisfaction in social sciences is also related to their perceptions of inadequate procedural justice of ERCs. These academic researchers believe ERCs are not objective when they consider research ethics applications and institutional reputation gets president over approving unbiased scientific research (Henry *et al.*, 2016; Iphofen, 2017). When academic researchers believe that an ERC is unfair, they are more inclined to oppose research ethics policies and procedures, and act in ways that could be damaging to scientific integrity (Keith-Spiegel *et al.*, 2006; Martinson *et al.*, 2006).

As explained above, trust and justice can be understood as job resources. However, when academic researchers believe that the conduct of ERCs is not trustworthy, or they are unjust in their responsibilities, these job resources do not exist. The motivational process that enables WE is thus hampered.

Finally, a few literature sources referred to the dissatisfaction academic researchers voiced because of a perceived lack of trust in them (Gontcharov & MacDonald, 2016). These social scientists maintain that they are trustworthy, educated professionals, with integrity and well-developed internalised norms, supporting correct behaviour (MacDonald, 2016; Hoecht, 2011). They feel that the formal regulation of ethical research is hindering academic freedom, it is offensive, and pointless (De Wet, 2010; Mamotte & Wassenaar, 2009).

Moreover, adequate job resources are vital for WE (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). These job resources include trust, justice, task variation, support from both supervisors and co-workers, opportunities for development, autonomy, role clarity, participation in decision-making, performance feedback, job control and many others (O'Connor, 2014; Bakker & Albercht, 2018; Schaufeli, 2012a). Such job resources can contribute to WE, but when social science academic researchers believe they are not trusted by ERCs or management, or they feel that they no longer have academic freedom or autonomy in their research undertakings and are not supported by their supervisors to manage their own research, these academic researchers will find it very difficult to engage in research ethics.

5.10 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The focus of Chapter 5 was to obtain a deeper understanding of the connection between research ethics and academic employees' WE in social sciences. To successfully achieve this objective, the chapter commenced with a discussion on the objectives of research ethics regulation in social sciences studies where human participants are involved. This section was followed by an analysis of prominent unethical practices in the name of research where human participants were involved. Since it was not within the scope of this study to analyse all documented unethical research studies, the analyses were limited to studies which prompted the creation of regulations regarding ethical research where human participants are involved.

The ethical transgressions which were analysed in this chapter included biomedical and social science research studies. The consequential international codes, declarations, and regulations of research ethics involving human participants were identified and discussed. Also, other influential discourses in research ethics regulation were acknowledged and discussed. These sections were followed by an analysis of research ethics regulation in SA specifically. In SA, in terms of the National Health Act, all research involving human participants, including research in social sciences, is regulated, implying that all proposed research studies (involving human participants) must be submitted and approved by a designated ERC.

The regulation of research ethics within the specific ODL institution where the study was conducted was also analysed. Within this ODL institution, the Policy on Research Ethics (Institution A, 2016) is the primary policy that guides all research involving human participants. Two other policies that also influence research at the ODL institution include the Research and Innovation Policy (2016) and the Policy for Conducting Research Involving '*Institution A*' Employees, Students and Data (2016). Additionally, the ODL institution developed a number of SOPs for research ethics regulation in accordance with the national policy guidelines entitled "Ethics In Health Research: Principles, Processes and Structures" to conduct research ethically and responsibly, as set out by the Department of Health (DoH, 2015).

With a deepened understanding of the research ethics regulatory framework on the national and institutional level, the reader's attention was drawn to academic employees' role in their capacity as academic researchers. In Chapter 4, I explained the changes and challenges that academic employees face in the contemporary HE landscape. In this chapter, I analysed scholarly literature to obtain a deeper understanding of academic researchers' perceptions of

research ethics regulation in social sciences. Accordingly, a section was devoted to analysing their appreciations and criticisms of research ethics regulation within the social sciences context. This holistic picture of the perceptions of academic researchers in research ethics regulation for social sciences, in combination with a deepened understanding of research ethics regulation in SA (including HEIs), raised a question on the connection between research ethics and academic employees' WE. Consequently, the final section of this chapter was dedicated to narratively analysing scholarly literature to gain a deeper understanding of the connection between research ethics and academic employees WE in social sciences.

With the presentation of this chapter, phase one of the study was concluded. With the aid of narrative analysis of scholarly literature, I was able to realise the objectives identified for this phase and present the analysed literature in Chapters 3 to 5. In the next chapter, the second phase of the study is presented. The purpose of phase two of the study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of how HRM practitioners can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS (PHASE TWO)

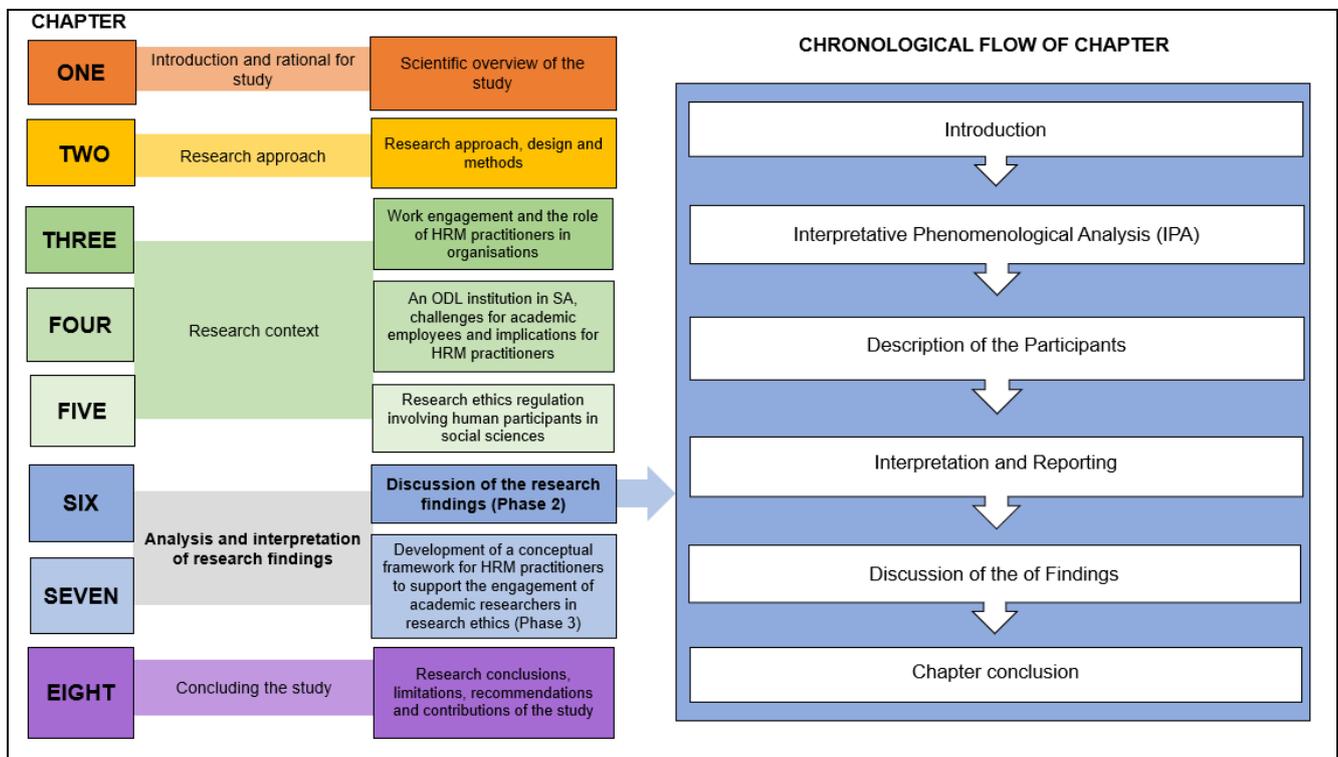


Figure 6.1: Composition and structure of Chapter 6

Source: Own compilation

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 5, the first phase of the study was concluded with the third literature chapter's presentation that narratively analysed scholarly literature to obtain a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon. With the presentation of Chapter 6, the second phase of the study is realised. This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion and interpretation of the findings of this study. The purpose of phase two was to obtain an in-depth understanding of how HRM practitioners can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The discussions and interpretations of the study's findings are based on multiple sources of data, which include individual semi-structured interviews, naïve sketches and field notes. A literature control was conducted to contextualise and authenticate the findings to existing literature (Latham, 2015:3; Morse & Field, 1996:147).

The chapter commences with a brief review of the selected method used to analyse the data (comprehensively discussed in Section 2.4.2.5). From there, the focus shifts to participants' demographical information, together with the inclusion and exclusion criteria. This section is followed by a clear explanation of the reporting of the research findings. Each theme identified during the analysis is labelled with a unique identification code. The referencing format used to label these codes is therefore also explained in this section.

Next, the discussion and interpretation of the research findings are presented. As a point of departure, the central storyline of the research findings is provided; the aim of the central storyline is to give the reader a synopsis of the themes which are discussed and interpreted in the subsequent sub-sections. Each theme is supported by several verbatim quotations from different data sources. The interpretation of each theme follows the data provided. Finally, a conclusion to the chapter and the second phase of the study is provided.

6.2 INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS (IPA)

IPA is focused on understanding and making sense of the individual's understanding of a lived experience, and while it is an interactive and inductive analysis method, a systematic approach is followed (Alase, 2017; Finlay, 2011). The analysis of the data, therefore, involved two subcategories of an interpretive process, namely phenomenological reduction (i.e., researcher makes sense of the first-order meaning-making of participants' understanding by reducing the content of transcripts into themes), and interpreting or explaining the findings in the context of relevant scholarly literature (Latham, 2015; Smith & Osborn, 2015). For this specific reason, Smith *et al.* (2009) and Alase (2017) underscored that the findings section of an IPA study is more sizeable and more extensive than the findings of a traditional qualitative study. They go on to explain that transcript quotations constitute a substantial portion of the presented findings, while the remainder are detailed analytical interpretations of the data. The data I obtained through the multiple data sources (semi-structured interviews, naïve sketches and fieldnotes) were rich and extensive, thus resulting in a chapter of 85 pages.

Despite the direction offered by IPA scholars, it is important to note that IPA is not prescriptive with a strict and precise method but rather a set of flexible guidelines which could be adapted depending on the research objectives (Crawford, 2019; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Eatough, 2007).

6.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

This study's sample consisted of 13 research participants. For this study's overarching purpose, specific qualifying criteria were used to establish if an employee qualified as a potential participant. The inclusion and exclusion criteria of potential participants were explained in Chapter 2, Sections 2.4.2.1 and 2.4.2.2. Qualifying candidates were accordingly invited to voluntarily partake in this study.

The biographical information of each participant is summarised in Table 6.1. The transcribed interviews in the original format, prior to the conversion to the analysis documents, amounted to 360 pages (Font: Arial; double line spacing). All participants received pseudonyms as soon as the data were transcribed. This measure was employed to protect their identity and ensure their confidentiality. The pseudonym assigned to each participant was done in alphabetical order. Stated differently, interviewee 1 received the fictitious name "Anna", the first letter of the alphabet, and interviewee 2 received the fictitious name of "Ben". The same codification was used for all of the interviews to protect their identities. All personal or identifiable information was removed. For this reason, the exact employment position which participants occupied were not disclosed in the biographical information, nor was the specific highest qualification obtained disclosed. As an alternative, the NQF was used to indicate the highest qualification obtained by each participant. The naïve sketches received from participants were treated with the same level of care.

Of the 13 participants, 11 returned their completed naïve sketches. One participant chose not to complete the naïve sketch and offered to have a second interview as an alternative to completing the naïve sketch. Thus, instead of completing the naïve sketch, a second interview was conducted for further reflections of his personal lived experience of the research phenomenon. Only one participant failed to return the completed naïve sketch.

Table 6.1: Demographical information of participants as captured at the time of the interview

Interview number and pseudonym	1: Anna
Highest qualification	NQF level 10
Work context	Academic employee
Number of years employed at the ODL institution	7 years (rounded)
Postgraduate supervision	Anna was supervising postgraduate students at the time of the interview
Postgraduate qualification enrolled for	Anna was not enrolled for any postgraduate qualification at the time of the interview
Interview number and pseudonym	2: Ben
Highest qualification of participant	NQF level 9
Work context	Support department: Human Resource Management
Number of years employed at this ODL institution	8 years (rounded)
Postgraduate supervision	Ben was not supervising any students at the time of the interview
Postgraduate qualification enrolled for	Ben was enrolled for his D. Com degree (field of specialisation intentionally omitted) at the time of the interview
Interview number and pseudonym	3: Candice
Highest qualification of participant	NQF level 10
Work context	Support department: Human Resource Management
Number of years employed at this ODL institution	7 years (rounded)
Postgraduate supervision	Candice was not supervising any students at the time of the interview
Postgraduate qualification enrolled for	Candice was not enrolled for any postgraduate qualifications at the time of the interview

Interview number and pseudonym	4: Denise
Highest qualification of participant	NQF level 9
Work context	Academic employee
Number of years employed at this ODL institution	7 years (rounded)
Postgraduate supervision	Denise was supervising postgraduate students at the time of the interview
Postgraduate qualification enrolled for	Denise was enrolled for her PhD degree (field of specialisation intentionally omitted) at the time of the interview
Interview number and pseudonym	5: Ellen
Highest qualification of participant	NQF level 10
Work context	Academic employee
Number of years employed at this ODL institution	9 years (rounded)
Postgraduate supervision	Ellen was supervising postgraduate students at the time of the interview
Postgraduate qualification enrolled for	Ellen was not enrolled for any postgraduate qualifications at the time of the interview
Interview number and pseudonym	6: Fred
Highest qualification of participant	NQF level 10
Work context	Academic employee
Number of years employed at this ODL institution	9 years (rounded)
Postgraduate supervision	Fred was supervising postgraduate students at the time of the interview
Postgraduate qualification enrolled for	Fred was not enrolled for any postgraduate qualifications at the time of the interview
Interview number and pseudonym	7: Gina
Highest qualification of participant	NQF level 8

Work context	Support department: Human Resource Management
Number of years employed at this ODL institution	23 years (rounded)
Postgraduate supervision	Gina was not supervising any students at the time of the interview
Postgraduate qualification enrolled for	Gina was enrolled for her M. Com degree (field of specialisation intentionally omitted) at the time of the interview
Interview number and pseudonym	8: Henry
Highest qualification of participant	NQF level 10
Work context	Academic employee
Number of years employed at this ODL institution	29 years (rounded)
Postgraduate supervision	Henry was supervising postgraduate students at the time of the interview
Postgraduate qualification enrolled for	Henry was not enrolled for any postgraduate qualifications at the time of the interview
Interview number and pseudonym	9: Jenny
Highest qualification of participant	NQF level 10
Work context	Support department: Human Resource Management
Number of years employed at this ODL institution	8 years (rounded)
Postgraduate supervision	Jenny was not supervising any students at the time of the interview
Postgraduate qualification enrolled for	Jenny was not enrolled for any postgraduate qualifications at the time of the interview
Interview number and pseudonym	10: Kayla
Highest qualification of participant	NQF level 9
Work context	Academic employee
Number of years employed at this ODL institution	7 years (rounded)

Postgraduate supervision	Kayla was supervising postgraduate students at the time of the interview
Postgraduate qualification enrolled for	Kayla was enrolled for her PhD degree (field of specialisation intentionally omitted) at the time of the interview
Interview number and pseudonym	11: Laila
Highest qualification of participant	NQF level 10
Work context	Academic employee
Number of years employed at this ODL institution	12 years (rounded)
Postgraduate supervision	Laila was supervising postgraduate students at the time of the interview
Postgraduate qualification enrolled for	Laila was not enrolled for any postgraduate qualifications at the time of the interview
Interview number and pseudonym	12: Mary
Highest qualification of participant	NQF level 9
Work context	Academic employee
Number of years employed at this ODL institution	5 years (rounded)
Postgraduate supervision	Mary was supervising postgraduate students at the time of the interview
Postgraduate qualification enrolled for	Mary was enrolled for her D. Com degree (field of specialisation intentionally omitted) at the time of the interview
Interview number and pseudonym	13: Neill
Highest qualification of participant	NQF level 9
Work context	Academic employee
Number of years employed at this ODL institution	6 years (rounded)
Postgraduate supervision	Neill was supervising postgraduate students at the time of the interview
Postgraduate qualification enrolled for	Neill was enrolled for his D. Com degree (field of specialisation intentionally omitted) at the time of the interview

6.4 INTERPRETATION AND REPORTING

As indicated earlier, the analysis process was carried out in two stages to reduce data into themes (first-order meaning-making) and interpret or explain the findings in the context of relevant scholarly literature (Latham, 2015). In addition to my interpretation of the data, the interviews were also analysed by an independent co-coder to ensure the research findings' credibility. The independent co-coder did not review the literature on which this study was grounded prior to coding the data. To this end, the themes that were identified by the co-coder were identified through an inductive approach, and not motivated by any theoretical predispositions on the research topic. No attempts were made to code the data to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame. The independent co-coder and I held a consensus meeting where we compared our findings. The naïve sketches and the semi-structured individual interviews focused on the participants' lived experiences of the research phenomenon. The themes identified in the naïve sketches echoed the themes identified during the analysis of the transcribed interviews. In support of the recommendations made by Smith *et al.* (2009), each extract (code) was labelled with a unique identifier to assist the reader in verifying the evidence of my interpretations and transparency regarding the findings being presented. Table 6.2 illustrates the reference system used (allocation of unique identifiers) to report on the findings of the naïve sketches, transcribed interviews, and field notes.

Table 6.2: The reference system used in reporting on qualitative data

Examples:	T:4:6:2:7	N:4:6:2:7	F:4:6:2:7
Where T , N or F represents the type of the primary document. Where T refers to a transcribed interview Where T2 refers to a second interview transcribed with one participant Where N refers to a naïve sketch Where F refers to a field note			
Where 4 refers to the fourth participant			
Where 6 refers to the page number of the relevant document			
Where 2 refers to the starting line of the quotation or naïve sketch or field note (calculated from the top of the relevant page of the data analysis document)			

Where 7 refers to the ending line of the quotation or naïve sketch or field note
(calculated from the top of the relevant page of the data analysis document)

This study embraced a theory-generating approach to explain the themes that emerged from the interviews, naïve sketches, and field notes, rather than a theory-testing approach. In harmony with the qualitative research design, which was followed for this study, I fulfilled the role as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis as a researcher. The reporting of the research findings obtained from the interview transcripts, naïve sketches, and the field notes is therefore carried out in the first-person voice, thus in my voice as a researcher. Likewise, the findings are presented from a first-person viewpoint to assist the reader in gaining an insider perspective.

6.5 DISCUSSION OF THE OF FINDINGS

Smith *et al.* (2009) recommend that it is beneficial to commence the discussion and interpretation of IPA's research findings by presenting a concise summary of what was discovered during the analysis of the different sources of data. This section of the discussion is referred to as the central storyline. An integral part of the central storyline is to introduce the main themes that were identified. The overarching themes and the associated sub-themes are also presented in Table 6.3 in an encapsulated format in support of the central storyline. Following the presentation of the central storyline and Table 6.3, the discussion and interpretation of each of the themes and sub-themes of the research findings will commence.

A brief outline is offered for each theme and sub-theme discovered. The themes are supported with verbatim quotes from the semi-structured individual interviews; extracts from the naïve sketches; and comments, observations, and reflections in my personal field notes. These findings are then discussed, interpreted, and contextualised in relevant scholarly literature.

6.5.1 Description of the central storyline

Engagement in research ethics is essential, multifaceted, and diverse. Different perspectives exist among academic researchers about what 'engagement in research ethics' entails. The HE environment, where ethical research is supposed to be evident, is complicated and concerning. This complicated work environment mirrors the larger employment environment of academic employees.

Unsettling, alarming, and undesirable conduct, as perceived by participants within the ODL institution, seemingly echoes cumbersome and disturbing manifestations of such conduct within the wider societal framework of SA. The perceived undesirable conduct within the ODL institution resulted in a bureaucratic research ethics regulatory system as a safety measure to proliferate ethical research.

Participants were authentic and honest, and were willing to admit that a lack of engagement can occur because of the work environment. ‘Disengagement’ is an identified sub-theme, and disengagement happens for specific, and varied, reasons.

Other elements that hinder academic employees’ engagement in research ethics is the belief that essential information regarding research ethics is not always available, and employees have conflicting responsibilities and multiple role demands (both academic employees and support staff share this challenge).

In addition to the abovementioned hindrances to engagement in research ethics, the ODL institution enables students who are geographically separated from supervisors, to conduct scientific research studies. DE creates challenges of control by supervisors. Serving on an ERC was also professed as a contentious part of academic employees’ work.

For an academic researcher to engage in research ethics, the academic researcher has an individualistic and personal ethical predisposition. In addition, a well-balanced and thriving ODL institution is critical for academic researchers’ engagement in research ethics. This can only be achieved if a culture of ethics is fostered within ODL institutions, and forms part of the strategic objectives of the university. HRM practitioners have an essential role to fulfil in creating support and promoting a culture of ethics within the institution.

Table 6.3: A summary of the identified themes and sub-themes of the research findings

Theme	Sub-themes
6.5.1.1 Engagement in research ethics is essential, multifaceted, and diverse	a) Engagement in research ethics is demonstrated by conducting research in a sanctified way

Theme	Sub-themes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b) Engagement in research ethics is an active process of sourcing knowledge by means of scholarly interaction and involvement c) Engagement in research ethics is evident when academic researchers apply for research ethics approval d) Being engaged is a persistent and progressive process
<p>6.5.1.2 The environment where research ethics is supposed to manifest is complicated and concerning, and mirrors the larger employment environment of academic employees, as well as the status of society in the broader SA context</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Unsettling conduct within the ODL institution and broader societal context b) A bureaucratic research ethics regulatory system developed because of distrust in academic researchers to conduct ethical research persistently
<p>6.5.1.3 Acknowledged facets that hinder engagement in research ethics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Disengaged researchers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a.i) A lack of being engaged a.ii) Resistance a.iii) Burdensome compliance processes b) Insufficient information available <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b.i) Unawareness resulting in time delays in research ethics approval processes b.ii) Engaged but unable to meet the sought-after requirements c) Conflicting responsibilities and multiple role demands d) Distance education and challenges of control

Theme	Sub-themes
	e) Contentious part of academic employees' work
6.5.1.4 An individualistic and personal ethical predisposition as a prerequisite for engagement in research ethics	a) To transform an academic researcher's engagement in research ethics necessitates an authentic and personal mindset b) Cognitive and emotive realisation of the importance of research ethics c) Engagement in research ethics encompasses the entire research process
6.5.1.5 Environmental prerequisites for a well-balanced and successful ODL institution	a) A culture of ethics as a strategic objective b) The role of HRM to create support and promote a culture of ethics b.i) Onboarding: Providing more than just orientation to processes and procedures b.ii) A supportive and enabling leadership style by management b.iii) Professional development, coaching, mentorship and research ethics training b.iv) Research ethics as part of performance agreements and performance appraisal b.v) Being proactive in the support provided to academic researchers b.vi) Ethical values embedded in the recruitment strategy

6.5.1.1 Engagement in research ethics is essential, multifaceted and diverse

During the interviews, I wanted to gain insight into how the participants made sense of the concept “engagement of academic researchers in research ethics”; how they saw their “own or personal engagement in research ethics”, as well as aspects which they believed to be contributing to their engagement in research ethics. Engagement in research ethics emerged as an essential, multifaceted, and diverse phenomenon in the ODL institution. Most

participants believed that it is essential to promote academic integrity in research activities. They also expressed a firm belief that an academic researcher should regard research ethics as important for engagement to take place. However, participants held different opinions on how engagement in research ethics would be demonstrated by academic researchers. This theme was categorised into four sub-themes, as discussed below.

a) Engagement in research ethics is demonstrated by conducting research in a sanctified way

Several participants explained that academic researchers who are engaged in research ethics are individuals who conduct research in a sanctified way. These participants upheld that they understood engagement in research ethics as the particular way in which research studies are approached.

During the semi-structured interview, Denise stated:

“For me, it is about how academics will begin their research, how do they plan it? Do they start it from an ethics point of view? And, during the process of research, do they follow that or do they reflect continuously with it to ensure that they remain with their ethical plan or behaviour that they want? And, to end off with it, also, in an ethical way” (T:4:3-4:12:1).

Likewise, in the naïve sketch, Anna wrote:

“I understand the phrase as academic staff members being dedicated and fully committed towards doing their research in an ethically responsible manner. In other words showing respect to every aspect of the process, including respecting individual rights, protecting anonymity of individuals and institutions, freedom of participation, objectivity, truth and the greater good.” (N:1:1:3:7).

Mary’s naïve sketch reported:

“For me ‘engagement’ means committing emotionally on a continuous basis to something. Engagement means that I support research ethics on an emotional / values level where I know why it is important to me (personally). So if I am engaged in research ethics it will mean that I understand why ethics in research is important and I continuously monitor my behaviour in order to adhere to the prescriptions of research ethics. I commit on an emotional or values level and not purely because I have to.” (N:12:1:3:8).

Therefore, these participants believe that engagement in research ethics is not possible when the academic researcher regards research ethics as a mindless, mandatory activity. Engagement in research ethics is only possible if the academic researcher upholds the view that research ethics is important and valuable.

Laila explained that:

“I think, in the first place, to be engaged in anything, you must have an interest in it, you must regard it as being necessary.” (T:11:21-22:17:2).

Likewise, Kayla stated:

“...the employee will be engaged in research ethics when the employee relates to research ethics, has a positive attitude or idea about research ethics.” (T:10:6:5:9).

For Neill, the importance of research ethics and the way in which research should be approached is:

“...having an ethical mind-set or an ethical disposition, and I think, when I’m aware of ethics, when I’m conscious of it, when it’s always top of mind...” (T:13:7:10:13).

In the naïve sketch of Denise, she wrote:

“#humandignity – be mindful of the ethics principles and use it with integrity. Treat all human beings with the necessary dignity.” (N:4:1:12:13).

For these participants, engagement in research ethics reflects a specific mindset of the academic researcher. They are engaged in research ethics because they consider research ethics as significant and important, and they are dedicated to conducting ethically sound and honourable research. This was also confirmed by my theoretical field notes.

The theoretical field note I wrote after my interview with Henry reflected:

“When I asked Henry about his understanding of engagement of researchers in research ethics, he explained that for him it is the process or approach that the researcher follows of ensuring that a study or research project is adhering to proper ethical guidelines and that the results would be valid and defensible. He mentioned that research ethics includes the application process, but it is more than that, it is a holistic approach to a research study.” (F:8:1-2:25:2).

Beckmann (2017) explained that research ethics is the attentiveness or concern with what is right and what is wrong in research conduct. Likewise, Barsky (2019) and Lefkowitz (2007) reason that research ethics is vital because if you believe in the principle that ethics relates to what is right and wrong, then research ethics relates to the proper treatment and protection of participants by the researcher. When specifically focusing on the purpose of research ethics regulation, Kruger *et al.* (2014), Mooney-Somers and Olsen (2017), Wassenaar and Mamotte (2012) explained that it is essential to ensure the interest of the research study never surpasses the wellbeing or dignity of the research participants. Furthermore, Lategan (2012) explained that an ethical researcher should be a person of integrity and dedication. To conduct ethical research should thus be a moral consideration rather than an administrative procedure (Head, 2020). Therefore, these explanations by scientific scholars confirm the research participants' perceptions that engagement in research ethics is demonstrated by conducting research in a 'sanctified way.'

b) Engagement in research ethics is an active process of sourcing knowledge by means of scholarly interaction and involvement

A number of the participants believed that their engagement in research ethics was evident in the active process of sourcing knowledge and better understanding through consulting scientific literature on research ethics, studying research and research ethics policies and procedures, and interacting with other academic researchers and scientific scholars.

Ellen stated:

"I think having a community of people who's [sic] also engaged in ethics, being able to discuss and reflect with each other..." (T:5:24:7:10).

Also, Gina noted:

"...also by asking them [academic researchers] questions. Either visiting them, asking them questions." (T:7:8:3:5).

Kayla pointed out that:

"...we asked co-workers to look at our application before we submitted it to the college again for review. And we got some helpful inputs from there as well. So co-worker support." (T:10:27:10:15).

Anna said:

“...so I even had one-on-one personal training to help me. So I had support but I looked for the support, I asked for the support.” (T:1:28-29:18:2).

Ben referred to the importance of having access to the relevant policies specifically:

“So the critical aspects for engagement, for me, was then, firstly, you need to have those policies...” (T:2:22:2:4).

In the naïve sketch of Gina, she wrote:

“Colleagues who went through this process are approachable and are always willing to assist and to mentor.” (N:7:2:6:7).

These shared experiences of participants were echoed in my theoretical field note of Jenny’s lived experience:

“Jenny emphasised the importance of mentorship and training to support engagement in research ethics. She elaborated by saying that the people you are connected to have the ability to support your engagement as researcher in research ethics.” (F:9:1:21:23).

Several of the participants indicated that the dedication of time, effort and energy spent on research-related activities, including actively seeking knowledge and enabling themselves to conduct ethically sound research, demonstrates engagement. These perceptions correspond with the observations made by Dingwall and McDonnell (2015), Ells (2011), Giraud *et al.* (2019), Head (2020), Wassenaar and Slack (2016). Wassenaar and Slack (2016) recommend that academic researchers utilise the support available for researchers. This can be done by examining respected academic literature and scientific journals to gain a profound understanding of research ethics regulation and ongoing theoretical and empirical studies on the subject. Conversely, Ells (2011) suggested that academic researchers should consult ERC members for guidance and assistance to ensure that the research study is sound. Head (2020), Giraud *et al.* (2019), Dingwall and McDonnell (2015) maintain that besides ERCs who can provide support to academic researchers, colleagues can also offer insight and are equally important for academic researchers.

Dingwall and McDonnell (2015) also stated that when academic researchers seek assistance from colleagues regarding their studies’ ethical aspects, an objective judgment can be made, and insight of different perspectives can be provided to select the best strategy to follow for the research project. Academic researchers who apply for research ethics approval are also advised to incorporate the most current literature and living documents in their research ethics

applications to demonstrate their appreciation and understanding of research ethics (Wassenaar & Slack, 2016).

c) Engagement in research ethics is evident when academic researchers apply for research ethics approval

Certain participants indicated that for them, engagement in research ethics is evident when they are involved in the physical and mental activity of applying for research ethics clearance for proposed research studies. Some participants indicated that the research ethics application process did not pose any problems, however, other participants noted that it was a difficult process. Nonetheless, all of the participants believed that engagement in research ethics is evident when academic researchers apply for research ethics clearance.

Anna noted:

"...I haven't really had any problems with ethical applications. I must say, from the first time I applied for ethical clearance... [section omitted for confidentiality purposes] ... when I just started at [Institution A], I can't say, personally, I've ever had any problems. It's a lot of forms and it's a lot of administrative stuff but I completed the forms and, right up to the last application that I had in August for myself, for personal research, I think I was very engaged". (T:1:18-19:10:2).

Gina referred to her continued dedication to obtain research ethics clearance:

"Of answering all those questions and there was [sic] corrections, answering all those questions and corrections were made. And, when you receive a document with many corrections, it tells you that you are going somewhere, so you need to improve what you said because, sometimes, you answer a question, then you just give a short sentence. Elaborate, give us more information for us to understand why". (T:7:13-14:16:7).

Henry was of the view that:

"To be a good researcher, you should have done the ethical clearance process to ensure that what you do is also above board." (T:8:8-9:19:4).

In Laila's naïve sketch, she documented:

"I had a very positive experience with regards to my own research ethics application." (N:11:1:24:24).

These perceptions were confirmed by my theoretical field notes of, *inter alia*, Candice and Gina. For Candice, I noted that:

“...a positive influence on the engagement in research ethics experienced by Candice was the feedback on her research ethics application from the committee, which she regarded as valuable...” (F:3:1:25:27).

For Gina, my field note read:

“When she finally obtained ethics clearance, she felt proud and satisfied with the feedback from the ERC. Gina indicated that after her engagement with research ethics she came to the realisation that research ethics processes and procedures within the university is there to safeguard all stakeholders. This includes the researchers, the university and the participants”. (F:7:2:14:17).

These participants' decision to comply with the research ethics application process, to reflect their commitment to conduct ethically rigorous research, was perceived by them as a demonstration of their engagement in research ethics. McAreavey and Muir's (2011) views are in agreement with the perceptions of participants, as they too uphold that the research ethics review and approval process is supposed to be meaningful and important, and the process should be valued by academic researchers. According to Al Tajir (2018), Clapp *et al.* (2017), and Davies (2020), when academic researchers apply for research ethics approval, they set the tone for responsible and ethical research conduct. Similarly, Mamotte and Wassenaar (2009) maintain that the research ethics review process can constructively contribute to the refinement and quality of the research design and add to academic researchers' awareness of the ethical aspects of their studies. Henry *et al.* (2016) and Wassenaar and Slack (2016) believe it is to the benefit of academic researchers when they perceive the ERC as an important role player and resource in their scientific research studies, and not as an obstruction.

Even though these scholars maintain that the research ethics application and clearance process are to the benefit of the academic researcher, they do not suggest that it is always an easy process (Henry *et al.*, 2016; McAreavey & Muir, 2011; Mamotte & Wassenaar, 2009; Wassenaar & Slack, 2016). As stated earlier, not all participants found the research ethics application process easy, but they all demonstrated perseverance to obtain research ethics clearance for their proposed studies. In some instances, the research ethics applications were not approved straightaway, and revisions and clarifications had to be incorporated and submitted for approval. Seemingly submitting more than one draft of research ethics applications is not uncommon, but routine for many academic researchers. Correspondingly,

scholars (Anderson & DuBois, 2012; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012) have noted that although total rejections of research ethics applications are rare, very few research ethics applications are approved with the first attempt. Nonetheless, these participants persevered and voiced their satisfaction when their research ethics application was approved, and they were also appreciative of the feedback the ERC provided.

d) Being engaged is a persistent and progressive process

Certain participants explained that engagement in research ethics is persistent and progressive in nature. For these participants, engagement in research ethics cannot be intermittent.

Mary explained:

“...research ethics is not something that is compartmentalised into certain aspects of our daily work. It is an overarching thing that goes through everything in our day. Not only when you deal with a proposal or only when you deal with writing an article but there are other instances where research ethics come [sic] into play and it has to be a natural part of your decision-making process...” (T:12:6-7:20:9).

Later in the interview, she also stated that:

“If I buy in on the whole research ethics thing, it’s not as if today I’m engaged and tomorrow I’m not, and, if you do this, I will engage and, if you do that, I will not.” (T:12:9:5:9).

Similarly, Neill said:

“Firstly, I think it’s actually almost like a beautiful interconnection between awareness, on the one hand, the significance of ethics, and particularly ethics within the research context, and then the consciousness of ethics when it comes to the researcher himself or herself. So, firstly, I would say that it’s the extent to which I, as a researcher, is [sic] aware of the ethical component of my research. And, obviously, when I talk about the ethical component of the research, it’s actually the entire research process, from the moment when I start to conceptualise my research all the way through to the findings, the analysis, the writing up of the research” (T:13:4-5:9:7).

Candice also stated that engagement in research ethics should start at the very beginning of the research study:

"I think that it actually starts from the conceptualisation of their study. I think ethics should already play a part in conceptualising the research study and what the whole process entails." (T:3:4:1:5).

Denise explained that researchers should continuously consider their research activities to ensure they uphold high research ethics standards:

"...during the process of research, do they follow that or do they reflect continuously with it to ensure that they remain with their ethical plan or behaviour that they want?..." (T:4:3:15:19).

In this naïve sketch of Anna, it became apparent that engagement in research ethics implies that the academic researcher should conduct research in a sanctified way (see Section 6.5.1.1.A), but she also demonstrated that engagement in research ethics should be a persistent and progressive process. She wrote:

"I understand the phrase as academic staff members being dedicated and fully committed towards doing their research in an ethically responsible manner. In other words showing respect to every aspect of the process, including respecting individual rights, protecting anonymity of individuals and institutions, freedom of participation, objectivity, truth and the greater good." (N:1:1:3:7).

These participants' perceptions were again echoed in my theoretical field note of Jenny. I journaled that:

"Jenny explained that she regards engagement in research ethics as encompassing of the entire research process and not simply conducting the fieldwork in an ethical way. For her engagement in research ethics is a holistic approach." (F:9:1:15:17).

Participants believed that an engaged academic researcher would find it very difficult to disconnect from the mindset that research should be conducted in an ethically sound manner. Participants explained that when academic researchers are dedicated to producing ethically rigorous research, their engagement will be evident from the conceptualisation of a research study and will persist throughout the research project. These reflections agree with Wester's (2011) views, who explained that to produce ethical research, it is important that the researcher must conduct research responsibly and make ethical decisions from the start of the research conceptualisation and throughout the research process. Likewise, Fujii (2012) stated that research ethics should be important to all researchers, not only when they are

conducting fieldwork, since conducting ethical research is an ongoing responsibility. For these participants, engagement in research ethics is therefore reflected in the persistent cognisance of ethical research throughout the entire research process.

6.5.1.2 The environment where research ethics is supposed to manifest is complicated and concerning, and mirrors the larger employment environment of academic employees, as well as the status of society in the broader South African context

Several participants shared their perception that the current research ethics landscape is complicated and concerning for academic researchers and mirrors the larger environment of employees in the HEI and the reality of citizens within the broader societal context. Participants shared their concerns of the current research ethics landscape, by comparing their unsettling lived experiences within this ODL institution to their concerns observed within the broader societal context of SA. Behavioural problems evident in society creates distrust, which in turn contribute to the need to regulate behaviour where possible. Participants believed that this includes research ethics regulation. Two sub-themes were distinguished with the analysis of the theme, which included unsettling conduct within the HEI and broader societal context; and a bureaucratic research ethics regulatory system based on distrust in researchers to persistently conduct ethical research. Each of these sub-themes is discussed below.

a) Unsettling conduct within the ODL institution and broader societal context

Several participants referred to unsettling conduct within the HEI and the broader SA context. These participants referred to corruption, unfair discrimination, nepotism, unethical behaviour, distrust, a lack of integrity and confidentiality, and the abuse of power. They reported unethical leadership within the institution imitating the broader SA context.

Henry explained his perception as follows:

"...this whole concept came about, as I say, because of international good practice, but, also, possibly, as the tendency in South Africa has brought about a [sic] awareness of corrupt activities around us, within the institution, but it also realised, I think...those working in this field realised that, because of the corrupt national feeling." (T:8:5:10:18).

Henry also mentioned that the university needs to foster a well-functioning and ethical culture that will support research ethics within the institution. The stated culture of ethics also needs

to be aligned with employees' conduct to avoid mistrust and scepticism. During the interview, it became apparent Henry believes academic researchers' engagement in research ethics would only be possible if the management of the ODL institution demonstrates ethical behaviour. He stated:

"But the important part, it ties in with the organisational ethics. If the organisation of macro-ethics are [sic] plundering, if there are...how shall I say? Possible unethical behaviour or perceived unethical behaviour in the organisation, it somehow creates this distrust about the institution, where it's going, and what you do in the academic field, getting ethical clearance for proper research, the dissonance between the two. So there needs to be harmony, they needs [sic] to be walking together". (T:8:22-23:10:3).

Furthermore:

"And all these things about where are we going? We don't know" (T:8:23:12:13) ... "If you want somebody to grow and to create a positive environment, it needs to be in sync with what the organisation does. Otherwise, distrust forms and the ethical clearance and engagement process then tarnish [sic], it's become a negative experience". (T:8:23-24:16:4).

Henry's perception is that if the institution's values are not reflected in the ethical conduct of its leaders or top management, it will be difficult to encourage academic employees to demonstrate ethical behaviour:

"...a compliance attitude versus a value-based one, and all the things we said about the organisation, about the reputation of the organisation and what the organisation does, if you've got a university not properly managed, where there's corruption and a lot of frustration, your chances of influencing lecturers to be ethical is [sic] not good". (T:8:37:6:14).

In the naïve sketch, Neill wrote the following:

"[Institution A] is a microcosm of society, where corruption, collusion, ethical malpractices, abuse of power, wastage of resources, nepotism, etc. are [at] the order of the day". (N:13:2:16:17).

Neill also made the following comment during the interview:

"...where we are dealing with issues such as corruptions and nepotism and unethical behaviour within the larger South African context". (T:13:15-16:17:1).

At a later stage, Neill explained that unethical behaviour within the institution creates discomfort and anxiety for him, since this behaviour is not congruent with his personal values. Furthermore, Neill shared that within an unethical institution, he is worried about the future of his job security and the sustainability of the institution. He explained:

"I think what will happen to me is that I become deflated, I lose my energy, I start to worry, it creates anxiety for me, I start to think am I still secure in this space? How is this going to impact the sustainability of this organisation? Will I still have work in ten years' time?" (T:13:50:13:19)...

"...that's the uncertainty that's created". (T:13:51:1:2)

"...these type [sic] of things would then push me out of the organisation, at the end of the day. And particularly if I feel that my personal values are not congruent with the values of the organisation anymore, then I start to feel uncomfortable, I'm a round peg in a square hole. I don't belong here anymore". (T:13:51:6:13).

Laila stated that the culture within the HEI does not honour confidential information, and information is shared among colleagues without discretion or accountability:

"...it's not only within our ethics environment, it's also in a bigger [Institution A] environment where people just don't honour it [confidentiality]. They just think whatever is said in a meeting or in a [sic] assessment environment, they can maar [just] talk outside, they can spread the word. So I think it's a culture in [Institution A]." (T:11:37-38:17:5).

Candice referred to an incident that occurred on her commute to work, where she overheard a telephone conversation, where one person was trying to convince another person to manipulate data (research misconduct) to suite his required work needs:

"I was on the Gautrain the other day and I heard the one guy calling someone, he wants to get involved in some project but he wants to use data that's already there and can that person manipulate the data to suit for the purposes that he wants to use it for." (T:3:4:7:13)

"I could see that ethics...the guy, his conduct was unethical, and then he's also involving another person in this whole thing". (T:3:6:7:10)

“...he asked that guy to, in his report, manipulate the data... So it’s unethical, it’s not truthful, it’s misleading because that won’t be a true reflection of what the study actually involved”. (T:3:6:14:19).

During the interview with Kayla, she referred to the favouritism and discrimination that takes place during the review of research ethics applications and approvals:

“...there’s some bias and no consistency regarding the reviews. And, sometimes, if you are networked [sic] and you know the people at college level, maybe, or departmental level, your application might be delayed or advanced, depending on where you are networked [sic]”. (T:10:17:8:15).

This perception was confirmed by Ellen, who also observed discriminatory behaviour by ERC members during the review process of research ethics applications:

“Unfortunately, they put on a little bit more of a critical hat when they see that’s the specific staff member or a student of the specific staff member, if that is a supervisor, and then, if it’s not perfect, once again, unfortunately, people will focus on irrelevant things or be overly critiqued [critical]...” (T:5:31-31:19:7).

These participants’ lived experiences confirm the perception of Ololube *et al.* (2016), who uphold that universities are often affected by struggles in the external environment. Discrimination can be understood as any distinction, exclusion or preference made on any of the following basis: race, colour, sex, religion, political views, national extraction or social origin, for the purpose of annulling or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation (ILO, 1958). Within the context of this study, perceived discrimination thus takes place in the preferential treatment of some colleagues during research ethics application procedures.

Furthermore, nepotism can be understood as a form of discrimination since it refers to the abuse of connections between parties and the favouritism of specific families or relatives, as well as comrades, irrespective of their capabilities or merit (Tran, 2016). Conversely, corruption is the unjustifiable exploitation of a position of authority, a violation of trust or legal responsibility, or any unauthorised or unlawful support to perform some act or refrain from doing so (Budhram & Geldenhuys, 2018). Although corruption occurs across the globe and manifests in different forms, the evidence thereof in SA is alarming (Budhram & Geldenhuys, 2018). In agreement with the participants’ perceptions, Shore (2018) also confirmed that corruption and fraud are evident in HEIs.

Participants explained that when employees observe unsettling behaviour within the ODL institution, which includes corruption, nepotism, unethical behaviour, dishonouring confidentiality agreements and abuses of power, it will be very difficult to motivate academic researchers to conduct ethical research. The participants did not explicitly state that academic researchers were, in fact, unethical in their research endeavours, but explained that there is a discord between what is expected of them as academic researchers and what they observed within the institution. According to Chapman and Lindner (2016), the influence of corruption within HEIs has far-reaching consequences. It disrupts the connection between employees' investment of energy and efforts and the expected positive outcomes and rewards. Corruption, for example, can therefore have the indirect negative influence that employees think personal success is achieved not through effort, hard work and merit, but by being involved in unethical behaviour (Chapman & Lindner, 2016).

The perceived dissonance between what is expected from academic researchers in terms of research ethics and what they observe as unethical conduct within the institution may negatively influence their engagement in research ethics regulatory procedures. Some participants also mentioned that these unsettling behaviours were causing uncertainty about the institution's future existence and their future job security, hence, negatively influencing their commitment to the organisation and fuelling distrust.

b) A bureaucratic research ethics regulatory system developed because of distrust in academic researchers to conduct ethical research persistently

Related to the preceding sub-theme, several participants believed that the observed behavioural problems evident in society create distrust, contributing to an organisational need to regulate behaviour more stringently. Participants believed that this includes research ethics regulation within HE institutions. A number of the participants lamented the bureaucratic research ethics regulatory system within the HEI.

Fred stated:

“So, for me, and I understand where the university comes from, is the whole lack of trust. I think, at a certain stage, researchers, academics, must be trusted to do their thing instead of imposing forms, templates, all these rules.” (T:6:6:13:18).

At a later stage in the interview, Fred again referred to his perceived distrust of academic researchers:

"...people don't trust the academics and I just think somewhere, in terms of the engagement, in terms of buy-in, there must be a message of trust, not distrust. I experience this as distrust. Everybody's looking over your shoulder, what are you doing? While I'm governed by my own professional board, I won't go outside those frameworks, but there is just no trust." (T:6:16-17:14:5).

During the interview with Henry, he explained that the bureaucratic research ethics regulatory system is restrictive and compliance-driven, and this prevents academic scholars from using their knowledge and discretion to determine whether a research study is ethical or not.

"So policies are for fools to follow, and the discretion around a matter, and sometimes that's lacking because you [sic] so compliance driven". (T2:8:20:4:8).

Henry later also stated:

"...it's a bit of a compliance thing because you've gotta tick the box. The value-based ethical approach is just not part of it, I think. If you look at the policies, it's all compliance. Look at the policy, you must do this, you must do this". (T:8:27:12:17).

According to Mary:

"...my perception is that the university tends to manage quite negatively. So, instead of saying let's do it this way, motivating from a positive perspective, they tend to motivate from a negative perspective. So, if something doesn't happen, then we put in more regulations and more rules..." (T:12:14:12:19).

My theoretical field notes of Mary confirmed that she believed the following:

"She said that researchers' experiences of powerlessness can cause further resistance or disengagement. She believes that the objective of research ethics is not to question researcher or to micro-manage or with the objective to control, but that it might be the experience of some research ethics applicants". (F:12:2:10:13).

Ben stated that the bureaucratic systems and procedures were created by individuals who are responsible for governing research ethics, and within the current context, employees follow the required procedures to keep those individuals satisfied:

"...it's a bureaucracy we created and keep people happy in the process by the forms are correct, you have got all the attachments, your supervisor signed and your own boss signed and that's currently the process." (T:2:14-15:18:4).

In my theoretical field notes, I also substantiated Ben's lived experience:

"During the interview Ben repeatedly indicated that he perceived the research ethics application and clearance process as bureaucratic, compliance driven and burdensome, which created frustration for him." (F:2:2:9:11).

Laila explained that she understood the need for research ethics regulation, but noted in her naïve sketch that despite the need thereof, the oversight or regulation should be less complicated:

"There exist many unethical practices in research and therefore I regard the process as necessary. Therefore I support it, I am engaged but it can be less complicated to ensure even more engagement". (N:11:1:19:21).

In Neill's naïve sketch, he wrote:

"Dominant narrative: 'we do not need to be policed, we know what is right and wrong...'" (N:13:3:7:7).

In my theoretical field notes of Laila, I observed:

"Laila mentioned that she considers the research ethics application process as an administrative process because researchers are aware that they should conduct ethical research". (F:11:1:23:25).

As part of contemporary HEIs research, governance practises emerged and research ethics regulatory procedures form part of this endeavour (McAreavey & Muir, 2011). These regulatory procedures are complicated bureaucratic systems developed to manage and support research ethics compliance (Cragoe, 2019; Horn, 2013). These processes that prevail cause dissatisfaction for most social science academic researchers (Cragoe, 2019; McAreavey & Muir, 2011). Applying for research ethics clearance is seen as an administrative ordeal in terms of time and effort required prior to the onset of a research project (Beckmann, 2017; Hammersley, 2009). According to Wessels and Visagie (2017), academic researchers' discontent with research ethics does not pertain to the values and norms embedded in research ethics and research integrity, but rather its bureaucratic management. The bureaucratic nature of research ethics regulation that results in burdensome compliance processes is discussed in more detail in Section 6.5.1.3.a.iii.

The participants also explained that they perceived the approach to governing research ethics as a demonstration of a lack of trust in academic researchers' integrity to oversee their own research endeavours and ensure that it is ethically executed. Moreover, these participants

considered this perceived distrust offensive, since the strict regulation of research ethics is deemed proof that management and individuals who govern research ethics doubt their professional competence. However, these participants maintain that bureaucratic regulations of research ethics resulting from distrust are undeserved, since they are professionals who are cognisant that they should conduct ethical research.

In support, Sleeboom-Faulkner *et al.* (2017) maintain that social science academic researchers are scholars who are motivated by their moral beliefs and accordingly examine topics such as the violation of socioeconomic, political, cultural norms and values. These scholars are aware of the complexities and sensitivities related to such topics. The faith and trust in professional competence and responsibility in the modern work environment are replaced with a bureaucratic research ethics regulatory system built on institutionalised scepticism, where academic researchers are subdued to another facet of regulation to ensure their ethical conduct (Haggerty, 2004; Sleeboom-Faulkner *et al.*, 2017).

One participant also referred to the professional body to which he belongs that prescribes a framework for ethical behaviour. He maintained that his conduct is within the parameters of those directive frameworks. The observations made by Dingwall (2012) and Haggerty (2004) agree with this perception. These scholars explain that prior to the strict bureaucratic research ethics regulations evident in contemporary HEIs, the ethical standing of a research study was an affair of scholars' professional discernment exclusively, who formed part of a group of peers (Dingwall, 2012; Sleeboom-Faulkner *et al.*, 2017) and were overseen by an arrangement of discipline-specific codes of conduct (Haggerty, 2004).

Furthermore, the participants indicated that they perceived the bureaucratic approach to research ethics oversight as the overarching approach followed by management, who continuously add more rules and regulations to regulate employee conduct within the organisation. Doyle *et al.* (2010) supported this view by stating that ERCs' functions mirror the bureaucratic environment in which they operate. These bodies have several rules that must be adhered to, thus making the research ethics application process a hurdle to overcome.

6.5.1.3 Acknowledged facets that hinder engagement in research ethics

Within the academic research context, five sub-themes were identified as aspects that could hinder academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. These sub-themes included disengaged researchers, insufficient information available, conflicting responsibilities and multiple role demands, DE and challenges of control, and research ethics as a contentious

part of academic employees' work. Each of these sub-themes is discussed in the sections below.

a) Disengaged researchers

The data analysis revealed that the theme 'disengaged researchers' (academic researchers who are disengaged from research ethics) occur for various reasons. To this end, I categorised these reasons into three sub-themes: 'a lack of being engaged', 'resistance' and a 'burdensome compliance processes'. During my sense-making of this theme, I realised that disengagement in research ethics did not necessarily mean that disengaged researchers were unethical in their research conduct. I came to the understanding that the disengagement that these academic researchers experience related to the processes and procedures of research ethics regulation within the university. The reasons and motives why participants experienced disengagement were real to their lived experience, and it was imperative to acknowledge and recognise each of these lived experiences separately. Each of these sub-themes is supported by several verbatim quotes to demonstrate the academic researchers' lived experiences.

a.i) A lack of being engaged

Within this sub-theme, two main reasons why academic researchers experience a lack of engagement emerged, including being older, established academic researchers who are not used to these stringent processes; and a lack of support by supervisors to students regarding research ethics during the course of these students' studies. According to the participants, the lack of support provided by supervisors are related to their own lack of engagement in research ethics, but the ripple effect of this insufficient support also makes it difficult for students to engage in research ethics.

Several participants referred to older, established researchers who had to comply with relatively new research ethics regulatory rules and procedures. The participants believed these older academic researchers experience a lack of engagement in research ethics regulatory procedures since these procedures are almost foreign to their "usual way of doing things".

Fred stated:

"...the buy-in, the emotive part, the affective part, I think that's missing. And I'm quite new in this field. I can just think about old researchers that has [sic] never been involved in this, I think it's even worse for them..." (T:6:10:5:10).

In agreement, Kayla mentioned:

“Most research was done without even ethical application. So it’s the older generation and they’re not always as connected and informed as the young people might be.” (T:10:30:4:8).

Kayla also said:

“So you might be someone that’s very set in your ways and don’t like change, so now it’s a whole new ethical application process, and you [sic] used to the old way of doing things, and now you feel these people are just being difficult and trying to withhold you from doing research.” (T:10:33-34:16:6).

Laila and Ben referred to their master’s studies conducted several years ago and explained that research ethics approval was not a requirement at that stage. Laila mentioned:

“If I think back, many years ago when I did my masters, ethics wasn’t an issue but, now, it has become quite an important part of any research studies”. (T:11:4-5:18:3).

Ben said:

“...because the last time I did some thing was in nineteen ninety-four, I did my masters. So, for twenty years, no studying, no ethical[sic], no whatever, in any case in those days there was no ethical committees I had to go through, in any case I did my masters...” (T:2:36-37:17:4).

Also, Henry made reference to “earlier days” when the regulation of research ethics was not a requirement when research studies were conducted. He reported:

“When I started here, obviously, close to thirty years ago, research ethics was not an item in terms of...or highlighted as absolutely a necessity to follow. Although I believe a lot of academics had this approach that things had to be done ethically...” (T:8:4:9:15).

Ellen referred to older academic researchers who might experience a lack of engagement in research ethics:

“...if they [older academic researchers] don’t focus or pay attention of all the awareness campaigns and try to understand it and incorporating that into their own research, maybe it makes them a little bit disengaged in terms of being committed and actively being involved in research and doing it the right way.” (T:5:9-10:14:2).

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, a second perspective that emerged in this sub-theme is that a number of participants mentioned that not all supervisors provided the required support for students to obtain research ethics approval for their studies. The data revealed that such supervisors experienced a lack of engagement themselves, but as a consequence of their own lived experience, they make it difficult for students to engage in research ethics as well.

According to Fred, speaking from the view of an ERC member:

“And we can say it’s the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure that, when the application is submitted, that is completed in full. It doesn’t happen.” (T:6:23:12:17).

Laila’s perception of her role as a supervisor, in terms of students’ research ethics clearance applications, was:

“It’s not my work so it’s not that I need to be stressed out about it. It’s not my ethical application. But, yes, I think the students experience it as quite a daunting thing.” (T:11:17:14:18).

In contrast, Ellen regarded her role as a supervisor as follows:

“I think ninety-nine-point-nine percent of students don’t know anything about the ethics. So my role is, firstly, to explain to them the importance of ethics and what it incorporate or includes, and then assisting them with completing the form, and not only just getting the black on white for the process in terms of obtaining ethical clearance but also explaining the importance and why it is important...” (T:5:17:5:14).

In my theoretical field notes of Ellen, I noted the following:

“Ellen also mentioned that some students do not receive the needed support from supervisors. Ellen’s perception was that some supervisors do not engage in the research ethics procedures. Where supervisors do not engage in the research ethics clearance process, the application is submitted for review, before it is on the required standard for approval. The supervisors therefore leave it up to the ERC to provide feedback to students on applications. The lack of engagement in the research ethics process creates additional work for committees.” (F:5:2:5:10).

In my theoretical field notes of Candice, I confirmed that her engagement in research ethics was compromised by her supervisor, who failed to adequately support her in the research ethics approval process:

“When she reflected on her personal lived experience, she explained that her engagement in research ethics were compromised by her supervisor’s inadequate skills to guide her through the research ethics clearance process. To support this view, she indicated that the empowerment of supervisors is crucial to ensure engagement of students in research ethics.” (F:3:1:18:21).

In my personal field notes of Laila, I noted that as a supervisor, she was not enthusiastic about supporting her students in the research ethics application process, thus endorsing the perception that not all academic researchers in their supervisory role provide the needed support to students:

“I noted that Laila made some contradicting statements during the interview which led me to think, that she might have provided me with responses which she supposed would be appropriate. Although she stated that she is engaged in research ethics, she commented during the interview that she did not like supporting post graduate students in the research ethics approval process.” (F:11:3:21:24).

On a number of occasions, I got the impression that several of the participants were tolerant of disengaged “older” social sciences researchers and almost sympathised with them. These seemingly sympathetic participants explained that research ethics regulatory procedures were not always part of these “older” academic researchers’ profession. Therefore, they can understand that they are not enthusiastic about these changes that transpired in terms of research ethics regulation within the ODL institution. These perceptions are echoed in the paragraph below.

In the modern HE landscape, strict research ethics regulation is customary in most HEIs (Rowley, 2014). However, research ethics regulation and oversight were not always part of the academic environment (Sleeboom-Faulkner *et al.*, 2017). It was only from the second half of the twenty-first century that the scope of oversight on human participant research expanded from almost nothing to what is now; a meticulous system of securities and protections (Rice, 2008). Within this ODL institution, formal research ethics regulation was introduced even later. The first formal Policy on Research Ethics within this HEI was approved by Council on the 21st of September 2007 (Institution A, 2016c). Prior to formalising research ethics regulation within the social sciences context, the responsibility fell on the academic researcher and their professional judgement to ensure scientific research was conducted ethically (Clapp *et al.*, 2017; Dingwall, 2012; Haggerty, 2004; Sleeboom-Faulkner *et al.*, 2017).

Supervisors are seen as undisputable sources of knowledge, and their behaviour influences students' behaviour (Arain *et al.*, 2017). Löffström and Pyhältö (2017) state that the role of the supervisor is essential for teaching acceptable practices and codes of conduct. The different facets of supervision observed by students during the course of their research studies also have a significant influence on the ethical behaviour embraced by the student (Löffström, & Pyhältö, 2014). Furthermore, if students observe unethical behaviour from supervisors, it is conceivable that those students may imitate those unethical behaviours (Arain *et al.*, 2017).

This lack of being engaged in research ethics by the supervisors can negatively influence students' engagement in research ethics and their research studies' progress. The participants who experienced a lack of engagement in their capacity as supervisors seemingly withheld their support from students. Without the needed guidance, supervision and support, the postgraduate research environment can be bewildering for certain students (Bagaka *et al.*, 2015). Support from supervisors is therefore needed to help students successfully navigate their research journey. Where supervisors were engaged in research ethics, they supported their students to obtain research ethics clearance.

a.ii) Resistance

Within the context of this study, the sub-theme 'resistance' refers to academic researchers who do not engage in research ethics regulation and actively oppose the regulation of research ethics within the social sciences context. Several participants stated that they were aware of academic researchers who oppose research ethics regulations, and a few alluded to their own resistance.

Henry believed the resistance experienced by some academic researchers is in reaction to the perception that research ethics regulation was forced on them. He stated:

"It was somehow a perception this is forced now, this is something to create work for people, and that approach brought about a bit of negativity in engagement..."
(T:8:10:8:12).

In my theoretical field notes, I noted Mary's perception, which was in agreement with Henry's view:

"She said that researchers' experiences of powerlessness can cause further resistance or disengagement". (F:12:2:10:11).

Anna also made the following observation in her naïve sketch:

“...where people are not used to follow ethical guidelines and are then forced to follow a complicated process only creates resistance to the process”. (N:1:1:25:27).

Kayla shared her observation of one colleague’s resistance to research ethics regulation (the colleague’s perceived anger):

“The professor indicated that he will not apply for ethical clearance again. So he will join other researchers where they have to apply for, he’s not gonna do anything on the application himself.” (T:10:33:1:5).

Laila shared her own feelings of resistance, but also acknowledged that she had no choice but to comply with the research ethics regulatory procedures if she wishes to conduct any research involving human participants. She stated:

“...we need to be engaged, you don’t have a choice, I don’t have a choice, I have to be engaged, I have to spend time and energy on it, but I think there’s a little bit of resistance sometimes just to think, oh, no, now we must work through this process again and I know it’s gonna take a lot of time.” (T:11:16:5:12).

In Fred’s naïve sketch, he referred to the frustration he experiences because of research ethics regulatory processes, despite already being governed by the professional body to which he is affiliated.

“...extreme frustration with the over regulation of aspects that are considered to be standard practice to my professional code of conduct and research protocols.” (N:6:2:3:5).

The perceptions of these participants, or their observations of other academic researchers’ experience of resistance towards the regulation of research ethics, demonstrated that the research ethics regulation process was forced onto them. These academic researchers are aware of the research ethics regulatory procedures, but they do not want to engage. This perception that they had no choice in the matter creates resistance, and these participants therefore push against the research ethics regulatory process. In agreement, several scholars have severely criticised research ethics regulation involving human participants in social sciences, and this regulation is met with unyielding resistance (Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Sheehan *et al.*, 2018).

Their perceptions ranged from resisting the completion of ethical clearance application forms; frustration with the fact that they are not trusted to act ethically in their research projects; and

displaying active measures to circumvent the research ethics application process. McAreavey and Muir (2011) grant that there are scholars who are in support of research ethics regulation, but there is also a cohort of academic scholars who are in definite opposition of research ethics regulation and the mandate that needs to be fulfilled by ERCs. Resistance related to research ethics regulation originates from the predisposition that researchers have integrity, are trustworthy and have intrinsic virtue, thus making the governance of research not only constraining to researchers but also offensive and futile (Mamotte & Wassenaar 2009; Sleeboom-Faulkner *et al.*, 2017; Wassenaar & Mamotte 2012; De Wet, 2010). Hoecht (2011) concurs and states that some academic researchers are of opinion that, as researchers, they are educated professionals with well-developed internalised values supporting correct behaviour. For that reason, they should be trusted to make suitable judgements on ethical aspects of their research; and should they be unsure, they will have the honesty to seek assistance from scholarly peers (Hoecht, 2011). For these researchers, a formalised regulatory process is therefore unjustifiable (Hoecht, 2011). Researchers also resist regulation because they object to spending time and effort on conveying information to bureaucratic committees in the standardised language aligned with the rules and regulations of ERCs (Babb *et al.*, 2017).

Participants who confessed resistance or observed resistance from other academic researchers explained that the current research ethics regulatory system used in the ODL institution was perceived as 'red tape'. Red tape can be understood as a bureaucratic system that forces employees to follow prescribed processes and procedures exactly before something can be done. Academic researchers who resist research ethics regulation therefore object to conforming to the required processes and procedures to obtain research ethics clearance for a proposed research study. However, when these social scientists wish to conduct academic research involving human participants, they need to comply with the required research ethics processes and procedures in order to obtain research ethics clearance (Dingwall, 2012).

a.iii) Burdensome compliance processes

Closely related to academic researchers' awareness and frustration regarding a bureaucratic research ethics regulatory system, which developed because of distrust in academic researchers to persistently conduct ethical research (see Section 6.5.1.2.B), is the widely supported perception that the research ethics regulatory system is a burdensome compliance process. Some of the participants also referred to the broader bureaucratic work environment of the ODL institution within which academic researchers must function. Within this

bureaucratic work environment, the research ethics approval process thus also became a compliance practice.

The following quotes support the participants' perceptions that the research ethics application and approval process is burdensome and compliance-driven.

Although Anna maintained that she is engaged in research ethics, she also acknowledged that she does not enjoy completing the perceived lengthy application forms.

*"I'm not sure whether I'm one hundred percent engaged in getting the forms completed."
(T:1:8:11:13).*

Candice commented:

"...completed all those hundreds forms that they require from you..." (T:3:20:3:5).

Fred perceived the application forms for research ethics clearance as red tape – a hurdle to overcome for his personal research endeavours and for students who need to apply for research ethics clearance. He stated:

"Red tape. It's, every time, another hurdle, another hurdle. As a researcher, I don't see research ethics as an enabling mechanism, and I think it should be because it needs to streamline research and those things. I see it, absolutely, at this stage, in terms of red tape." (T:6:5:5:11).

Later in the interview, Fred also mentioned:

*"And we are frustrating our students as well, applying for that. Why are we these motions and things while there are much more important things in terms of the methodologies that they [sic] going to use and whatever, rather than all these tick boxes and red tape?"
(T:6:8:3:9).*

Ellen bemoaned the burdensome compliance process by referring to the length of the research ethics application form and the time it takes for a research ethics application to be approved. She said:

*"...it's this lengthy application form that you need to complete, and you might not always understand the reasoning why certain information should be included in the form."
(T:5:25-26:18:3).*

She elaborated on her lived experience as an academic researcher and made the following statement:

“So I think it’s the time and energy that one has to invest in ethics, because it’s such a lengthy process, that hinders you.” (T:5:33:8:11).

Also, in her naïve sketch, Ellen wrote:

“The lengthy form to complete to comply for ethics clearance; the long process to get ethics approved...” (N:5:1-2:24:1).

In support, Laila also indicated that the application form takes a long time to complete and the feedback from ERCs is time-consuming. She said:

“Because it takes quite a while to complete the ethical clearance form and to go through the process and to wait for the approval from the committees.” (T:11:8:2:6).

Later in the interview, Laila again mentioned:

“...I also see it as a very lengthy, intense process, a very time-consuming process...” (T:11:15:14:16).

The quotes below support the perceptions of some participants that the research ethics application and approval process is a manifestation of the broader bureaucratic work environment within which academic researchers must function.

Fred stated:

“I think we are working in an institution that’s absolutely bureaucratic, all universities are, and that is fine, but I think, from a research ethics side, let’s see how can we be enablers rather than just giving more red tape, red tape, and red tape?” (T:6:16:2:8).

In Ben’s naïve sketch, he criticised the burdensome compliance processes by referring to various forms that need to be completed by academic researchers. He believed that a lot of the burdens could be alleviated if there can be cross-referencing between the different forms. He wrote:

“...I think is critical is that the bureaucracy between the different application processes, e.g. Ethics, MDSP, permission to access [Institution A] info and R&D leave be streamlined. For the various processes, one is cutting and pasting the Research proposal’s content into different formats.” (N:2:1:16:19).

Ben also made the following comment during the interview:

“So, now, complying with the format of this form, which, for me, is ridiculous, we can just say read paragraph six there...” (T:2:10:7:9).

Laila agreed that there is a lot of repetition in the various forms. The research ethics application form can be shorter, since a lot of the required information is already provided in the research proposal document. The repetition can be avoided by providing the proposal document as an addendum to the research ethics application process.

“So you cannot disengage from it, definitely not. It’s just that you sometimes wish it was only a five-page document, or three pages, and you attach the proposal, and there you go. Why copy, again, everything? So that feels a bit unnecessary sometimes.” (T:11:16-17:16:4).

When the topic of research ethics is raised with academic researchers, the frequent reaction is a roll of eyes and objections to the burdensome research ethics clearance processes (Fujii, 2012). Most of the participants shared their frustration and discontent with the burdensome research ethics application process to obtain research ethics clearance. The participants repeatedly mentioned that the research ethics application process was taxing, long, time-consuming and rigid in nature. The inflexible system created frustration since researchers are required to complete numerous forms, apart from the research ethics clearance application form, prior to conducting research (fieldwork). This view from participants related to the interpretations of Beckmann (2017), Cragoe (2019), Hammersley (2009), Kruger *et al.* (2014), Vitak *et al.* (2017), Wassenaar and Mamotte (2012), who acknowledged that the process of applying for, reviewing, and approving research ethics application for research projects is a time-consuming procedure, frequently slowing down research progress.

After academic researchers submit research ethics applications to the ERC, they have to wait for extended periods before they receive feedback certifying approval or requesting clarifications or revisions on a number of aspects identified in the application (Anderson & DuBois, 2012; Beckmann, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012:271; Wassenaar & Slack, 2016:307). Lengthy turnaround times also seem customary as ERC meetings are held on a monthly basis under the best of circumstances (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012).

According to Doyle *et al.* (2010) and Clapp *et al.* (2017), the function of ERC echoes the administrative, compliance-driven environment in which they operate, stipulating numerous details that must be adhered to, thus making the research ethics application process a

hindrance for academic researchers. The recurring need voiced by participants also included the need for systems to be streamlined to create an enabling research environment rather than creating a hindering experience. Participants experienced frustration with the rigidity of the various processes and shared their perplexity as to why cross-referencing between forms and processes was not possible. This stance need is supported by Wassenaar and Slack (2016), who stated that ERCs should refine and streamline rigid administrative and compliance-driven governing and maximise efficiency.

b) Insufficient information available

Within the overarching theme of acknowledged facets that hinder engagement in research ethics, I identified the sub-theme 'insufficient information available'. The two sub-themes that I identified included 'unawareness resulting in time delays in research ethics approval processes' and 'engaged but unable to meet the sought-after requirements'. Nevertheless, the two sub-themes are distinct and merited separate discussions.

b.i) Unawareness resulting in time delays in research ethics approval processes

Several of the participants indicated that the lack of information they faced in their research journeys, specifically when they were applying for research ethics approval, contribute to their disengagement in research ethics. This disengagement was caused by unawareness, which resulted in time delays to obtain research ethics approval. The perception of 'unawareness' by participants was twofold. First, the perception exists that ERC members are ill-informed, unequipped, and poorly prepared to review research ethics applications. Second, supervisors are ignorant of the research ethics application process and are unable to support their students effectively.

The quotes below support the perceptions that ERC members are ill-informed, unequipped, and poorly prepared to review research ethics applications.

During the semi-structured interview, Mary, in her capacity as ERC member, stated that not all committee members had the required knowledge or experience to effectively review research ethics applications. She shared that research ethics training (specifically for the review process of applications) should be obtained from an expert. From the quote below, it can also be concluded that, according to her, there is no suitable research ethics expert within the department. She stated:

“...with an expert from outside the department, nie [not] the blind leading the blind in the department.” (T:12:60:14:15).

In her naïve sketch, Ellen made the following observation:

“...the limited knowledge of some colleagues who reviews ethics applications and then make uninformed/incorrect reviews.” (N:5:2:1:2).

In the naïve sketch that Mary wrote, she said:

“...I experienced some difficulty in that I am doing a mixed method study and submitted one research ethics application. The feedback that I received was that I will have to submit two, one for each phase of the study. I would have liked to have known this prior to going to all the trouble to submitting an extremely lengthy document for both phases initially.” (N:12:1:21:26).

The theoretical field note I made after my interview with Candice reflects:

“Candice also mentioned that she considered information being available, including documentation, transparent procedures and clarity regarding feedback or turn-around times from ERC as vital aspects for engagement in research ethics.” (F:3:1:21:24).

The second perception upheld by participants is that supervisors are ignorant of the research ethics application process and, to this end, they are unable to support their students effectively.

Candice upheld that supervisors need to be informed to assist students in research ethics applications. She stated:

“...empowerment, in the first instance, of the supervisor, him- or herself, to fully understand what that whole process entails so that he or she can be in a position to really guide the student and reduce the frustrations...” (T:3:14:9:14).

Later in the interview, Candice again referred to the importance of informed supervisors to assist students in the research ethics application processes. She mentioned:

“...empowerment of supervisors, for me, is key in terms of the guiding the students so that they can be engaged during the process and having information available on what the process entails, approximate timeframes, so that the student can also plan their work.” (T:3:33-34:14:1).

Likewise, Denise also indicated that some supervisors do not have the required knowledge to sufficiently assist students in research ethics-related application procedures:

“...I feel some of the supervisors are also not empowered with the necessary knowledge to can assist their students in the ethical clearance process.” (T:4:13:1:4).

Ellen also agreed with Candice and Denise, but added that such supervisors leave it up to the student to complete the form, and the ERC should guide the student through the research ethics clearance process:

“It seems like supervisors don’t engage in the research ethics procedure. The students will rather complete the form and the supervisor will not take time to go through it thoroughly and to see if everything is completed, just sign off and send it through for review, because they think the committee will provide feedback and the student can incorporate.” (T:5:22:5:9).

Participants were of the opinion that ERC members provide incorrect information regarding application procedures and irrelevant or incorrect feedback on research ethics applications. In accord with these perceptions, Braun *et al.* (2020), Davies (2020), Israel (2017), Kruger *et al.* (2014), Wassenaar and Mamotte (2012) denote that some academic researchers believe ERCs are not competent in the review of the technical aspects of a study, or even capable of evaluating the ethical facets of a study. This ignorance results in unsuitable feedback on applications and subsequent delays in the research ethics clearance process (Wassenaar & Mamotte 2012). In the absence of competent and adequately trained ERC members, social science methodologies can be misinterpreted or go unnoticed, which can be important features for proper research ethics review, as well as for social sciences as a field of study (Israel, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012).

In addition, ERC members who are not adequately trained can feel incompetent and hesitant to approve complicated applications, even if it is well-designed, furthered by fear of exposure to risks for themselves and participants (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012). Some commentators have also speculated that ERC members rely on their intuition instead of evaluating research ethics applications scientifically (Anderson & DuBois, 2012). ERC should therefore explain their decisions in terms that are clear to all parties involved by using simplistic language with emphasis on substantive ethical concerns and considerations. The ERC should substantiate the requested amendments in the feedback communication (Clapp *et al.*, 2017; Henry *et al.*, 2016).

Ells (2011), Israel (2017) and Kruger *et al.* (2014) support participants' perception that ERCs sometimes provide inaccurate information on research ethics application processes and irrelevant or incorrect feedback. While it is reasonable and expected that small modifications and changes might be needed for research ethics applications prior to approval, dealings with the ERC can be tedious, especially when the ERC requests clarification of information that might seem obvious, or information that is not relevant to what the academic researcher intends to accomplish (Ells, 2011; Israel, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014).

Without the needed support, students are unable to complete application forms correctly to obtain research ethics approval. According to the Committee on the Conduct of Science (1989), younger or developing academic researchers learn about the values and methods of scientific researchers from more experienced academic researchers. According to this committee, the failure of an academic researcher to pass on knowledge to younger or developing academic researchers (e.g. students on ethical research) significantly diminish their contribution to the progression of the scientific study area (Committee on the conduct of science, 1989).

According to Löfström and Pyhältö (2014), students' learning is firmly entrenched in the guiding behaviours of the supervisor, and these teachings should include the advancement of ethical behaviour in the scientific arena. Löfström and Pyhältö (2012) also uphold that the ethical practices demonstrated by an individual can be understood as the demonstration of their ethical principles. Therefore, with the supervision of masters' and doctoral students, the supervisor has the opportunity to guide students to ascertain and find resolutions to questions in an ethically sustainable manner (Löfström, & Pyhältö, 2012). The findings by Arain *et al.* (2017) confirm that when students witness ethical behaviour by supervisors, they are inclined to develop their moral character, to some extent, by imitating the supervisor's ethical behaviour. However, as mentioned earlier, the opposite is also true. When students observe unethical behaviour by supervisors, it is conceivable that those students may imitate those unethical behaviours as well (Arain *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, when a supervisor fails to support and guide a student to obtain research ethics clearance, a message is conveyed that research ethics in scientific research is not important. Furthermore, the student may also regard research ethics as insignificant – mirroring the supervisor's behaviours.

The participants also mentioned that since some supervisors did not have the necessary knowledge of research ethics procedures, they rely on the ERC to provide guidance and feedback to students on research ethics applications. Academic researchers, including supervisors, should realise that to place the responsibility of ethical considerations of a

research study on the ERC is a defective and ill-advised approach and will result in delayed approval and an array of enquiries (Wassenaar & Slack, 2016). If the supervisor fails to support the student, and the student does not receive constructive feedback from the ERC, the research ethics clearance process will be extremely taxing.

b.ii) Engaged but unable to meet the sought-after requirements

Several participants shared a sense of powerlessness with the research ethics application process because of their inability to meet the sought-after requirements, despite their efforts to do so. These participants indicated that they were engaged in research ethics and wanted to follow the correct procedures to obtain ethics clearance for their studies, but it was tough. The participants made efforts to follow the required procedures, but explained that it was challenging since the processes and procedures are not clear, and they did not know how to satisfy the ERCs' requirements.

Some participants also indicated that although they wanted to follow the correct procedures to obtain research ethics approval, no information was available where research ethics applications should be submitted or who can be consulted in cases of uncertainty regarding the application. In other instances, the participants shared their frustration with the rigid approach followed by ERCs. These participants felt that they were actively engaged in the research ethics process, and they were transparent about their planned research activities, but they were hindered in the process because of the ERCs' uncompromising management style. The participants' lived experiences are supported by the following quotes:

Candice wanted to ensure that her research study was ethically sound, but she found it difficult to obtain the needed information to do so. She explained:

"...for me, it was more a process of running from pillar to post trying to understand what do I do next? Where do I obtain the forms? Who do I submit the forms to for the ethical clearance process?" (T:3:12:13:18).

At a later stage in the interview, Candice added:

"...the absence or the lack of information on what you, as a student, are supposed to do..." (T:3:22:3:6).

Similarly, Ben also expressed the need for adequate information to comply with the required research ethics processes. He said:

“So critical knowledge of the process, information on the process, who’s [sic] the contact people, that’s critical for me. But, if you don’t have contacts, forget it.” (T:2:27:10:14).

These perceptions were confirmed with Ben’s observational field note:

“One of the big challenges Ben experienced was the uncertainty of what the process entailed to obtain research ethics approval. He explained his frustration by stating that it was unclear who could be contacted for assistance or where to submit the application forms. He mentioned that it would be even more challenging for students from outside. He repeatedly mentioned the importance of having clear communication channels to assist academic researchers.” (F:2:1:21:25).

According to Ellen, it is a stressful event for an academic researcher to submit a research ethics application to an ERC because ERCs are perceived as being strict, and no certainty exists that an application will be favourably considered. Ellen said:

“...I know the stresses and concerns and fears when handing in application...” (T:5:25:2:4).

Ellen also explained that although she was making all efforts to meet the research ethics application requirements and tried to incorporate the requested amendments from the ERC, her application was referred back more than once because of the strict management style and adherence guidelines of the ERC. She said:

“...it’s this load of information that should be included, it’s been sent back for minor things you don’t understand why, and it might hinder your progress, because it takes a long time to get feedback on the application, and it might be referred back once or twice.” (T:5:26:5:11).

During the semi-structured interview, Fred stated:

“Rejection, for instance, if there’s one signature not on the form, it’s rejected. It places the student back for one month, because the committee’s sitting once a month.” (T:6:19:15:19).

Fred expressed his frustration since an application was referred back because an outdated application form was used. For Fred, the applicant demonstrated engagement since they tried to adhere to the policies and procedures, given that research ethics clearance was sought. Yet because of the ERC’s bureaucratic management style, the “mistake” of using an outdated

application form (requiring the same details of the study protocol) resulted in the application being referred back. He voiced his frustration as follows:

“...let me give you an example, you will submit something and then there’s a new template. A template. If you look at the templates, there are questions asked and they will repeat a very similar question...” (T:6:5:12:17).

Mary referred to her experience as a new member of an ERC, and the uncertainty she experienced in the evaluation of research ethics applications. Even in the capacity as an “insider”, uncertainty exists. This perception is demonstrative of the confusion academic researchers experience when they try to obtain research ethics approval:

“Research ethics applications. What I don’t understand, and perhaps this is also just where I’m from and worked in the past, it felt to me as if I’m learning with trial and error. So here’s a [sic] ethics proposal, I’ve never seen one in my life, I’m from the private sector, I don’t know what you’re talking about, but apply your mind and complete this form, evaluate it for us by completing this form, which is fine but there’s an element of a certain standard that is acceptable and that is not acceptable. So, when I started getting ethical applications, it felt to me like now I must set my own bar as to what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, which is fine. The only problem is that I do that by trial and error”. (T:12:2:2:19).

These experiences were also confirmed in my personal field notes of Gina:

“Gina was hesitant to be totally honest and open when the voice recorder was on. This was specifically true for aspects she thought could be regarded as negative feedback. I had to reassure her that the information will be kept confidential and that pseudonyms would be used for all participants. After this reassurance she more openly shared her lived experience, including the challenges she experienced to engage in research ethics. She explained that the research ethics approval process was difficult and that she was not always sure what the ERC wanted”. (T:7:3:21:27).

During the interview with Anna, she referred to an incident at the ERC meeting, where she served as a committee member. Anna was aware that a specific research ethics application took a long time for a student to complete. For Anna, the time spent to complete the application comprehensively is demonstrative of the student wishing to meet the sought-after requirements. The frustration Anna felt related to the double standards demonstrated in ERCs. If applications are not comprehensive enough, the application is referred back, yet when the applicant makes every effort to meet the required standards, such applications are also criticised.

“...I felt extremely upset in the ethical meeting because there was a comment that this application is an overkill, that it’s too long, and I felt, damn, this student spent six months on this application, how can you now be too lazy to read through this application?” (T:1:36-37:16:3).

In her capacity as student, Gina felt despondent to continue her qualification, since she struggled to obtain research ethics clearance, despite all her efforts (revising her application more than once in order to meet the requirements of the ERC). During the interview with Gina, she made the following comment:

“...when I started the process of ethical clearance, I am going to be brutally honest, I nearly gave up...” (T:7:11:13:14).

I noted the following theoretical field note after my interview with Henry, which confirmed the lived experiences of the research participants:

“Henry mentioned that he understands the importance of research ethics and that he need not be convinced, but that he can almost experience empathy for frustrated researchers with the research ethics clearance process. He said that the expectations are very high, and the clearance process is rigid.” (F:8:2:15:18).

Despite the efforts they made to demonstrate their commitment to conducting ethical research, these academic researchers found it difficult to meet the sought-after requirements. The researchers’ inability to meet these requirements caused frustration and created anxiety to submit applications. Social sciences researchers feel frustrated and are reluctant to share their proposed research studies with ERCs because ERCs could reject their envisioned research topic, methodology, or both (Hedgecoe, 2016; Iphofen, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, even if applications are not entirely rejected, applicants might face the task of addressing major revisions expected from ERCs. These stipulations must be adhered to should the applicant wish to obtain research ethics clearance. Therefore, numerous researchers are justifiably hesitant to query the decisions made by ERCs because of the distress that such an action might adversely affect their future research ethics applications (Henry *et al.*, 2016).

One participant provided some insight into the frustrations she experienced in her capacity as a supervisor. Her student demonstrated devotion and thoroughness with the research ethics application and spent a lot of time to ensure that the application was of exceptional quality. The feedback received from one reviewer was that the application was “overkill” and “too lengthy”. Another participant who served on an ERC at the time of the interview explained that she was not sure where the “bar” was of acceptable applications. These examples further

demonstrate that obtaining research ethics clearance was difficult as the presumed sought-after requirements were unreliable, inconsistent and susceptible to fluctuation. This concern voiced by participants is echoed by Israel (2015), who expressed his bafflement by stating that academic researchers are trapped between their obvious commitment to ethical conduct and ERCs' indifferent governing approach to which researchers are expected to conform. Several scholars also bemoaned the discrepancies existing among ERCs in their review processes, and the varying perceptions held in terms of their exact responsibilities, which cause frustration for researchers and contribute to the doubt they have regarding ERCs' ability to ensure the ethical conduct of research studies (Doyle *et al.*, 2010; Henry *et al.*, 2016; Kruger *et al.*, 2014).

The participants demonstrated efforts to engage in research ethics – they wanted to obtain research ethics clearance but experienced uncertainty regarding the process, whom they were supposed to contact, or where to get the required application forms. Wassenaar and Slack (2016) advise research ethics applicants to download and check their institution's research ethics policy and present clearance application forms well in advance of the planned submission date to ensure that all required information is provided. However, participants stated this information was not available to them or that they were unable to find it. The assumption was thus that the needed information was not easily accessible if it was indeed available. Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail (2011) maintain that the inaccessibility of information exacerbates the low quality of students' studies.

One participant mentioned an application that was criticised because it was completed on an outdated application form. Seemingly, this is not a new obstacle among researchers as Wassenaar and Slack (2016) warn that using an outdated form will result in frustration and delays. Participants also expressed frustration in unnecessary time delays because applications were referred back for minor corrections.

Another frequently mentioned concern among academic researchers is that the review of research ethics applications is not always consistent. The same research ethics application might be approved at one ERC, but might be referred back for clarification or revisions at another ERC. These observed inconsistencies exist since various ERCs use different norms to evaluate applications (Wassenaar & Slack, 2016). Differences in ERC processes and decision-making are well-documented. Such dissimilarities result in frustration among academic researchers and add to uncertainty about these committees' ability to safeguard research studies' ethical conduct (Henry *et al.*, 2016).

c) **Conflicting responsibilities and multiple role demands**

Several participants indicated that they had conflicting responsibilities and multiple role demands, which influenced their engagement in research ethics. Some participants referred to work overload, potentially caused by administrative burdens or because they were pursuing their postgraduate qualifications part-time. Other participants indicated that they had difficulty maintaining a work-life balance, and they simply do not have sufficient time to engage in research ethics. Yet another view that was upheld is the pressure employees face to deliver research outputs. The perception was that academic researchers thus become results-driven, and the quality and integrity of such research undertakings could be compromised. These lived experiences are supported by the quotes below:

Anna explained:

"...we sometimes feel that we don't have enough hours in the day to cover all the responsibilities. And this is an activity that takes a lot of hours but it's not recognised formally by [Institution A]." (T:1:9-10:18:4).

Ben made the following statement during the interview:

"...you work fulltime, you sit eight hours in your office and you run around, and you must do this bureaucracy..." (T:2:15-16:18:1).

Gina similarly shared:

"...being a working person and being a working parent and being a working mother and being a working community person, you've got personal life and then you've got work life, so you need to balance the two and then, thirdly, you are a student, so you need to balance between the three..." (T:7:18-19:13:2).

During the interview, Kayla explained that she finds it challenging to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Specifically, as an academic employee, she believes that the number of administrative tasks she must manage is increasing. She said:

"Time is always a thing, no-one has time, work-life balance, there's no such thing, currently, 'cause of all the administrative stuff that's already being loaded onto the academics." (T:10:37:1:5).

In Gina's naïve sketch, she wrote:

"Individuals are not fully engaged in their studies, due to work demands." (N:7:2:12:12).

Kayla shared the following in her naïve sketch:

“Based on my own experience, firstly, I would say the lack of work-life-balance.”
(N:10:3:9:9).

During the semi-structured interview, Ellen explained the role conflict she experienced as follows:

“...I think, for a lot of people, is the time, and we’re already so overloaded with administrative burdens and the university really pushes you for research outputs and to just perform, perform, perform, and provide outputs and articles and now the extra burden to get ethical clearance and to engage in the ethical clearance...” (T:5:32:11:19).

As a student and employee at the ODL institution, Gina experienced role conflict because the same institution that encourages employees to further their qualifications expects the staff to deliver on job requirements. Gina thus felt confused about whether her academic research or other work duties should take priority. She said:

“...the institution is telling me that, by this year, you should have been finished your qualification. But, on the other side, the employer says your work has to be done, although they have granted me permission to do my qualification.” (T:7:28:1:6).

Gina’s lived experience was also confirmed in my theoretical field notes:

“Another challenge for her was the role conflict she experienced. She explained that she works for the university and she need to deliver services to her employer; however, she is also a student at this university who expects her to complete her degree in a certain amount of time. She is therefore conflicted, and unsure which aspect should receive more attention.” (F:7:2:7:10).

Participants also highlighted the pressure to produce research outputs as part of academic employees’ performance agreements and as a key measurement for promotion.

During the interview, Ellen explained that it is difficult to engage in research ethics since it is a lengthy application process. Academic researchers are continuously under pressure to deliver research outputs to meet their performance criteria. The lengthy process thus delays academic researchers in meeting their performance outcomes on time.

“...I think a lot of people try to make it as quick as possible just to get the research done, get something out, get an article output so that you can still get a three in your IPMS...”
(T:5:33:2:6).

Yet again, Neill believed that younger academic employees might be more susceptible to questionable research practices, since they are driven to gain research output points as a pathway to career progression. Neill made the following comment during the interview:

“...when emerging scholars, when they fight for promotion, for example, and those units become very important, for them, the temptation is real, the temptation could be there to cut corners...” (T:13:20:13:18).

The participants explained that they had numerous responsibilities requiring attention, and these commitments were sometimes in conflict. Academic employees in HE have an extensive variety of work tasks and roles (Kyvik, 2013b). They have to focus their efforts on different areas of their work, including teaching, research, knowledge exchange (Boyd & Smith, 2016), service delivery (Edgar & Geare, 2013), and community service (Stewart, 2007; Shaw, 2009). The fact that the research ethics application process is a time-consuming activity contributes to the pressure experienced by academic researchers. Therefore, not engaging in research ethics can be an effort to manage multiple work demands. Some participants experienced work overload, while others explained that they found it difficult to balance their work responsibilities and private lives. Challenges related to work-life balance are evident considering that the majority of postgraduate students (like several of the participants) pursue their qualifications as a part-time activity that they fit into evenings and weekends, and occasionally on days off from work (Mouton *et al.*, 2015). In addition, they face challenges such as family commitments, work obligations, finances and others, which can all influence their successes (Abiddin *et al.*, 2011).

The participants explained that academic researchers might not engage in research ethics since it is a time-consuming task, and their primary objective is to produce research outputs. Academic employees must further their research skills and publish peer-reviewed articles in international journals, as their career advancement opportunities are dependent on it (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014).

Several participants voiced the reality of these conflicting responsibilities. These numerous tasks, which are embedded in the role of an academic researcher, inevitably create tensions in terms of the time and devotion that can be afforded to each of these sub-roles (Kyvik, 2013b). Frequently, academic employees complain about the trouble they have in an effort to complete a single task properly, due to this task overload (Kyvik, 2013a). While attempting to manage the different responsibilities, these participants felt that it was difficult to engage in research ethics.

d) Distance education and challenges of control

The participants had divergent views on whether differences exist between the engagement experienced by academic researchers in research ethics at an ODL institution or the engagement experienced among academic researchers employed at a residential university.

During the semi-structured interview, Denise stated:

“Remember, whether you are at a [sic] ODL environment or at a normal tuition institute, all of them is [sic] the same. It all depends on how do you treat your human participants.” (T:4:25:1:5).

Fred explained his perception as follows:

“Research ethics, whether you have a contact university, whether it’s ODeL, it doesn’t matter.” (T:6:12:11:13).

Anna shared her lived experience by referring to her responsibility as a supervisor. As a supervisor, she needs to make sure that her students conduct reputable studies, but because of the geographical separation, she has limited capability to oversee or intervene if she is concerned about the study’s ethical aspects. She said:

“I can’t promise that they are actually doing what they said they would do, and that causes feelings of guilt in me sometimes because sometimes I have my doubts but I can’t go to Ethiopia or I can’t go to Kenya.” (T:1:12:4:9).

I also confirmed Anna’s lived experience with the theoretical field notes I took after the interview:

“Anna expressed some uneasiness when she referred to the fact that she had very little control over the ethical protocols followed by students, since they are geographically removed from her. She experienced some distress because of her inability to oversee research conduct of students or intervene if ethical transgressions were taking place hundreds of miles away because in all likelihood, she would not be aware if wrongdoings took place. This uncertainty of student conduct causes some disengagement in research ethics processes of students’ studies.” (F:1:1:23:29).

Henry explained his view as follows:

“...once your ethical clearance process has been completed, then the onus is on the student to adhere to that process. I don’t see any follow-up, whether it’s done, throughout

the process. There's no committee to report to. It's more did the individual adhere to the ethical approach he or she intended to follow?" (T:8:6:3:11).

During the semi-structured interview, Ben stated:

"If I go out tomorrow, like currently I'm doing, and I interview and I mess up the process within my permission, who will know, except if that person feels offended nobody will know. I might have been unethical in my whole approach but, if it's not coming out, nobody will know. So do we put a lot of emphasis then on the why and the how to be ethical or the documentary process of tick-box forms go?" (T:2:14:7:17).

Laila made the following comment regarding students' experiences related to the ethical aspects of research studies that exist because of the mode of delivery of teaching and learning:

"So I think it's a very clinical process, in a sense, with most of our students because of the fact that we don't have a lot of personal contact with them, and you cannot really discuss these things and get their emotions and get their feelings around it." (T:11:28:1:7).

In the naïve sketch of Mary, she wrote:

"It is important that I provide an absolute ethical example of how to do research as well as explain to them clearly what research ethics is and how they are supposed to complete their assignments ethically. This is difficult as I have limited time to engage students on a face to face level and thus it is difficult for me to influence them to such a degree that research ethics also becomes a value-driven motivation for their behaviour". (N:12:1:16:21).

Some participants maintained that "research ethics is research ethics" irrespective of whether the academic research is conducted at an ODL institution or residential university. In their minds, engagement in research ethics should not be influenced by the pedagogical approach (teaching and learning approach followed) at a given HEI. For these participants, the essence of academic researchers' engagement in research ethics is determined by the ethical treatment of research participants and not the HEI with which the academic researcher is affiliated.

However, other participants felt that the geographical separation between the student and supervisor, typical to an ODL institution, had a negative influence on their engagement in research ethics. The geographical separation between the supervisor and the student who

conducts the study, including the fieldwork, creates a sense of loss of control for the supervisor. The supervisor can either be unaware of ethical transgressions or suspect questionable conduct, but they cannot intervene due to geographical separation. Supervisors' inability to oversee geographically separated students' fieldwork creates anxiety for these academic employees. In addition, some participants believed that students cannot comprehend and engage in the value of the ethical aspects of research and instead simply go through the application process because it is expected. The comprehensive interaction needed to explain the value of ethical research is not feasible at an ODL institution.

Finally, some participants felt that ethical research is not dependent on the delivery mode of education, but rather on the academic researcher's integrity. These participants explained that academic researchers could obtain research ethics approval from an ERC, but such approval does not automatically imply that this researcher will follow the protocol that was approved by the ERC. Furthermore, it is not possible to oversee all studies once these applications are approved, due to a lack of capacity. Capacity constraints are true for ODL and residential universities. The ethical conduct during the study is ultimately dependent on the academic researcher's ethical orientation.

Considering that frequent face-to-face meetings are not possible in DE contexts, contact with students is restricted to email, telephone and other communication modalities (Erichsen, Bolliger & Halupa, 2014; Mouton *et al.*, 2015). Supervisors thus have limited insight into whether the student was engaged in ethical research. Close monitoring of students under these conditions is therefore complicated (Bezuidenhout, 2015; Mouton *et al.*, 2015). The geographical separation between the supervisor and student requires the supervisor to trust that students will conduct ethical research.

e) Contentious part of academic employees' work

Several participants either previously served on an ERC or were serving on one of the ERCs at the stage when the interviews were conducted. These participants indicated that serving on ERCs were a contentious part of academic employees' work. Participants indicated that ERC work is emotional labour and frequently not appreciated by academic researchers. In addition, participants indicated that the work performed by ERC members could potentially cause interpersonal conflict.

Neill explained:

“I had decided to resign from the committee because that emotional work just became too difficult for me.” (T:13:18:8:11).

Ellen believed that because of the decentralised approach in research ethics regulation that is followed at the ODL institution, the sub-ERCs serve a smaller proportion of academic researchers, thus compromising the anonymity of the reviewers. Because of the compromised anonymity, the reviewers of sub-ERCs are hesitant to provide honest and constructive feedback for fear of interpersonal conflict.

“...unfortunately in the community that we in, it’s such a small community, that people are sometimes...they feel personally critiqued if all their students’ application [sic] has [sic] been referred back and, although it’s anonymous in terms of the review, it’s not, in the real world, always anonymous, it’s always people talk in the hallways and they hear rumours of who’s the reviewer, and people might feel hesitant on the other side in order to provide constructive feedback of sending something back because of the fear that it’s your friend’s things that you send back and they might be upset that you had send [sic] it back.” (T:5:27:1:16).

Laila believed academic researchers consider negative feedback on their research ethics applications as personal criticisms, and they are unable to remain objective and understand the actual purpose of such reviews. She felt this has a negative influence on engagement in research ethics:

“They see it as a personal attack on me and not my work, as such. So I think that might also influence the engagement in the process, that there’s a bit negativity...” (T:11:14:14:17)

“...people see it as a personal thing and not as it’s my ethical clearance. It’s seen as me, as a person, is going to be scrutinised or peer reviewed.” (T:11:13:6:10).

Later in the interview, Laila also commented:

“...I think, within [Institution A], a lot of the procedures that we follow opens [sic] up a lot of criticism that can be directed to a person, and the same applies to the ethical process within our system, that everything that you do say, regarding an ethical clearance application, is often seen as a personal attack against a person.” (T:11:34:5:13).

Kayla believed that academic researchers are evaluated and judged by their colleagues, and applicants' reputations can influence how an application is considered by ERCs. She stated:

"People give people labels. You are given a label. And, based on your label, you are reviewed accordingly." (T:10:20:4:6).

While sharing her experience as an ERC member, Anna indicated that reviewing applications for research ethics approval is a contentious issue and often results in interpersonal conflict. She also shared that reviewers sometimes abuse their power to get back at colleagues:

"...people are sometimes...they are using this to get to one another and it's causing conflict." (T:1:13:16:18)

"...whenever we discuss an ethical application, it turns into a huge fight. So, as an academic, I feel there's a lack of respect between academics." (T:1:14:5:8).

In my interview with Ellen, she came to a very similar conclusion regarding the biased reviews among ERC members because of interpersonal conflict. She said:

"...in our department specifically, unfortunately, there's [sic] a lot of people who has [sic] internal conflict with each other and that definitely plays a role, and that's not ethical that it should play a role but it does play a role, it's only human that it plays a role in your evaluation of another person's work." (T:5:31-32:15:4).

During the semi-structured interview, Denise also stated:

"...the conflict and people that doesn't [sic] have time for one another, people that don't respect one another..." (T:4:35:16:18)

"...in this department because then it result [sic] in conflict and miscommunication with one another, poor, in my opinion, not necessarily constructive feedback." (T:4:18:13:17).

In Anna's naïve sketch, she made several comments regarding the interpersonal conflict that she observed in her work environment:

"It leads to a lot of conflict among staff members, bullying and grievances." (N:1:2:17:18)

"I am often worried about the conflict my feedback is going to cause in the department. Many academics do not understand how the peer review process work. They see it as a personal attack. I have also witnessed a number of times that staff members try to 'get back at each other' during the next round of evaluations by finding fault where there

is none. I don't like the personal feelings involved and if I could I would like to escape the whole ethical application process, to avoid the conflict." (N:1:2:19:24).

The theoretical field notes I took from my interview with Kayla also confirmed that she regarded the work related to research ethics as a contentions part of academic employees' work.

"Kayla raised the concern that the research ethics review processes and procedures are not always fair and consistently applied. She explained that if a researcher has a good network the process is sometimes quickened. The opposite also applies, so the process can be delayed if the researcher is not as well connected. In addition, people are labelled and as a researcher applying for research ethics clearance, the application are treated in accordance with that person's label." (F:10:2:12:16).

In my theoretical field notes of Denise, I observed:

"The majority of the concerns raised by her was within the capacity of the departmental ERC. She experienced the miscommunication and conflict within the committee as constraining aspects for engagement in research ethics. She also raised the concern that the feedback the committee offered to researchers were not always constructive feedback. Denise indicated that the conflict within the department was tiring, a cause of stress or even burnout of employees and that it was dividing the department." (F:4:1-2:29:5).

In my theoretical field notes of Anna, I noted the following, which serves supports her perspective:

"She referred to examples and experiences she had, which she perceived as negative. This included negative relationships between supervisors (submitting research ethics applications of their students) and committee members; and among committee members." (F:1:2:3:7).

Neill's lived experience was supported in the theoretical field notes I wrote after my interview with him:

"Neil said that serving on the committee was stressful and a negative experience, because of the negative interaction he had with colleagues who resist the research ethics processes and procedures. His experience was that committee members are treated with antagonism and suspicion by researchers." (F:13:2:2:6).

ERC members are required to review research ethics applications to ensure that once the research ethics applications are approved, these academic researchers can conduct their

scientific studies in an ethically sound manner. As committee members, they are required to provide feedback to the ERC on applications, who in turn provide feedback to applicants. The purpose of the feedback is to alert researchers of possible aspects of studies that might not be ethically sound research practices, and assist researchers in refining their research studies to ensure ethical rigour throughout the study. Planned research projects involving human participants should be submitted to ERCs, and the ERC's task is to review these applications meticulously and in detail, with the objective of protecting potential participants from harm that could have been avoided (Beckmann, 2017; Davis *et al.*, 2012; Heale & Shorten, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014; Rice & Bernard, 2018; Weiss, 2015). It is within this capacity that participants experienced discomfort and voiced that it was a contentious part of their work.

Some of the participants indicated a lack of mutual respect between ERC members when deliberating on applications. McAreavey and Muir (2011) confirmed that ERCs members, at times, find it difficult to work together. Others voiced their concern that when they provided candid and earnest feedback as an ERC member, it is perceived as personal attacks rather than objective reviews of research ethics applications. Because of the potential tension arising from earnest feedback, ERC members are hesitant to provide constructive feedback, including notating ethical concerns with proposed studies. This should be a cause for alarm, since this is in stark contrast with ERCs' mandate.

Confirming some participants' lived experiences, other participants admitted that ERC members are sometimes more critical of research ethics applications of certain colleagues and more lenient towards research ethics applications of other staff members. These responses substantiate the perception that the research ethics review process is sometimes subjective and biased in nature. This fear is echoed by the observation made by Van den Brink and Benschop (2012), that in academia, who you know and with whom you cooperate is important for your status and career.

Therefore, the custodians of ERC portfolios find themselves in circumstances of division, mistrust, and antagonism (Allen, 2008; Israel, 2015). The efforts made to fulfil their duties as reviewers within an ERC were thus questioned and criticised. Allen (2008) similarly reflected that a culture of distrust and cynicism between academic researchers and ERC exists. One of the participants eventually resigned from a committee because of the emotional labour involved.

Most of the participants indicated that the review process was a cause for interpersonal conflict among ERC members and between committee members and research ethics applicants.

Given that research ethics applicants frequently experience feedback as personal attacks rather than an objective evaluation of their proposed research studies, it is comprehensible that interpersonal conflict will arise. Horn (2013) observed that the setting within which academic researchers operates is very competitive and sometimes antagonism, hostility, and unfriendliness arise between colleagues. Several participants also said they found the review process practiced in the university currently was used by some committee members to abuse their power within the committee to 'get back at someone'.

6.5.1.4 An individualistic and personal ethical predisposition as a prerequisite for engagement in research ethics

The theme 'an individualistic and personal ethical predisposition as a prerequisite for engagement in research ethics' was categorised into three sub-themes. These included 'to transform an academic researcher's engagement in research ethics necessitates an authentic and personal mindset'; 'cognitive and emotive realisation of the importance of research ethics'; and 'engagement in research ethics encompasses the entire research process'. Each of these sub-themes is discussed below and is supported by verbatim quotes. However, before the onset of the discussions, I need to explain that although the subsequent sub-themes may seem familiar and remind the reader of findings and discussions from Section 6.5.1.1 (the nature of engagement in research ethics), definite differences exist. Section 6.5.1.1 gave the reader insight into what participants considered or understood as engagement in research ethics. Section 6.5.1.4 (this section) describes the requirements or fundamentals for academic researchers to become engaged in research ethics. The following sub-themes, therefore, focused on these aspects specifically.

a) To transform an academic researcher's engagement in research ethics necessitates an authentic and personal mindset

Most participants believed that ethical research and being a responsible academic researcher should form part of the individual's identity. This theme is supported by the following quotes of participants' lived experiences.

Neill stated during the interview:

"...having an ethical mind-set or an ethical disposition, and I think, when I'm aware of ethics, when I'm conscious of it, when it's always top of mind..." (T:13:7:10:13).

Jenny believed that for an academic researcher to be engaged in research ethics, the person should have an ethics orientation. She thus saw engagement in research ethics as a holistic approach to research and other undertakings. She said:

“So ethical research becomes, very much, the foundation of everything that you are doing...” (T:9:4:13:15)

“...you, as a person, have got to be beyond reproach, people have to trust you so that they can allow you to come into a space where they participate in your research. So it’s not just your work, it’s also you, as a person, you have to be seen as an ethical person...” (T:9:6:1:7).

Anna also claimed that engagement in research ethics is possible when the academic researcher considers their proposed studies from an approach as a person throughout the research. It is not merely a task that should be adhered to. She stated:

“It’s a personal approach, it’s the way I approach the whole design of my research, conducting research, engaging with my participants.” (T:1:6:17:18).

Candice explained her perception as follows:

“...it shouldn’t just be about the papers that they [sic] writing and the students that they [sic] supervising. I think they should be so immersed in the process of research ethics that, in their conduct.” (T:3:8:9:14).

Also, Denise maintained that it is a holistic approach and forms part of the person’s identity. She maintained:

“It’s actually your whole being as a person.” (T:4:6-7:19:1).

Henry started to explain his view by asking a rhetorical question, and then proceeded to answer his question as follows:

“...what is my role as an academic? What is ethics? Ethics is not only in the ethical process. This makes you aware of the ethics but, all of a sudden, your personal ethical view, your learned ethical standards, your departmental ethical values, your school, your college ethical values, university ethical values are brought to the fore instantly and you start to wonder what’s happening around me on the ethical front. But ethics is a natural, human activity. It’s how you view it, and the importance of that...” (T:8:26-27:14:7).

In Mary's naïve sketch, she wrote:

"Engagement means that I support research ethics on an emotional / values level where I know why it is important to me (personally)". (N:12:1:5:6).

She also stated:

"For me the most important aspect will be that research ethics should be entrenched in the personal value system of each academic. The value and knowledge system of academic employees are not developed in a focused manner in terms of research ethics which I think is where the crux of the problem lies. The university expects academics to behave in an ethical manner but no focused training or influencings (on a values level) is taking place at the moment. This is where intervention is desperately needed." (N:12:2:7:13).

Mary's perception was also confirmed in my theoretical field notes of the interview:

"Therefore, a researcher cannot be engaged in research ethics if there is not a personal value attached to it and engagement cannot be enforced." (F:12:1:25:26).

In my field note of Kayla, I noted her belief of what engagement in research ethics entailed:

"She understood engagement in research ethics then as the awareness of the value of ethical research. She clarified by explaining that a researcher will be engaged in research ethics if that person relates to research ethics and has a positive attitude or idea about research ethics." (F:10:1:21:23).

While I was immersed in the data, I realised that it is not feasible to enforce how academic researchers feel about research ethics. Therefore, engagement in research ethics cannot be imposed either. To attune or change academic researchers' perceptions regarding their engagement in research ethics is, therefore, reliant on their authentic personal mindset. Participants explained that academic researchers need to become aware or conscious of research ethics and appreciate that it cannot simply be a paper exercise. Furthermore, conducting ethical research should form the foundation of an academic researcher's behaviour. As a person, the researcher should be beyond reproach and be regarded as ethical. The academic researcher's entire approach needs to be ethical, including how they treat participants. For these participants, such behaviour would demonstrate that the academic researcher has an individualistic and personal ethical predisposition. Likewise, an individualistic and personal ethical predisposition will assist academic researchers in being engaged in research ethics.

According to Lategan (2012), academic employees who aspire to form part of a responsible research community need to have indisputable ethical values. These ethical values include characteristics such as being responsible; trustworthy; honest; a person of integrity; loyal; respectful of life; holding no conflict of interest; performing no harmful activities or generating dangerous outcomes; mindful of the environment; responsible in public-funded expenses; supportive of human capital development in research endeavours; and have a fair and proper value connotation to monetary distribution (Lategan, 2012). Also, Ballyram and Nienaber (2019) state that trustworthiness, honesty and accountability are imperative values that are needed to conduct, report and publish ethical research.

Considering the shared viewpoints of the research participants and the reasoning of Lategan (2012), Ballyram and Nienaber (2019), I realised that once the mindset of an academic researcher is changed, and the realisation manifests that research ethics should form part of the identity of a responsible academic researcher is secured, engagement in research ethics would be possible.

b) Cognitive and emotive realisation of the importance of research ethics

Several participants shared their realisation that for academic researchers to be engaged in research ethics, they need to regard ethical research as important from a cognitive and emotive viewpoint.

Neill shared his lived experience with me by explaining that:

"...I think, once ethics becomes part of my research identity, once it becomes a fundamental component of my work as a scholar, for me, that will be the ultimate form of engagement..." (T:13:9:7:12).

Jenny believed that academic researchers should not commence with empirical research if they are not convinced of the value of ethical research conduct. She said:

"...if you don't have that understanding of how important the ethical basis is to your study as an academic, you perhaps have to leave the whole research aside and be grounded in the importance of ethical research first..." (T:9:7:2:7).

Mary stated during her interview:

"I can understand, if we talk about research ethics and we are doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do, when it comes to the people side of your study, it's important for me that we are ethical..." (T:12:38:11:16).

Denise noted:

"...for me, the word [sic] human dignity summarise, actually, all the principles that you have to keep note of... [section omitted for confidentiality purposes]...if you treat people with the necessary respect and dignity, then your research will be ethical but, if you don't do that, then it lose [sic], actually, its credibility totally". (T:4:5:7:15).

Fred also shared:

"And I want to say this. I'm one hundred percent supporting research ethics because, if you look at the Belmont [SP] and all of that, that's [sic] big things..." (T:6:7:14:18).

Gina shared her personal growth experience with me regarding her increased appreciation for research ethics regulation. She said:

"...after completing the form, I realised that the university, actually, is saving itself, as well as the researcher himself or herself, as well as participants. It's safeguarding everybody." (T:7:12:1:5).

Kayla noted:

"You should be aware of things that you need to consider when you conduct research with participants, not only for yourself but also the participant and the organisation." (T:10:5:3:7).

In Jenny's naïve sketch, she wrote:

"Ethical research forms the foundation of the work of an academic. It is crucial that an academic receives adequate support in internalizing the importance of ethical conduct in general and the link from there to ethical conduct in research." (N:9:1:3:5).

Laila made the following observation in her naïve sketch:

"Academics need to see the process of ethics as necessary to protect themselves as well as the participants in the research and to produce research that will contribute to society as being reliable and trustworthy." (N:11:1:3:5).

In my theoretical field note of Neill, I again documented his perspective.

"Neill understands engagement in research ethics as the interconnection between being aware and acknowledging the significance of ethics, specifically within the research context. Engagement therefore is the extent to which the researcher is aware that ethics should be a central and critical component of the entire research study." (F:13:1:19:22).

Anna's views were recaptured in my observational field notes of her.

"The more engaged she became in her responses, related to her engagement in research ethics, the more she made use of hand gestures to explain herself. At one stage she leaned forward to emphasise her viewpoint. In other instances, she leaned back against the chair to think and reflect before responding. She took her time to respond and elaborated on all her answers to make herself clear and to ensure that I understood what she said. She wanted to make sure I understood the importance of ethical research. She spoke with enthusiasm when she explained her engagement in research ethics." (F:1:1:12:18).

Moreover, Jenny's lived experience was reiterated in my theoretical field notes of our interview;

"Jenny explained that being ethical means that you have to be ethical as person and that you have to be beyond reproach. Every aspect, not just research needs to be above board. She said that a researcher is engaged in research ethics when ethical research conduct becomes part of who you are." (F:9:1:17:20).

Participants indicated academic researchers need to realise that they are responsible for maintaining the highest level of scientific integrity. Beckmann (2017) and Resnik (2018) state that the principles of accountability and trust must drive the relationship between academic researchers and society. Academic researchers should recognise the importance of ethical research in knowledge creation (Committee on the Conduct of Science, 1989). Some of the participants referred to their personal growth and the deeper insight they developed of the importance of research ethics and the regulation thereof. They realised and gained a richer understanding of the purpose and significance of research ethics regulation. With this enriched understanding and awareness, participants better understood that through research ethics regulation, all stakeholders, including researchers, participants, institutions to whom researchers are affiliated, and the wider community, are protected and benefit from trustworthy research findings.

When academic researchers fail to understand the importance of ethical research and engage in unethical research conduct, it can have significant consequences, such as damaging the integrity of research findings, research as a scientific profession, and lowering society's trust in all scientific knowledge (Todd *et al.*, 2017). Also, unethical research can cause harm to individuals and societies at large. Ethical research is needed to produce high-quality data and findings, since such findings will be used in practice (Heale & Shorten, 2017).

c) Engagement in research ethics encompasses the entire research process

Several participants shared their understanding that for academic researchers to be engaged in research ethics, they need to realise that they ought to be attentive towards ethical considerations and implications in research from the very beginning, and throughout the entire research process.

This is what Jenny mentioned during the interview:

“They have to understand and get to grasp [sic] with every aspect of their research being ethical.” (T:9:5:4:6).

Later on, she also stated that:

“...you internalise it, so it becomes part of everything that you’re doing while you’re conducting research, and, not just the actual conducting, but while you start with your study, right up to very end.” (T:9:14:7:12).

Denise explained her perception as follows:

“...during the process of research, do they follow that or do they reflect continuously with it to ensure that they remain with their ethical plan or behaviour that they want? And, to end off with it, also, in an ethical way.” (T:4:3-4:15:1).

In Anna’s naïve sketch, she noted:

“...sensitivity towards ethical challenges and respect for participants must be built into the design of new projects from the very beginning. It continues through the ethical application process, the administrative red tape of filling in the forms, the project itself and the distribution of findings.” (N:1:1:12:15)

“I think engagement with research ethics is very much a personal, internal approach to the whole process.” (N:1:1:12:16).

In my theoretical field notes of Denise’s lived experience, I confirmed her viewpoint.

“When I asked Denise about her understanding of engagement in research ethics, she indicated that research ethics is the approach or continued process that a researcher follows from the onset of the study. This entails the way in which the study is planned and executed”. (F:4:1:23:26).

Henry's lived experience was confirmed with this theoretical field note.

"When I asked Henry about his understanding of engagement of researchers in research ethics, he explained that for him it is the process or approach that the researcher follows of ensuring that a study or research project is adhering to proper ethical guidelines and that the results would be valid and defensible. He mentioned that research ethics includes the application process, but it is more than that, it is a holistic approach to a research study". (F:8:1-2:25:2).

Jenny's perception was captured as follows in my theoretical field note:

"Jenny explained that she regards engagement in research ethics as encompassing of the entire research process and not simply conducting the fieldwork in an ethical way". (F:9:1:15:16).

Engagement in research ethics is persistent in nature and cannot be limited or confined to only certain parts of the research process. It encompasses the entire research study, beginning with the conceptualisation of the study, the execution of the fieldwork, as well as the reporting thereof.

This understanding is supported by Davis *et al.* (2012), Lategan (2012) and Wester (2011), who argue that to publish ethical research, you have to conduct research in a responsible manner, thus making ethical choices from the very beginning with the conceptualisation of the research study and all through the research process. Therefore, engaged researchers are guided by a predisposition that ethics is important and should be part of every aspect of the research study. Fujii (2012) confirmed this understanding by stating that ethical research is a persistent responsibility of the researcher and not a separate task to tick off from a "to do" list.

6.5.1.5 Environmental prerequisites for a well-balanced and successful ODL institution

The final theme that emerged during the data analysis was the environmental prerequisites needed to create a well-balanced and successful HEI. For the analysis and interpretation of this theme, I took a forward-looking approach. This approach's objective was to internalise the perceptions of participants who shared their views of what is needed to create a well-balanced and successful HE institution. Within this well-balanced and successful HEI, academic researchers would be able to engage in research ethics. Following this approach, I came to the understanding that academic researchers' engagement in research ethics cannot be

achieved through any isolated efforts. Instead, they need to be engaged in ethics as an overarching phenomenon. Ethics should therefore be understood from a holistic perspective. To better understand the overarching theme, it was deconstructed into two sub-themes, namely 'a culture of ethics as a strategic objective' and 'the role of HRM to create support and promote a culture of ethics'. These two sub-themes are discussed below and supported by several verbatim quotes.

a) A culture of ethics as a strategic objective

The participants believed that for academic researchers to become engaged in research ethics, the HEI must ensure that a culture of ethics becomes a strategic objective of this ODL institution.

During the semi-structured interview, Neill stated:

"...ethics should become a strategic objective within the context of the university and, once it becomes part of our strategy, once it becomes part of our vision for the organisation, then it will become part of the culture in the organisation, and then, obviously, ethical behaviour will be encouraged, ethical behaviour will be rewarded, and, obviously, it would then become almost like a tool of engagement, a tool of attraction, a tool of retention..." (T:13:16-17:9:1).

This is what Henry stated during the interview:

"...look at what's been the mission, how it's integrated in the rest of the organisation, who does what, and how does it influence the total package of the ethical institution? It cannot be seen as a [sic] isolated process. (T:8:30-31:18:4).

Jenny commented:

"...at [Institution A], let's say, one of our priorities is to create a [sic] ethical culture in the workplace." (T:9:42:5:7)

"...they must all contribute towards that strategic plan to create an ethical culture at [Institution A]." (T:9:44:11:13).

She later added:

"...the impact of this strategy is so crucial on the academic and producing ethical research, it's worthwhile to invest in that kind of intervention, it's worthwhile to invest in it, because you'll basically be pulling everyone together, you basically will be looking at

linking to the academic sector and seeing all of us are doing different things to improve the ethical culture in the institution... (T:9:49-50:12:3).

In Neill's naïve sketch, he made the following recommendation:

"Shift from culture of compliance to culture of attraction and retention – repositioning ethics as a strategic objective." (N:13:2:12:13).

Jenny made the following observation in her naïve sketch:

"An institutional culture that promotes ethical behaviour." (N:9:1:16:16).

In Neill's naïve sketch, he reflected:

"...raise awareness or embed an ethical culture." (N:13:2:11:11).

With my field notes of the interviews with Henry, I confirmed his perception with this reflection:

"When I asked Henry if HR can play a role to support the engagement of researchers in research ethics, he explained that in order for researchers to be engaged in research ethics the organisation must have an ethical culture. A holistic approach needs to be followed to support engagement in research ethics. He said that any unethical behaviour within organisation will have a negative influence on engagement experienced." (F:8:2:19:24).

Mary's theoretical field note stated:

"She also mentioned that it is essential that engagement is driven from an emotional or values level or perspective and that it is not possible to be engaged if the person does not support or believe in the value of research ethics." (F:12:1:23:25).

An organisational strategy comprises the different strategic objectives or action plans that are necessary for an organisation to operate successfully in order to realise its organisational goals (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2012; Moorhead & Griffin, 2012; Robbins & Coulter, 2012).

Demirtas and Akdogan (2015) agree with this belief and stated that in order for an organisation to have sustainable growth and strategic advantage, it needs to create a culture that encourages and supports ethical behaviours. According to Bouckenooghe, Zafar and Raja (2015), organisations should value ethics and regard it as a cornerstone for building the organisational culture. Organisations who are committed to high ethical values realise the importance of creating a common set of values and a unified culture embedded in integrity, in which organisational values and individual values are aligned (Celikdemir & Paker, 2016).

According to Erdem (2016), an organisation's culture has specific attributes that can be observed. These attributes can be taught and acquired; shared between the employees; saved in the employees' cognisance and memories; and shape behavioural patterns that are repetitively done or made known (Erdem, 2016). However, throughout the analysis of the data, I got the impression that participants did not see or perceive the current organisational strategy as supportive of an ethical culture. Nonetheless, two of the core values of the ODL institution, as stipulated in the organisational strategy (Institution A, 2019c), reads as follows:

Ethical and collective responsibility: Ethics reflects the intrinsic and extrinsic values, principles, norms and standards to which [Institution A] is committed and is undergirded by respect, integrity, accountability and excellence. Our ethics guide all institutional conduct, actions, decisions and stakeholder relations, supporting equity and fairness. Against this backdrop, our decision-making will be participatory in the interests of the effective and efficient functioning of the university - all employees are equally responsible for decisions taken and implementation is underpinned by commitment and loyalty to and solidarity with [Institution A].

Integrity: Integrity refers to conduct guided by honesty, equity, respect, transparency, responsibility and accountability in all that we do. Integrity must be evident at an individual level, and it should be infused in the character of the institution through the behaviours of the individuals who constitute and engage with the university. It applies to all our stakeholders and reflects how we relate to them and how we expect them to engage with the university.

A breach, therefore, exists between the proclaimed strategic objectives and values of the ODL institution and the lived experience of employees within the organisation. The dissonance between the declared core values of the ODL institution (Institution A, 2019c) and the personal beliefs of participants seems plausible and is consistent with the findings of Section 6.5.1.2.a. As mentioned earlier, participants observed several forms of unethical behaviour within the ODL institution, which in is a stark contradiction to its declared values. A possible cause for unethical behaviour evident in the ODL institution, despite the stated strategy and imbedded values thereof, is that it is not correctly implemented in the ODL institution.

Rajasekar (2014) indicated that different factors within the organisation could influence strategy implementation. These include the availability of information and the certainty thereof; the structure of the organisation; the human capital; the culture of the organisation; and the leadership of the organisation. However, Rajasekar (2014) maintains that the most important

factor for the successful implementation of a strategy in an organisation is effective leadership. He explains that it is essential that the employees accept the organisational strategy, and it is leadership's role to steer their skills and mindset towards the strategy (Rajasekar, 2014).

b) The role of HRM to create support and promote a culture of ethics

With the analysis of the data and the identification of this sub-theme, I began to understand that HRM can fulfil different roles to co-create a culture of ethics within the university. HRM is the division of management concerned with the management of employees within the organisation (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020; Chidi, 2012; Ololube *et al.*, 2016). It has a significant role to fulfil in creating and supporting an ethical culture in an organisation (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020; Arulrajah, 2015). In fact, in the management of human capital, this department is focused on ethical standards in three distinctive aspects, including the behaviour of employees, the values that govern these employees' conduct, and the ethical standards of the organisation (Chidi, 2012). An ethical culture within the organisation is vital to guide employees to behave fittingly and achieve organisational objectives (Arulrajah, 2015). The organisational culture furthermore signifies employees' shared views in terms of the adopted norms, policies, practices, and procedures in the organisation (Nedkovski *et al.*, 2017).

The theme 'the role of HRM to create support and enable a culture of ethics' was organised under the following sub-themes: 'onboarding: providing more than just orientation to processes and procedures'; 'a supportive and enabling leadership style by management'; 'professional development, coaching, mentorship and research ethics training'; 'ethics as part of performance agreements and performance appraisal'; 'being proactive in the support provided to academics' and finally 'ethical values embedded in the recruitment strategy'. Each of these sub-themes is discussed in the sections below.

b.i) Onboarding: Providing more than just orientation to processes and procedures

Several participants stated the need for a comprehensive onboarding programme for academic employees when they join the ODL institution.

During the interview, Fred expressed his concerns regarding the current orientation provided to new academic employees who recently joined the ODL institution. He said:

"...during the orientation of academics, something that is, at this stage, seriously lacking. If you look at the orientation, it's about medical aid, leave, and all your conditions of

service, while there's no real academic orientation. And I think HR need [sic] to play a very important role..." (T:6:27:7:14).

Henry explained his perception as follows:

"...I believe, in the orientation of those who join universities, normally the onboarding process talks about the organisational structures, business, where to fill in this form, etcetera, etcetera, but colleges needs [sic] perhaps to take responsibility to include this holistic view of what is an academic? This whole concept of what's teaching and learning, what's research, what's community engagement." (T:8:12:3:12).

This is what Neill stated during the interview:

"...when we do that orientation for how long? Two days/three days? I can't even remember mine anymore, how do we ensure that ethics comes critical component of who we are? So this is the organisation that you are joining, and this is what you are signing up for and, if this is not what you want, then you are not going to be welcome here". (T:13:58:4:12).

In Fred's naïve sketch, he wrote:

"One area where HR can be involved, is with the induction of academics – to include something about research ethics..." (N:6:2:29:30).

In Anna's naïve sketch, she noted:

"I think research ethics start with proper training and development of academics. I would make it a compulsory part of the orientation programme of new academics." (N:1:1:21:22)

"A holistic approach of orientation, socialization, ongoing training and development, professional development, mentoring and coaching will be more beneficial to engagement in the research ethics process." (N:1:1:26:28).

Neill wrote in his naïve sketch:

"...compulsory training programme to expose new lecturers (or employees) to research ethics. How [Institution A's] systems work, why research ethics is an important value for an academic and how the university goes about managing research ethics." (N:12:3:9:12).

These perceptions were confirmed by my theoretical field note of Mary.

“Mary also referred to the induction or onboarding programme of employees and said that employees should from the onset understand the importance of research ethics.” (F:12:2:19:20).

My theoretical field notes also confirmed Fred’s viewpoint:

“Fred also underscored the importance of thorough and comprehensive orientation (onboarding) of new employees. He indicated that the current orientation was not adequate to orientate new academics to prepare them for a career in academia.” (F:6:2:17:20).

Onboarding, also known as organisational socialisation (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011; Nyakale, 2016; Salazar, 2016), can be defined as the action or process of integrating a new employee into the organisation (Prathna & Balu, 2018). Furthermore, Klein, Polin and Sutton (2015) state that most organisations consider onboarding as a vital and successful strategy to support new employees becoming thriving colleagues and considering themselves as part of the organisation.

The participants acknowledged the current induction or orientation programmes used in the ODL institution, but mentioned that it was not sufficient to familiarise the new academic employees (scientific researchers) with the scholarly processes of this HEI. They explained that the orientation programme currently focuses on employment conditions, organisational structures, access to forms, and leave management. The orientation for new staff is therefore generic in nature, thus alluding to the fact that actual onboarding does not occur. Participants explained that for academic researchers, a focused onboarding programme needs to be implemented. To the minds of participants, new academic employees (researchers) should therefore be familiarised with all research-related processes and procedures, including research ethics regulatory procedures.

Onboarding is different from employee orientation or staff induction and should be understood as a comprehensive procedure and not a separate standalone routine activity (Kumar & Pandey, 2017). The concept of onboarding is much more than simply orienting an employee (Prathna & Balu, 2018); it is an overarching concept and orientation, and induction is only a part thereof (Kumar & Pandey, 2017). Orientation or induction programmes occur at the commencement of the new employee’s admission to the organisation and only lasts a few days or a week to inform new employees about the mission, vision, various policies, procedures and employee benefits of the organisation (Korte, 2007; Kumar & Pandey, 2017).

In contrast, an onboarding process lasts up to three months and covers training programmes, performance feedback, interactions with teams, supervisor and human resources, intending to align the new employee with the organisational goals and objectives (Kumar & Pandey, 2017). Onboarding influences the new employee's behaviour and helps to form and uphold the organisation's culture (Champoux, 2011). With onboarding, the organisation not only aims to influence the new employee's desire to stay with the organisation but also to alert the new employee of the expected values, norms and acceptable behaviours within the organisation (Champoux, 2011).

b.ii) A supportive and enabling leadership style by management

Several of the participants indicated that managers within the institution should be more supportive, engaging and enabling, rather than following a regulatory management approach.

Henry shared his lived experience with me by explaining that:

"So the whole university's ethical behaviour influences what people think and, having an ethical application for your research is but a reaction, your attitude towards what you pick up in the organisation, be that from top management, from the dean's office, from colleagues. A highly unethical organisation would not be supportive..." (T2:8:23-24:13:2).

Neill noted:

"I always believe that the success or failure, in any specific context, is dependent on the leadership that exists at that point in time, and, if our leaders don't demonstrate ethical behaviour, if we don't see it in their own behaviour, if they don't seize those opportunities to make those bold ethical decisions, then the rest of us are not going to see it, we're not going to feel it, it's not going to entrench this ethical culture in the organisation..." (T:13:48:5:15)

"So we don't want just to see the VP or hear him saying certain things, we don't just want to hear the Deputy Dean saying it, or School Director or COD saying certain things. We actually want to see them doing something about it." (T:13:49-50:18:5).

Neill later also stated that he was able to identify several unethical behaviours within the ODL institution, which was not addressed by management at the interview stage. He said:

"...I can give the VP seven cases where I think unethical behaviour was at play and nothing has been done about it." (T:13:71:14:17).

This is what Ben shared during the interview:

"...if you've got a university not properly managed, where there's corruption and a lot of frustration, your chances of influencing lecturers to be ethical is [sic] not good." (T:2:8:37:10:14).

Laila shared the following viewpoint:

"But, in terms of maturity, I think that comes down to the department, to the line manager, to the fact that the line manager must maybe have a feeling for people who need some guidance." (T:11:40:15:19).

Fred said that:

"...researchers, academics, must be trusted to do their thing instead of imposing forms, templates, all these rules." (T:6:6:16:18).

In Fred's naïve sketch, he noted:

"...engagement should be done in a simple manner, based on two-way communication and full consideration of the viewpoints of the academics. The simplicity should be based on minimum regulation and maximum trust, provided that research ethics should be embraced by all researchers in the institution." (N:6:1:21:24).

Kayla noted the following thought in her naïve sketch:

"...I believe trust, support and empowerment are critical aspects for engagement in research ethics." (N:10:2:31:32).

In Neill's naïve sketch, he made the following comment:

"Pretentious attitude of particularly some senior executives (talking about ethics, when their hands are in the unethical cookie jar!)." (N:13:3:8:9).

Jenny made the following observation in her naïve sketch:

"Ethical conduct displayed by members of Extended Management to set the example for other employees in an institution". (N:9:1:18:19).

My theoretical field note of Mary confirmed her concerns regarding the management style within the ODL institution.

"...Mary believes that engagement in research ethics might be impaired by the management styles within the organisation." (F:12:2:6:7).

During the interview, Neil expressed his concern regarding an unethical culture that can be created at the ODL institution if management is not cautious of their behaviour. This view was also confirmed in this theoretical field note.

“...Neill mentioned that the lack of action by management to address unethical conduct by employees can create a culture where questionable conduct (unethical behaviour) is acceptable.” (F:13:2:16:17).

Another field note I made of the interview with Neill follows:

“In terms of engagement in research ethics, Neill believes that engagement in research ethics by researchers are impossible if the leadership fails to display ethical behaviour. In order to have engagement in research ethics there needs to be an ethical culture present in the organisation and this ethical culture needs to be evident in leadership behaviour. If leaders fail to be ethical it will not be possible to create an ethical culture and ultimately engagement in research ethics.” (F:13:2:10:14).

The participants perceived the current management style within the ODL institution as restrictive and controlling. Participants who voiced their concerns with the regulatory approach in managing employees, including academic researchers, indicated that they perceived this management style as reflecting a lack of trust from management.

Paradoxically, managers are the role models within the organisation, and their behaviours can influence the behaviours of others. Therefore, they are regarded as the most important factor in creating ethical working conditions (Bonner, Greenbaum, & Mayer, 2016; Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015). Also, Babalola, Stouten and Euwema (2016) indicated that leaders can inspire employees to uphold ethical behaviour in the workplace through social learning. Creating an ethical culture within an organisation therefore originates with the leadership of the organisation (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2013).

In contrast to the current management style, engaging leadership is founded on integrity, honesty and transparency, and a sincere appreciation of others and their involvement, together with the ability to be decisive and solve complicated problems (Alimo-Metcalfe *et al.*, 2008). The call of participants to trust that researchers will be ethical in their research endeavours can therefore be answered with an engaging leadership style. Participants also mentioned that management's behaviour could influence the engagement of subordinates, specifically in terms of engagement in research ethics.

After further analysis of the data, I realised that the perceived lack of trust by management was reciprocated by staff members. One participant mentioned that he was aware of unethical behaviour within the institution, but nothing was done about it by management. He explained that managers' inaction to address employees' unethical behaviour creates a culture where unethical behaviour becomes acceptable. Subordinates therefore believe they cannot trust managers to be ethical if they fail to address employees' unethical behaviour. This view is echoed by Villegas *et al.* (2019), who state that ethical conduct does not unexpectedly occur but is reflected through unambiguous statements that are made and actions taken by management. If an engaging leadership style is adopted by management, employees' ethical conduct is likely to follow.

b.iii) Professional development, coaching, mentorship and research ethics training

A number of participants indicated that HRM practitioners have a responsibility to assist academic employees in their professional development. The participants voiced the need for development initiatives, including coaching, mentorship and research ethics training.

Anna stated:

"...professional development that they need to know how to do ethical research."
(T:1:32:10:11).

Anna later voiced her need for conflict management training, and she believed HRM practitioners can play a role in this regard. She said:

"Can't HR then at least teach us how to cope with this conflict or help us to be confident enough so that you don't feel you are being attacked when someone has a comment on your ethical application?" (T:1:35:8:13).

Candice explained her perception as follows:

"So, as part of their development, we bring in the experts, like Dr Allison [PSEUD], to empower them in terms of research ethics and, as HR practitioners, I think perhaps also get involved and not leave it to the academics..." (T:3:25:12:17).

During the semi-structured interview, Denise mentioned her need for conflict management training and academic employees' workload being alleviated if support staff obtain the required training, to enable them to support academic employees:

“...how to communicate with one another even though you differ. Conflict management, more team building opportunities, because that’s something that I think, personally, is lacking...” (T:4:41:15:19).

“...training, workshops that they become involved with that, that will also take a lot of stress away from academics” (T:4:44:13:14).

During the semi-structured interview, Gina stated:

Let us develop our employees, it doesn’t matter whether they are academics or they are support staff. (T:7:24:10:12).

Gina further noted:

“...we take young researchers, we mentor them, we nurture them. We’ve got that community, we take a number of young and upcoming researchers and say we have this community, we would like to nurture you guys, please come and join us”. (T:7:31:13:19).

Mary explained her perception as follows:

“...I think, if we do formal training, what we do is, if we do an assessment centre and we say we’re going to evaluate behaviour, we do a practical soos ‘n gevallestudie [like a case study]. We have seven case studies. So I think that will add a lot of value.” (T:12:59-60:20:6)

“...one-day training session, evaluate those and then, when we have the training, we’re going to discuss each of them and see what was right and what was wrong and why we say it was right and why we say it is wrong, with an expert from outside the department...” (T:12:60:8:15).

Jenny shared her lived experience with me by explaining that:

“...in human resource management, you have a very crucial directorate called human resource development and part of their role would be skilling and upskilling employees in an institution, in their career field. So I think their role would be very crucial to create or contribute towards this ethical culture.” (T:9:41:7:14).

Neill believed:

“...ethics must be a critical component of that coaching and mentoring process.” (T:13:60:2:4).

This is what Kayla said in the course of her interview:

"...maybe they can dedicate a group of people that can mentor or assist academics that is [sic] not strong in research to help them to complete the form..." (T:10:36:6:10).

Mary made the following observation in her naïve sketch:

"I think new members (that plan to stay on as members of the committee) should work with a mentor initially so that they can ask questions while they are evaluating applications..." (N:12:3:19:21).

Later in the naïve sketch, she also reported:

"My lack of personal knowledge and experience of the environment and research ethics specifically. Not know where the "bar" in terms of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable for an ethics application is." (N:12:2:25:27).

In Anna' naïve sketch, she wrote:

"A holistic approach of orientation, socialization, ongoing training and development, professional development, mentoring and coaching will be more beneficial to engagement in the research ethics process." (N:1:1:26:28).

Neill's naïve sketch reflected:

"Potential HR leveraging points for engagement... Training and development" (N:13:2:6:10).

In the field notes I took of the interview with Candice, I captured the following:

"When we discussed the possible roles HR could play in the engagement of academics in research ethics, she indicated that HR practitioners can support engagement in research ethics by providing training interventions by experts as well as incorporating ethical research conduct into employment contracts of academic employees." (F:3:2:1:4).

These views were verified by my theoretical field note of Jenny:

"Jenny emphasised the importance of mentorship and training to support engagement in research ethics." (F:9:1:21:21).

One of the main functions of the HRM department is to identify employees' learning and development needs, and subsequently provide these employees with the required

infrastructure to develop these skills and abilities (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015; Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). Within the HE context, specifically for academic researchers, the HRM's assistance is needed for the development of their research skills. As part of researchers' development process, strong emphasis should be placed on ethical research practices. Coaching is an on-the-job approach where a manager (frequently the line manager) teaches and guides an employee on an individual basis to achieve development objectives by setting goals, giving assistance to reach the identified goals, and providing timely and constructive feedback (Wärnich *et al.*, 2018).

To mentor entails both a coaching and an educational element, it requires a lot of time, it requires identification and understanding, a willingness to share knowledge and skills, and an interest in teaching and supporting the success of others (Burgess, Van Diggele & Mellis, 2018). Mentoring is frequently used for young professional employees who are ambitious within their vocations. Typically an older, more experienced employee will then provide guidance to a junior employee and facilitate their development (Wärnich *et al.*, 2018). These guiding and development initiatives assist employees in developing in their professional careers and enable them to progress in the organisational hierarchy (Khan *et al.*, 2018). According to Horn (2013), a key strategy to produce successful academic researchers is to provide mentorship to develop these scholars. Mentors of developing academic researchers should ensure that they clearly communicate the importance of responsible research conduct, research integrity and responsible behaviour to their mentees (Horn, 2013). Mentoring can also be used in the onboarding of new employees to facilitate their integration into their new employment position (Allen *et al.*, 2017).

Training is a process whereby employees obtain capabilities and competencies to contribute to the realisation of organisational goals (Wärnich *et al.*, 2018). Training in research ethics will thus help academic researchers obtain the required skills and competencies to successfully conduct ethical research within the ODL institution. Horn (2013) upholds that research ethics training programmes should be holistic in nature, stating that 'ethics of responsibility' should be taught together with critical thinking competencies. Horn (2013) further recommends that case studies should be used where group discussions can take place since this form of training is more effective than simply teaching ethical principles and 'codes'. Currently, the assigned time and attention devoted to aspects related to research ethics, while training academic researchers, is insufficient (Lategan, 2012). Some participants also mentioned the need for soft-skills training. Soft skills are sometimes referred to as people skills, life skills, interpersonal skills or employability skills, and are essential at every level of an organisation to ensure smooth and effective functioning (Rao, 2014).

b.iv) Research ethics as part of performance agreements and performance appraisal

Several participants indicated that they believed involvement in ethical research endeavours should form part of academic researchers' performance agreements.

Anna believed that involvement in any endeavours to support ethical research should be formally acknowledged. She said:

"...that it is acknowledged or recognised..." (T:1:30:16:17)

"I would really appreciate it if they could at least include some aspect of the time that we spent on ethical clearance in our performance appraisals that would give it, definitely, more weight." (T:1:41:5:9).

During the semi-structured interview, Denise stated:

"...remember, if you go look at your reward systems, you can start with employment wellbeing without...so it's actually a recognition for the person..." (T:4:48:7:11).

This is what Laila said during the interview:

"...maybe, that our performance management system is not really addressing the issues that academics need to focus on." (T:11:47:12:15).

Later in the interview, Laila also shared:

"I think people is [sic] still seeing the performance management system, at the moment, as a very subjective if you like me, you score me this, if you don't like me, you rate me that." (T:11:48-49:17:3).

During the semi-structured interview, Candice reflected:

"...it's one of their KPAs to supervise students but I think, if you commit to supervising a student, then it should almost not just form part of your orientation and induction but as an ongoing developmental process for you to regularly attend information sessions on research and on the research ethics..." (T:3:15:6:13).

Neill discussed the performance criteria that were used at his previous place of employment to explain that ethical conduct among employees formed part of their criteria and was formally assessed. He said:

"So we actually got a percentage point on our IPMS for ethics. So a three-point-five out of five for ethics. And we got rewarded for that." (T:13:73:11:15).

Kayla believed that the performance criteria and evaluations within the ODL institution are problematic. She said:

“The KPAs, currently, is [sic] not fair and it doesn’t take into consideration a lot of things, and it’s also not applied consistently within all the departments.” (T:10:48-49:17:2)

“So the KPAs, currently, is [sic] not as effective as the university thinks it is. That’s why they say everyone gets a high performance-appraisal score but the university is not performing. It’s because there’s no alignment.” (T:10:49:2:8).

Fred noted:

“...in terms of IPMS, I can think in terms of performance management, somewhere there, to build in something to ask the question in terms of you must indicate your engagement in terms of research ethics.” (T:6:28:7:12).

In Fred’s naïve sketch, he wrote:

“...with performance management (infusing research ethics in the IPMS)...” (N:6:2:21:21).

In Neill’s naïve sketch, he wrote:

“...IPMS (what is rewarded and punished).” (N:13:2:8:8).

My theoretical field note of Fred confirmed these beliefs held by participants.

“Another area which needed attention according to Fred is the current performance management system used by the university. He explained that the performance measurement should include an evaluation or measurement to recognise efforts made by researchers to conduct ethical research.” (F:6:2:20:23).

In my theoretical field note of Mary, I confirmed this viewpoint:

“...HR should change the current performance management system to include a solid ethical value system entrenched in the organisation.” (F:12:2:17:18).

This understanding was also captured in my theoretical field note of Denise:

“She also indicated that the performance management system should recognise and reward ethical behaviour of employees”. (F:4:2:10:12).

These experiences were reaffirmed in my theoretical field note of Kayla:

“...the performance management system is at this stage not a fair system. She said that several aspects of employees’ work are not taken into consideration and that it is not consistently applied in the different departments.” (F:10:2:20:22).

The performance management system used in an organisation indicates the strengths and weaknesses of an employee and can accordingly motivate the employee through promotion opportunities and salary increases, while improving self-awareness and self-esteem (Ahuja, Padhy & Srivastava, 2018; Krishnan, Ahmad & Haron, 2018). Furthermore, it can serve as a motivation to advance their performance in other areas (Ahuja *et al.*, 2018; Krishnan *et al.*, 2018).

The performance management system (IPMS; the Integrated Performance Management System) used within the ODL institution comprises different key performance areas (KPA) to which employees should aspire. Participants indicated ethical research activities should form part of these KPAs, which can then be evaluated during performance appraisals. The participants mentioned that they wanted to receive recognition and performance feedback for the efforts they made as academic researchers to be ethical in their research activities.

Engagement in ethical research endeavours can be verified in different ways, depending on the employee’s established performance agreement. One example provided by a participant was recognition and rewards for the efforts made by supervisors to assist their students in conducting ethical research, including assisting students in obtaining research ethics clearance for their studies (also taking into consideration the number of students who were successfully guided in this task). Another participant indicated that academic researchers should receive recognition for continuously making an effort to up-skill themselves and enhance their own knowledge on research ethics, in part as academic scholar, and also in part of their responsibility as supervisors. Yet another participant indicated that while ethical research behaviour should be acknowledged and rewarded, unethical behaviour should be made known and punished. He also referred to his previous place of employment, where the performance evaluation included an ethics element, and ethical behaviour was rewarded.

Some participants indicated that the current performance management system used in the ODL institution was subjective in nature, and employees’ performance was not always impartially evaluated. As confirmation of this perception, Ahuja *et al.* (2018) state that several studies have indicated employees frequently express their discontent with performance management systems. According to Khan *et al.* (2018), the performance management system

should be formulated and managed in a fair and objective manner, and the focus should be developing and incentivising in order for HEI employees to regard it as essential. According to Olorube *et al.* (2016), only when academic employees are treated fairly will they demonstrate positive and loyal behaviours towards the HEI. It will not be possible for the HEI to gain the desired performance from employees if the performance management system is not perceived as fair (Khan *et al.*, 2018).

b.v) Being proactive in the support provided to academic researchers

Participants indicated that HRM practitioners need to be proactive in the support provided to academic employees, including academic research endeavours.

Anna held the following view:

“I think HR steps in when there are problems, when there’s already a grievance or people want to kill one another or throw one another out of the window. It shouldn’t be like that. They should be proactive.” (T:1:38:7:11).

This is what Neill stated during the interview:

“...often feel that we need to go to them [HRM support department] if we need help ...those individuals, those collectives, those entities could act a little bit more proactively...” (T:13:54:10:17).

Candice explained her perception by saying:

“...HR practitioners, I think perhaps also get involved and not leave it to the academics to they, them selves, go and find workshops on research ethics but to invite the professionals to conduct workshops maybe more often and invite the academics along to that.” (T:3:25-26:15:3).

Ellen shared:

“...to enhance the efficiency of administrative personnel within this institution because they [sic] not sufficient and, if they are sufficient, they can also lessen the burden of the academics’ administrative burden and it will provide more room and time for academics to engage in ethics...” (T:5:39-40:15:4).

Jenny made the following observation in her naïve sketch:

“I support that a researcher must be exposed to sufficient training in ethical research in advance of the submission of a research proposal”. (N:9:2:1:3).

My theoretical field notes also confirmed that Denise believed there is an opportunity for HRM practitioners to be proactive in the support they provide:

“She indicated that HR could arrange for research ethics training to alleviate the burden on academics to arrange it”. (F:4:2:8:10).

This seemingly agrees with the observation made by McGowan (2015), who upholds that a proactive approach should be employed to support the wellbeing of employees. The sub-theme denotes the need voiced by participants that HRM, as a support function, has to reconsider their approach in the support they provide to academic researchers. The responses received from participants suggested that they perceive the current functioning of this support department as either insufficient, or that they offer support as a reactive measure. Also, Zolkifi (2014) claim that although HRM has transformed into strategic partners in most organisations, there are still instances where HRM departments react reactively to situations. As a support department, the needs of academic employees have to be identified timeously or even pre-empted in order to offer assistance and guidance in a constructive way.

While some participants mentioned that HRM practitioners should arrange workshops and other initiatives to empower and develop academic employees (also see Section 6.5.1.5.b (iii)) other participants maintained HRM practitioners should develop administrative staff's efficiency and competence to alleviate the burden of administrative tasks placed on academic employees.

b.vi) Ethical values embedded in the recruitment strategy

The final sub-theme that emerged was the call from participants to ensure that ethical values are embedded in the recruitment strategy in support of the advancement of an ethical culture within the ODL institution. The participants suggested that a recruitment strategy with ethical values should consider three focus areas. First, the recruitment process itself must be ethical and transparent. Second, the ODL institution needs to promote itself as an ethical organisation within the labour market to attract the largest possible group of suitably qualified applicants from which perspective employees can be selected. Finally, as part of the selection process, suitable candidates should be evaluated to determine if their personal value orientation is in agreement with what the ODL institution stands for and aims to achieve.

Laila shared her view with me by explaining that:

“It should start with the hiring of people who are really interested in research, ethical research.” (T:11:45:13:15)

“I think there is a lot of dishonesty, often, in that field. So I think, in terms of selection and hiring the right people, I think it starts there, definitely.” (T:11:46:16:19).

This is what Henry said during the second interview:

“In the recruitment process in colleges, HR’s function’s absolutely essential. Be ethical. You can’t get your buddy in. You’ve gotta go through a process. So it’s not an argument even that they must be ethical and be the custodian and the ambassador to ensure that the organisation’s ethical. Act ethical in that process”. (T2:45:10:18).

Henry also said:

“Certain things are just more susceptible than others. For example, in the recruitment, advertising, highly susceptible to unethical behaviour”. (T2:7:2:5).

In terms of the ODL institution positioning itself as an ethical HEI within the labour market, Neill noted:

“...using ethics as a tool of attraction so that people, other academics from UJ and from UP and from Stellenbosch, will see that is an ethical institution, those are ethical academics, and I want to be part of that institution.” (T:13:49:1:6).

Henry made the following recommendation during the interview:

“...but, in terms of signing their contracts upon joining [Institution A], especially for academics, I think there should be a clause that should be included regarding the research ethics, which is part of the conditions of employment to say, as an academic, it is expected of you to...” (T:3:26:4:11).

In Mary’s naïve, she made the following observation related to the recruitment of ethical employees:

“High ethical standards can be included in recruitment and selection processes to make sure that [Institution A] only recruits and appoints academic employees that values ethics on a personal basis.” (N:12:3:24:26).

Also during the semi-structured interview, Mary stated:

“So definitely in your selection process, I think, to recruit people who value ethics and who have that inclination to want to do the right thing, within the system, is important”. (T:12:65:3:7).

During the semi-structured interview, Denise said:

“So it has to do with the selection in recruitment to get the persons that’s [sic] maybe open for ethics.” (T:4:41:11:13).

These shared experiences were echoed in my theoretical field note of Denise.

“Denise indicated that HR should recruit and select employees who are ethically inclined”. (F:4:2:10:10).

The recruitment and selection process can be understood as the steps taken by an institution to make job vacancies known, with the prospect of drawing several qualified applicants to fill vacant positions within the institution (Chidi, 2012). Numerous researchers found that the recruitment and selection process should be ethical if the organisation wants to survive in a contending environment (Bhoganadam & Rao, 2014). According to Shekhawat (2019), the foundation of any HE institution should be exceptional academic employees since dedicated, hardworking employees are the main contributors to the success of the institution.

HRM practitioners and managers should be the organisation’s custodians when recruiting and selecting employees to prevent or limit unethical behaviour within the organisation (Villegas *et al.*, 2019). When HRM practitioners and managers dishonour this responsibility to appoint the most suitable candidate, the probability of appointing an individual that could negatively influence the institution and its stakeholders, is increased (Villegas *et al.*, 2019). Examples of unethical and sketchy recruitment practices include, among others, favouritism and nepotism. Nepotism entails the abuse of connections between parties and refers to the favouritism of specific families or relatives, as well as comrades, irrespective of their capabilities or merit (Tran, 2016). When nepotism or favouritism infiltrate the recruitment and selection process, it is to the detriment of the institution since these employees were not selected on merit and excellent performance, and will not be able to perform on the expected requirements (Shekhawat, 2019). Therefore, it is essential that HRM practitioners and managers set clear ethical standards for the institution to illustrate integrity as a shared guiding value (Villegas *et al.*, 2019).

Villegas *et al.* (2019) explain that when an institution openly declares its ethical orientation when recruiting and selecting potential employees, it serves as a demonstration of the dedication and importance of ethical behaviour within the institution. Arulrajah (2015) notes that within the contemporary labour environment, the institution's ethical status is regarded as one of the main elements of an organisation's capability to attract and hold onto talented employees.

According to Villegas *et al.* (2019), behavioural questions should be included in the compiled interview questions to assess a possible candidate's ethical predisposition and personal character traits, such as integrity, self-discipline and trustworthiness. Also, Albrecht *et al.* (2015) and Bakker (2017) stated that HRM practitioners and managers should be intentional in their employee selection procedures by performing structured interviews, verifying references of previous employment, and measuring the personality attributes of job applicants. With the emphasis on high quality and ethically oriented people, an institution can uphold or develop a positive ethical culture within the workplace (Arulrajah, 2015; Villegas *et al.*, 2019).

6.6 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I explored and interpreted academic researchers' lived experiences of engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The findings demonstrated that engagement in research ethics was a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The understanding of engagement in research ethics was reliant on participants' personal beliefs of what engagement is and how it is demonstrated. Academic researchers identified several challenges that influenced their ability to engage in research ethics. The challenges were not only context-specific but spoke to broader problems academic researchers experienced within the ODL institution and observed in a broader societal context. These shared lived experiences among academic researchers resulted in my realisation that the engagement experienced by academic researchers cannot be compartmentalised or bracketed to one area of their lived experiences at work. A holistic approach to support academic researchers' engagement is needed. Stated differently, engagement, specifically in research ethics, will only transpire if the academic employee is engaged in other areas of their work as well.

To support researchers' engagement, the participants were clear. A culture of ethics should be a strategic objective of the ODL institution. In addition, HRM practitioners have a vital role to play in creating a supportive and enabling environment for a culture of ethics. With the presentation of this chapter, the purpose of phase two of the study was realised. In Chapter

7, the third phase of the study will be realised. The purpose of phase three is to develop and present a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The building blocks of the conceptual framework will be derived from the empirical findings of this chapter.

CHAPTER 7

DEVELOPMENT OF A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR HRM PRACTITIONERS TO SUPPORT THE ENGAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS IN RESEARCH ETHICS (PHASE THREE)

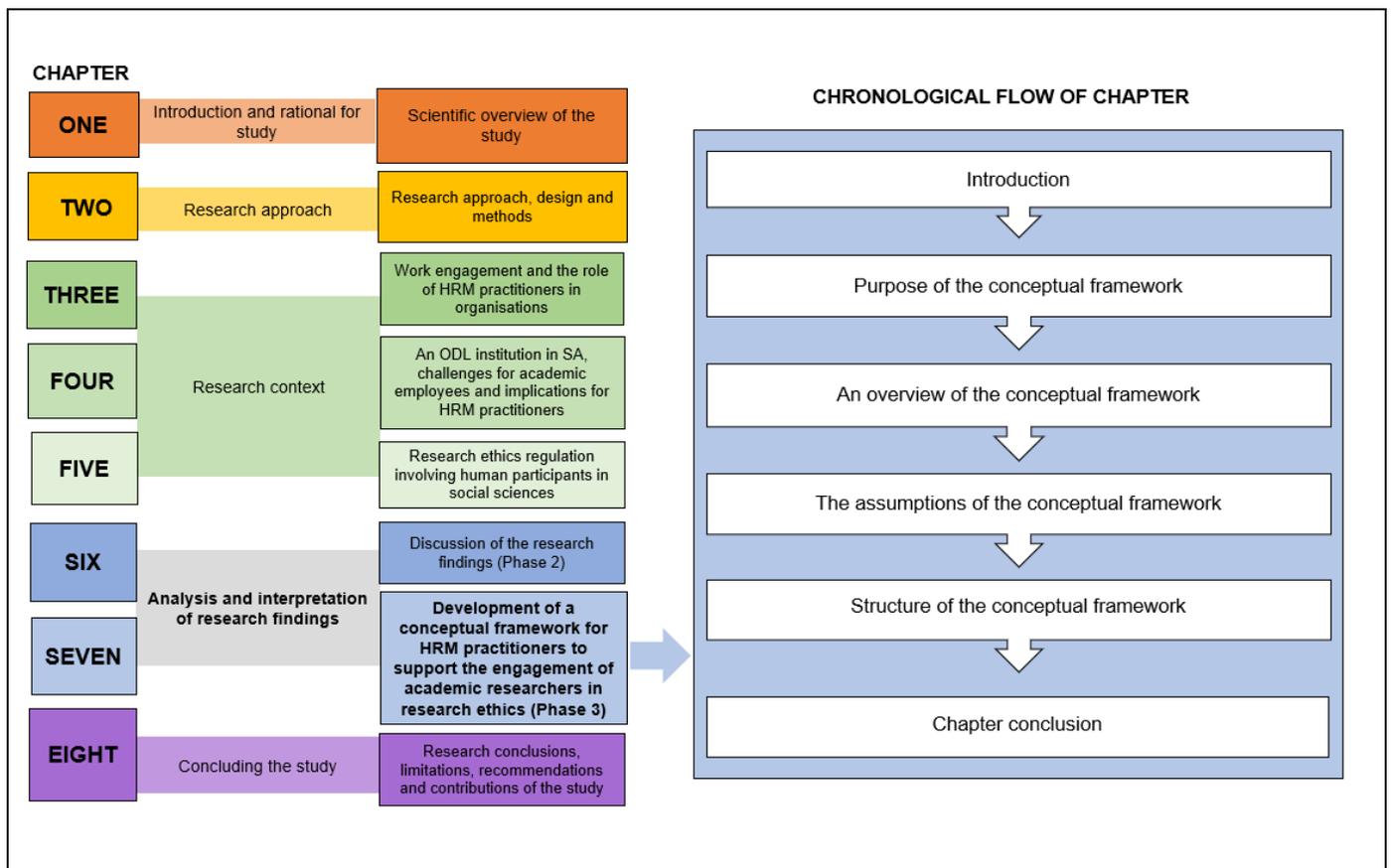


Figure 7.1: Structure of Chapter 7

Source: Own compilation

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter (Chapter 6), the research study's findings were presented, which were analysed using the guiding principles of IPA. Chapter 6 thus realised phase two of the data analysis, and obtained an in-depth understanding of the way in which HRM practitioners can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. In this chapter, the final phase of the research study was executed. The purpose of phase three was to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic

researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. This chapter was therefore dedicated to constructing and describing the proposed practice-oriented conceptual framework.

To achieve the outcome of the chapter, it commences with a description of the purpose of the conceptual framework, followed by a concise overview of the conceptual framework. Subsequently, the conceptual framework's assumptions are provided, followed by the structure of the conceptual framework, which was developed according to the organising principles described in the seminal work of Dickoff *et al.* (1968) (Section 2.4.3.1). This section clarifies the different activities of the conceptual framework, the symbolic meaning of the colours used for the visual presentation of the key concepts, and the role of the different activities in meeting the goals identified in the conceptual framework. The chapter concludes with a review of how the objectives of phase three were attained with the development of the conceptual framework.

7.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As stated in Chapter 1 (Section 1.6.2), a conceptual framework can be understood as a network or vehicle of interrelated concepts that, as a whole, offers a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Adom *et al.*, 2018; Imenda, 2014; Jabareen, 2009). Furthermore, it is developed by the researcher who studied the phenomenon, and this visual representation is an aid employed to explain the relationships that are evident between the key facets investigated (Adom *et al.*, 2018; McEwen & Wills, 2014). Researchers can also use an existing theory and adapt it to suit their current study (Adom *et al.*, 2018).

Importantly, the presentation of a conceptual framework is not yet acknowledged as scientific evidence. It should rather be understood as the proposed solution to the research problem identified with the study's onset (Adom *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, a conceptual framework aims not to offer an analytical or causal standpoint, but rather an interpretative consideration of social reality (Jabareen, 2009). The conceptual framework also promotes theory development, which may have a positive impact on organisational practices (Adom *et al.*, 2018). The conceptual framework in this study serves as a frame of reference for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

7.3 AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This conceptual framework describes the way in which the HRM practitioners can support social science academic researchers' engagement in research ethics involving human participants at an ODL institution. As noted in Chapter 3 (Section 3.4), several researchers have used the JD-R model to demonstrate how resources and job demands influence WE and burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Hakanen & Bakker, 2017). In agreement with Bakker *et al.* (2014), I too believe that the JD-R theory can be used to understand, explain, and make predictions about WE, burnout, and organisational outcomes. To this end, the JD-R theory was used as the theoretical framework in the development of this conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The principles of the JD-R theory, supported by scientific literature, were thus used to identify academic researchers' job- and personal resources and job demands within the ODL institution. In addition, attention was paid to ascertain the specific role(s) HRM practitioners can play within the ODL institution to support job- and personal resources, and alleviate academic researchers' job demands.

As already discussed, job resources are a significant driving force of WE, and WE, in turn, leads to improved wellbeing and positive organisational outcomes (Bakker *et al.*, 2014). Hindering job demands, over extended periods, have a health impairment impact which can weaken the positive relationship between job resources and WE (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Nonetheless, employees can cope with high job demands if they have access to enabling job resources (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Also, challenging job demands can emphasise the value of job resources, which has a strong positive influence on WE (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). This is possible since job resources have the motivational potential to satisfy employees' psychological needs, which, in turn, supports them to handle job demands and reach their intended outcomes (Bakker, 2017). The specific role(s) that HRM practitioners within the ODL institution can play to optimise job- and personal resources and alleviate job demands for academic researchers are therefore crucial to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics.

To construct the conceptual framework, I hinged on the work of Dickoff *et al.* (1968), who originally developed this thinking map that can be used to construct a conceptual framework. This thinking map guided my thought process and provided the needed insight to bring order to findings and compile the conceptual framework in an organised and constructive manner.

I realised that since academic researchers' engagement in research ethics can only be promoted if a culture of ethics (organisational culture) prevails within the ODL institution (see Sections 6.5.1.5.a & 6.5.1.5.b), the HRM practitioners within the ODL institution have specific supportive roles to fulfil. Consequently, the conceptual framework focuses on the role that HRM practitioners should fulfil to underpin a culture of ethics by supporting academic researchers' job and personal resources within the ODL institution. By alleviating hindering job demands and supporting job and personal resources, HRM practitioners within the ODL institution can indirectly support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics.

7.4 THE ASSUMPTIONS OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Assumptions can be understood as statements that are not scientifically proven but believed to be true (Chinn & Kramer, 2011; Polit & Beck, 2017). This conceptual framework's assumptions were derived from the findings obtained from the empirical data (see Chapter 6), the theoretical standpoint I adopted to understand engagement (the JD-R theory), and scientific literature to substantiate the empirical data that were analysed. The conceptual framework is thus based on the following assumptions:

- Engagement in research ethics can be understood as an essential, multifaceted and diverse phenomenon (see Sections 7.5.4.1 – 7.5.4.4).
- In order for academic researchers to engage in research ethics, the ODL institution should have uncompromising ethical standards, where ethical values are a declared strategic objective of the institution and, more importantly, these values are evident in employees' and management's conduct (see Section 7.5.3.3).
- The HRM practitioners within this ODL institution play a vital role to underpin a culture of ethics, as the preferred organisational culture, within the ODL institution (see Section 7.5.4).
- A clear relationship exists between an enabling environment where academic researchers can engage in research ethics, and a culture of ethics (as organisational culture). The culture of ethics should be underscored by mutual trust, ample information, sufficient support, and enough job and personal resources for academic researchers (see Sections 7.5.3.3 & 7.5.7).

- In agreement with the JD-R theory, I believe that it is possible for HRM practitioners to facilitate academic researchers' engagement in research ethics by supporting job and personal resources and limiting hindering job demands (see Section 7.5.7).
- HRM practitioners within the ODL institution have a fundamental role in supporting the job and personal resources of academic researchers (including resources for research ethics) (see Sections 7.5.7.1 – 7.5.7.6).
- For HRM practitioners to effectively support academic researchers' wellbeing in the ODL institution, these practitioners need to be aware of and understand academic researchers' job demands and job resources in the institution (including their job demands and job resources related to research ethics) (see Sections 7.5.4.5 – 7.5.4.9).

7.5 STRUCTURE OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The presentation of the conceptual framework commences by clarifying the different concepts used in generating a conceptual framework. A description is also provided of the symbolic meaning of the different colours used to illustrate the conceptual framework. Subsequently, the conceptual framework's visual presentation is offered, followed by a comprehensive explanation of each activity needed to realise the goals depicted in the conceptual framework.

7.5.1 Concept clarification of activities

The themes that emerged with the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data (see phase two, Chapter 6) served as a reference for deriving the key concepts, which were later used in the conceptual framework. It goes without saying that these disjointed concepts could not realise the overarching objective of this study, without some structure or clarification of the relations between these concepts. To this end, I utilised the thinking map of Dickoff *et al.* (1968) to develop the conceptual framework, as stated in Section 7.3 and explained in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4.3.1). These scholars specified six questions that need to be answered for the development of a conceptual framework to be functional. To logically explain the course of action of the conceptual framework developed for the current study, the sequence of the questions identified by Dickoff *et al.* (1968) was changed (for original sequence, see Chapter 2, Section 2.4.3.1). The revised sequence of questions is offered below. After that, Table 7.1 provides clarification and answers to each of the questions presented.

1. *In what context is the activity performed (context)?*
2. *Who or what performs the activity (agent)?*
3. *Who or what is the recipient of the activity (recipient)?*
4. *What is the endpoint of the activity (outcome)?*
5. *What is the guiding procedure, technique, or protocol of the activity (procedure)?*
6. *What is the energy source for the activity (dynamics)?*

Table 7.1: Identified activities of the conceptual framework for the current research study

ACTIVITY	IDENTIFIED SOURCE FOR ACTIVITY
Context	Macro-context: HEIs in SA
	Meso-context: An ODL institution in SA
	Micro-context: A culture of ethics in the ODL institution
Agents	HRM practitioners endorsing a culture of ethics
Recipients	Academic researchers who conduct research involving human participants
Dynamics	JD-R theory
Procedure	Facilitation of job and personal resources to support the engagement of academic researchers in research ethics
Outcome	Academic researchers engaged in research ethics

Source: Own compilation

7.5.2 Symbolic meaning of colours used for the visual presentation of the conceptual framework

Colour is a way of communicating in a nonverbal way (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). It plays a major role in influencing emotions, perceptions, feelings and experience, albeit an unconscious process (Ferreira, 2019; Singh & Srivastava, 2011; Steemit, 2018). It is important to recognise that the symbolic meaning of a colour is not static, and like most factors known to mankind, all colours have positive and negative nuances (King, 2019). Such value connotations are not right or wrong, but merely a reflection of the subjective interpretation of a colour, from which no person is excluded (King, 2019).

Thus, using a single specific colour to have the same effect on moods or behaviour for all people is not possible (Nunes, 2018). There are too many variables, and the variances in reaction from one person to the next are too vast (Nunes, 2018; Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). Research conducted on the influence of colour on the psyche, found that cultural background,

gender, upbringing and value orientations have a definite influence on colour perceptions (Ferreira, 2019; King, 2019; Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). The perceptions of colours can also be influenced by political connotations, religious significance, or even current trends in society (King, 2019). Nevertheless, scholars who conduct research on colours, maintain that colours influence all people, and only the feelings evoked might differ (Nunes, 2018).

Table 7.2 indicates what colour was associated with each activity in the conceptual framework. It is important to note that I intentionally selected colours to portray a positive, healthy and well-functioning ODL institution and a positive HE landscape in SA. I wanted to portray the envisioned outcome of the conceptual framework. Currently, there are several challenges within the ODL institution and broader SA landscape. These challenges create obstacles for the ODL to function optimally (see Chapter 6 for empirical evidence). Therefore, some of the chosen colours might seem at odds with the current status of the activity discussed. The symbolic meaning and how each of these colours relates to the different features of the conceptual framework’s visual presentation are discussed as part of the activities portrayed in Sections 7.5.3 to 7.5.8.

Table 7.2: Associated colour for each activity in the conceptual framework.

ACTIVITY	IDENTIFIED SOURCE FOR ACTIVITY	CHOSEN COLOUR
Macro-Context	Macro-Context: HEIs in SA	Charcoal
Meso-Context	Meso-Context: An ODL Institution in SA	Silver
Micro-Context	Micro-Context: A culture of ethics in an ODL institution	Brown
Agents	HRM practitioners endorsing a culture of ethics	Purple
Recipients	Academic Researchers who conduct research involving human participants	Yellow
Dynamics	Job Demands-Resources Theory	Grey, Red and Blue
Procedure	Facilitation of Job resources Facilitation of Personal resources	Green
Outcome	Academic researchers engaged in Research Ethics	Orange
Arrows	Pathways for Action	Turquoise

Source: Own compilation

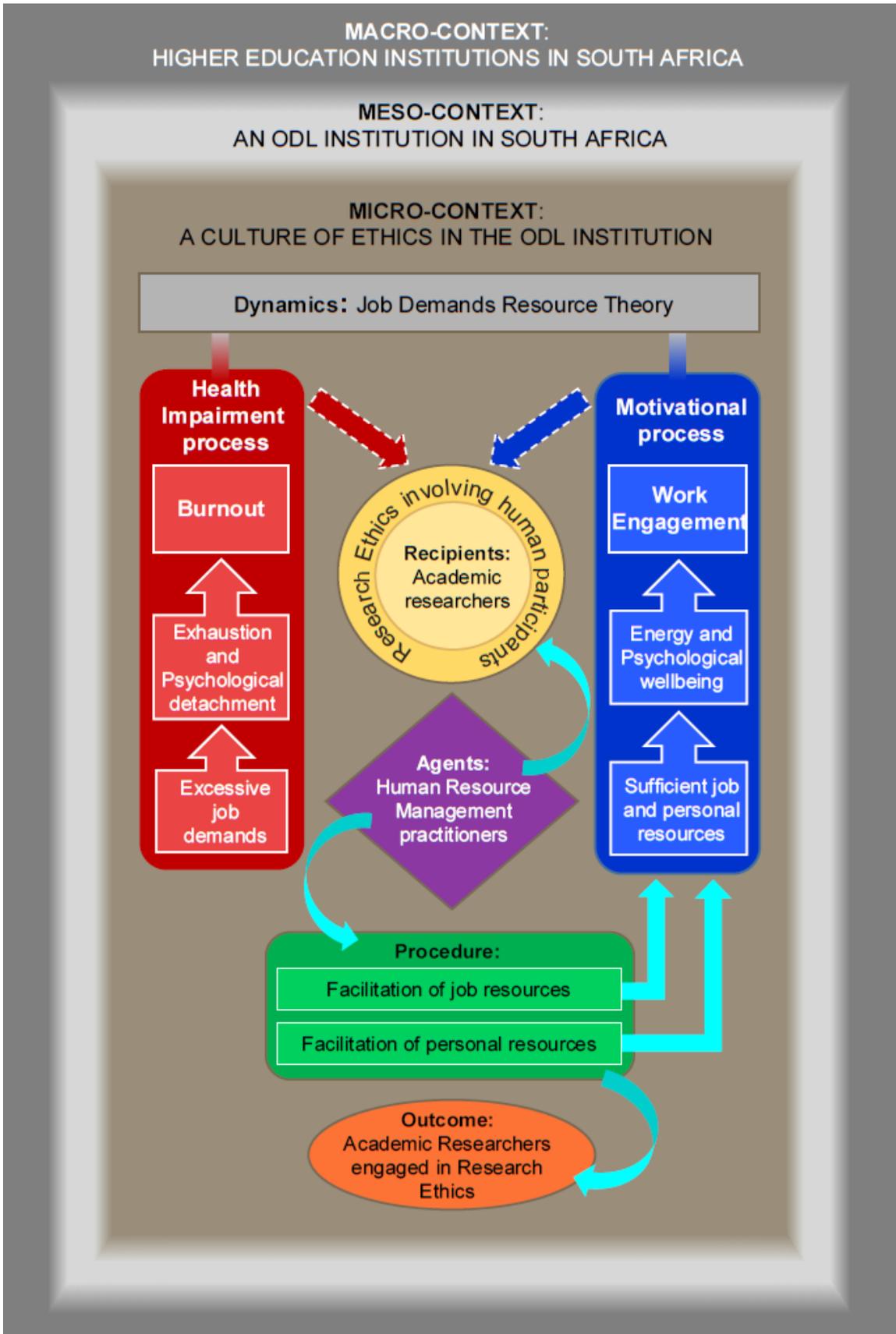


Figure 7.1: A conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support the engagement of academic researcher in research ethics

7.5.3 Context where the activities takes place

The context of this conceptual framework refers to the setting or the environment in which activities take place. This research study was conducted within the HE milieu of SA at a specific ODL institution. The environment (context) of this research was structured into three interconnected settings, namely the macro-context, the meso-context and the micro-context. The macro-context refers to HEIs in SA, which was represented with charcoal. The meso-context of this study refers to an ODL institution in SA, and was represented with silver. The micro-context signifies a culture of ethics in the ODL institution, evident in the demonstrated commitment and acknowledged responsibility of each employee to behave ethically. The micro-context of the conceptual framework is represented with brown.

The three colours, representative of the research context, do not have solid lines and blur into each other to visually demonstrate the interrelationship. No organisation, including this ODL institution, can function in isolation, and the macro-context and meso-context will inescapably influence the micro-context. Figure 7.2 visually portrays the macro-, meso- and micro-context where the actions take place. In this conceptual framework, the holistic view demonstrates that the different subdivisions of the context are interrelated and accordingly contribute to academic researchers' lived experiences in the ODL institution. These lived experiences include their perceived engagement in research ethics involving human participants. Each of these sub-contexts was considered and are discussed below. Consistent with the undefined lines used to portray the different sub-contexts, a clear distinction in the discussions was also difficult and might seem imprecise or overlapping. Nonetheless, when considered as a whole, the context where this study transpired should be clearly understood.



Figure 7.2: The macro-, meso- and micro-context where HRM practitioners need to support the engagement of academic researchers in research ethics

7.5.3.1 Macro-context: Higher education institutions in South Africa

The macro-context refers to public HEIs in SA. A lot has been written on the troubling state of HEIs globally and locally (Baloyi, 2020; CHE, 2016b). However, the opposite is also true. Countless literature sources have applauded the value and significance of HEIs across time and space. HEIs, particularly universities, have been in existence since the middle ages (CHE, 2016b; Marshall, 2010). Universities are known to be illustrative of an elitist society and only students who are estimated to have the intellectual aptitudes to succeed are admitted (Archer, 2017). As social institutions, universities equip individuals with quality education and skills, which enable these individuals to constructively contribute to the national development of a country (CHE, 2016b; Ford, 2017; Ololube *et al.*, 2016). These institutions are the foundation for structuring a thriving population (Ololube *et al.*, 2016).

Ford (2017) stated that universities have become more significant and have multiplied in numbers over the last 100 years. Also, in SA, HEIs, including universities, play a significant role in the country's intellectual presence and have a vital influence on the nation's social, cultural and financial wellbeing (DHET 2013; USAF, 2017). These universities have the specific mandate to provide teaching and education, community engagement and outreach, and deliver scientific research (DHET, 2013). Therefore, it is plausible that universities' executive standing leads to the belief among numerous individuals that a university degree is a crucial qualification and that such qualifications can be the forerunner to several employment opportunities (Bhorat, Cassim & Tseng, 2016; Marshall, 2010).

In solidarity with the abovementioned perception, the colour I selected to portray the macro-context was associated with the longstanding prestigious and influential role associated with HEIs in SA. The chosen colour, charcoal, is associated with authority, leadership, influence, regulation, direction and sophistication (EBC, 2018; King, 2019; Singh & Srivastava, 2011; Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). It communicates intelligence, sophistication, uncompromising excellence (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016), professionalism (Singh & Srivastava, 2011), and competence (Kurt & Osueke, 2014).

Yet, the findings allude to a lived experience where uncertainties exist among research participants regarding the reputation and standing of HEIs in society. The research findings (phase two) indicated that participants perceived the current research ethics landscape as mirroring the larger context of employees working at HEIs and the experiences that citizens encounter in the broader societal context of SA (see Section 6.5.1.2). They described this context as complicated and concerning. Several participants also expressed concerns about perceived unsettling behaviour in the broader SA context (also evident in HEIs), such as corruption, unfair discrimination, nepotism, unethical behaviour, distrust, a lack of integrity and confidentiality, and the abuse of power, coupled with unethical leadership within the HEIs (including the ODL institution, see Section 7.5.3.2), as well as in the wider SA (see Section 6.5.1.2.a).

The context of employees working at HEIs, including the research ethics landscape, should be clearly distinguishable from the perceived broader societal context of SA, in order for academic researchers to engage in research ethics. The meso- and micro-context (Sections 7.5.3.2 and 7.5.3.3) of the conceptual framework will shed light on how this can be achieved. In Section 7.5.4, an explanation is presented of actioning this envisioned outcome.

7.5.3.2 Meso-context: An open distance learning institution in South Africa

The meso-context of this conceptual framework is situated in a specific ODL institution in SA. This ODL institution is one of the largest correspondence universities globally and on the African continent (Africa Universities, 2016; Gerber, 2019; USAF, 2017). Literature describes the ODL institution as a respectable, comprehensive, accommodating and accessible HEI, and state that the institution provides HE to a large proportion of students in SA (Africa Universities, 2016; USAF, 2017). The qualifications offered include a wide variety of degrees up to doctoral level, as well as certificate and diploma programmes (Gerber, 2019), all of which are accredited and internationally recognised (Institution A, 2019d).

The colour chosen to illustrate the meso-context for this conceptual framework was silver. Silver is associated with respect, dignity, responsibility, determination and structure (EBC, 2018). Resembling the opportunities offered to students to positively change their career prospects with a tertiary qualification, silver initiates support (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016); it is a source of positive energy (Bourn, 2011); and can indicate a change of the direction as it sheds light on the envisioned course of action (EBC, 2018). In the context of the current study and honouring the lived experiences of research participants, it is noteworthy that silver can also symbolise inner reflection as it mirrors back any energy shared, whether it is constructive or destructive (EBC, 2018). And so, in line with the symbolic meaning of silver, the framework portrays the opportunity for the ODL institution to evaluate its standing as HEI in SA by means of inward reflection.

Paradoxically, the documented view of the ODL institution contradicts the perception held by participants, who shared that not all conduct within the ODL institution is ethical. Perceived unethical behaviour is believed to have a damaging effect on the reputation of the institution. Thus, if the ODL institution's reputation is perceived to be undesirable by participants, due to occurrences of unethical behaviour among colleagues and management (see Section 6.5.1.2.a), it will be imperative for the institution to acknowledge the problem and reclaim its standing as an ethical ODL institution.

Organisational reputation can be understood as the collective term referring to the perceptions held by various stakeholders regarding the organisation's vision, products and services, economic performance, leadership, management, employees, and social responsibility undertakings (Şantaş, Özer, Saygılı & Özkan, 2020). The reputation of an organisation is important, and since it is founded on the perceptions of its stakeholders, it can be utilised as an intangible asset of the organisation (Dhir & Shukla, 2019). One of these stakeholder groups

is its employees (Yasin, 2021). The perceptions held by this stakeholder group of the organisational reputation have an undeniable influence on the engagement they experience in the workplace (Dhir & Shukla, 2019; Men, 2012).

Participants indicated that perceived unethical behaviours cause uncertainty about the future existence of the ODL institution and jeopardise their future job security. The perceived unethical behaviours also have a negative influence on their commitment to the university. When instances of unethical behaviour come to the fore, it not only damages the organisational reputation (Page, Boysen & Arya, 2019; Rajan & Bhaduri, 2020), it also threatens its continued existence (Lee, 2020).

The analysis of the data revealed that a number of participants experienced these perceived unethical behaviours as strenuous job demands. This is evident in their threatened job security and compromised organisational commitment. The consequence of excessive job demands is burnout, and the known outcomes thereof include impeded workability, job insecurity, turnover intention and diminished organisational commitment (Schaufeli, 2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

In contrast, when the reputation of the organisation is positive, employees' turnover intention is decreased, and the continuous employee commitment is supported (Dhir & Shukla, 2019), thus resulting in knowledge being retained within the organisation (Yasin, 2021) (also see Section 7.5.7.6). The organisational reputation therefore clearly has an influence on employees' behaviour towards the organisation (Şantaş *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the quality of service that these employees provide (their behaviour) is the result of their demonstrated perceptions (Şantaş *et al.*, 2020). The organisational reputation also influences their perceived level of trust in the organisation (Şantaş *et al.*, 2020). Employees who experience positive feelings towards the organisation, such as esteem, trust, and respect, are more inclined to be engaged in their jobs and devoted to the organisational undertakings (Men, 2012).

Employees desire to work at and will seek out organisations that have good reputations (Mitonga-Monga & Cilliers, 2016). Such behaviour is understandable if it is understood that, according to Yasin (2021), the organisational reputation reflects employees' identity within society. Organisations that adopt a culture of ethics (as the preferred organisational culture) are particularly prone to support the organisation's reputation and the organisational commitment of employees (Lee, 2020) (see Section 7.5.3.3). Furthermore, the employees' view of organisational reputation is associated with their view of their organisational leadership (see Sections 7.5.3.3 and 7.5.7.2) and organisational policies (Yasin, 2021).

Consequently, it is critical that organisations and management of organisations realise that a reputable impression of the organisation will support employees to engage in their work (Dhir & Shukla, 2019). Engaged employees, in turn, will be more productive (Dhir & Shukla, 2019) and positively contribute to the organisational outcomes (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Han *et al.*, 2019). This is true for the ODL institution as well. For that reason, academic researchers can only engage in research ethics if the ODL institution's reputation is beyond reproach. The academic researchers' perceptions of the university should be positive. They should feel committed to the institution, have the intention to stay with the university, and feel secure in their jobs and the future existence of the institution.

7.5.3.3 Micro-context: A culture of ethics in the ODL institution

The micro-context of this conceptual framework is a culture of ethics, as the preferred organisational culture for the ODL institution. The participants shared that it is essential for the ODL institution to endorse a culture of ethics, to create an environment where academic researchers can engage in research ethics. This culture of ethics that should be fostered within the ODL institution should be evident at the organisational level. Yet, it is pertinent to understand that according to the participants, each employee should endorse and demonstrate ethical behaviour on an individualistic level, to ensure that a culture of ethics manifests within the ODL institution. Essentially, without employees' endorsement on an individualistic level to consistently be ethical in their work tasks, a culture of ethics will not be sustainable within the ODL institution.

To symbolically represent a culture of ethics as the micro-context of the conceptual framework, I chose the colour brown. Symbolically, brown is associated with reliability, support, reassurance, security, insightfulness, tradition, steadfastness, dedication and dependability (Bourn, 2011; Olesen, 2019; Singh & Srivastava, 2011; Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). The colour brown is also associated with feelings of belonging and compatibility (Bourn, 2011).

As discussed in Sections 6.5.1.4 and 6.5.1.5, an academic researcher needs to have an individualistic and personal ethical predisposition before they can engage in research ethics. It is also critical that the ODL institution is well-balanced and successful in supporting academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. According to the participants, this balance and success of the ODL institution can only be achieved if a culture of ethics is evident within the university. Participants also upheld that the strategic objectives of the university and the culture of ethics are intertwined. Their perceptions were that the culture of ethics cannot be sustained within the ODL institution if the strategic objectives are not aligned to the

organisational culture. Likewise, this university's strategic objectives cannot be attained if it is not aligned with a culture of ethics within the institution.

The concept of individualism is defined by Hofstede (1994:6) as "the degree to which a person acts as an individual rather than as a member of a group". Santos, Varnum and Grossmann (2017) explain that individualism is the perception that a person is an autonomous agent, who is self-directed, and distinct from other individuals. Chan and Cheung (2016) agree, but add that the individualist is self-contained, focused on goal attainment, and demonstrates measured behaviour. Individualists thus demonstrate the ability to direct their own behaviour rather than mimicking others (Collins Dictionary, 2021a). The definition of Merriam-Webster (2021a), stating that individualism is the belief that all values, rights, and duties originate within the individual, is the most fitting to understand participants' views that engagement in research ethics originates from an individualistic ethical predisposition. Conversely, the concept 'personal' can be understood as belonging to a particular person and not a group or organisation (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021b). It relates to a particular person's character, motives, behaviours, and qualities, and not to a thing or abstraction (Merriam-Webster, 2021c).

For the purposes of this study, an individualistic and personal ethical predisposition should thus be understood as: The belief that all values, rights, and duties originate within the individual, and these values, rights, and duties are personal (belong to a particular person), evident in their qualities as person, character, motives and behaviours. Academic researchers' individualistic and personal predisposition should be ethical in nature in order for these employees to engage in research ethics.

As stated above, apart from having an individualistic and personal ethical predisposition as a prerequisite for engagement in research ethics, participants maintained that the ODL institution must be well-balanced and successful to effectively support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. The concept 'well-balanced' is frequently associated with an individual who is calm, reasonable and demonstrates good judgement (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021d), or someone who does not experience emotional or psychological problems (Merriam-Webster, 2021d). For the purposes of this study, a well-balanced ODL institution should be understood as an organisation demonstrating sensible, rational (Collins Dictionary, 2021c), and reasonable conduct, with sound decision-making (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021d) procedures.

The concept of success is sometimes associated with concepts such as wealth or prosperity (Dictionary.com, 2021), but for this study, success should be understood as achieving the desired outcome and the attainment of respect (Dictionary.com, 2021; Macmillan Dictionary, 2021; Oxford Dictionary, 2021). Thus, in order for academic researchers to engage in research ethics, the ODL institution should demonstrate sensible, rational, and reasonable conduct, with sound decision-making procedures, in order to achieve its desired outcome (strategic objectives) and attain respect from all stakeholders (including its employees).

An organisational culture refers to the shared views of employees within an organisation in terms of the adopted norms and values, the organisational objectives, appropriate behaviour, and policies and procedures upheld by an organisation (Nedkovski *et al.*, 2017; Page *et al.*, 2019; Rose, 2018). In essence, the organisation's culture defines the proper way for employees to behave within the organisation (Page *et al.*, 2019; SHRM, 2021). The norms and values upheld by the organisation's culture also provide a sense of job security for employees and offer clarity on expected behaviours, how to solve problems, and decision-making procedures (Page *et al.*, 2019).

Organisational cultures have specific attributes that can be observed (Erdem, 2016). These visible manifestations of the culture can be observed through its formalities, traditions, customs, behavioural norms, and the traditional way of doing things (SHRM, 2021). According to Erdem (2016), it is possible to teach and acquire these attributes of organisational culture; the attributes can be shared among the employees; it can be saved in the employees' cognisance and memories; and it can shape the behavioural patterns which are repetitively done or made known. Also, Page *et al.* (2019) uphold that employees can influence an organisation's culture since they play a direct role in supporting the values and norms of the organisation.

A culture that is well-established can be beneficial for the advancement of trust and cooperation, effective and timeous decision-making, and decrease organisational conflict (SHRM, 2021). The organisational culture ensures that employees have a clear understanding of what is important in the organisation and promotes a sense of identification for employees in relation to the organisation (SHRM, 2021; Tucker, 2017). It also plays a critical role in supporting the engagement and satisfaction of employees (Page *et al.*, 2019).

When an organisation upholds an ineffective culture, it can have detrimental consequences for the organisation (SHRM, 2021). These negative consequences can include a high turnover

of employees, poor relations with external stakeholders, an inability to reach desired organisational outcomes, and disengaged employees (SHRM, 2021).

Although a general description of what an organisational culture entails can be offered, to precisely define what an organisational culture is, is challenging (SHRM, 2021; Tucker, 2017). No two organisations have the same culture because the needs, objectives and responsibilities of each organisation differ, resulting in a unique organisational culture within every organisation (SHRM, 2021). Still, Tucker (2017) maintains that in fostering a culture of ethics, specifically, some characteristics are significant for all organisations. First, an organisation that fosters a culture of ethics will not tolerate unethical behaviour or misconduct (Tucker, 2017). Second, acceptable behaviour is clear, since it is backed by policies and procedures (Tucker, 2017). Third, these policies and procedures clarify the conceivable consequences of discovered unethical behaviours (Tucker, 2017). Reprimands are sharp and can lead to dismissal in instances where the wrongdoings are harmful to the organisation's reputation, against the law or recurring (Tucker, 2017).

A culture of ethics is essential to guide and support employees to conduct themselves appropriately and realise institutional objectives (Arulrajah, 2015). It also serves as a resource for employees that aids them to identify with the organisation (Huhtala & Feldt, 2016). An organisation that endorses a culture of ethics is recognised in the demonstrated support that the management and employees of the organisation give, to uphold ethical values, to abide by lawful organisational practices, and in the promotion of suitable behaviour between colleagues, management, and external stakeholders (Tucker, 2017). As stated in Section 7.5.3.2, an organisation's culture also has a direct influence on the organisation's reputation (Lee, 2020). When a culture of ethics manifests within an organisation, it will thus have a positive influence on the organisational reputation and increase employee loyalty (Lee, 2020). Within such an organisational culture, an environment is created that endorses responsibility and ethical approaches to reach desired organisational outcomes (Lee, 2020).

According to Erdem (2016), trust, honesty, trustworthiness, and reliability are the ethical values that universities should uphold in their undertaking to teach, conduct research and offer community services. When the organisational culture is founded on these principles, the culture will be constructive and able to thrive (Page *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, employees who perceive their working environment as characterised by trustworthiness, respect, dignity, justice and honourable behaviour are more satisfied and productive in their work duties (Mitonga-Monga, Flotman & Moerane, 2019).

In organisations where an organisational culture is well-established, it not only contributes to employee effectivity but also supports the realisation of the organisational strategy (Reddy & Scheepers, 2019). To this end, it can be understood that a close relationship exists between the culture of an organisation and the strategy of the organisation (Tasgit *et al.*, 2017). According to Nedkovski *et al.* (2017), the strategic position taken by an institution denotes the employees' shared views in terms of the adopted norms, values and policies in the organisation, and these adopted norms, values and policies are demonstrated in the organisation's culture.

The strategy that is developed within an organisation should be completely aligned with the organisational culture in order to be successfully executed; and, as a result, ensure that the organisation remains operational (Reddy & Scheepers, 2019; Rose, 2018; SHRM, 2021). Therefore, before an organisation attempts to identify and implement its strategic objectives, it should first ensure that the organisational culture is well-established to support and underscore those strategies (Rose, 2018).

In the ODL institution where the study took place, the following values are declared as part of its strategic position:

- Ethics portrays the intrinsic and extrinsic values, principles, norms and standards to which the ODL institution is committed, and these values are rooted in respect, integrity, accountability and excellence (Institution A, 2019d).
- These ethical principles direct all institutional conduct, activities, decisions and stakeholder relations, supporting equity and justice (Institution A, 2019d).
- Integrity refers to behaviour guided by honesty, equity, respect, transparency, responsibility and accountability in all the activities of the ODL institution (Institution A, 2019d).
- Integrity must manifest at an individual level, is embedded in the character of the institution, and must be evident in individuals' behaviour who form part of the ODL institution, as well as parties who are representative of the institution (Institution A, 2019d).
- Ethical behaviour applies to all stakeholders of the institution, mirrors how the institution interacts with these parties, as well as the expected behaviour from these parties to engage with the ODL institution (Institution A, 2019d).

However, despite the stated values of the ODL institution, participants expressed concerns about incidences of unsettling, unethical, and corrupt behaviour within the institution (see Section 7.5.3.2). Thus, it is evident that discord exists between participants' perception of the

ODL institution and the stated values of the institution. Participants maintained that dissonance exists between what they observe and the expectations placed on academic researchers (to conduct ethical research). According to Chapman and Lindner (2016), unethical behaviour within HEIs has far-reaching consequences since it disrupts the connection between employees' investment of energy and efforts, and the expected positive outcomes and rewards. For instance, when corruption is observed, it can negatively influence employees who will regrettably believe that personal success is achieved not through effort, hard work, and merit, but by being involved with unethical behaviour (Chapman & Lindner, 2016).

To curtail possible unethical behaviour within the ODL institution and enable academic researchers to engage in research ethics, a culture of ethics within the university should be endorsed. Villegas *et al.* (2019) maintain that ethical behaviour within organisations does not occur unexpectedly, and should be reinforced with clear, unambiguous statements and actions taken by management. In effect, managers are the most important factor in creating a culture of ethics and ethical working conditions, since these individuals are the role models within the organisation, and their behaviours can influence the behaviours of other employees (Bonner *et al.*, 2016; Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015; Page *et al.*, 2019; Yasin, 2021). Babalola *et al.* (2016) indicated that leaders could inspire employees to uphold ethical behaviour in the workplace through social learning. Employees who observe ethical values and practices carried out in their organisation experience higher levels of WE (Huhtala & Feldt, 2016). However, when managers fail to provide this leadership and are involved with unethical behaviour, uncertainty and distrust emerge (Moorhead & Griffin, 2012).

To demonstrate the negative influence unethical behaviour within an organisation can have on employee wellbeing, I refer to a study conducted by Dubbelt and Rispens (2016) on gender discrimination. The authors found that when women face discrimination in the workplace, this unfair bias is associated with feelings of increased job demands and fewer job resources (Dubbelt & Rispens, 2016). The same study also determined that when a cohort of employees observes discrimination towards a specific group of employees, it creates an insecure work environment for all employees, who then view the work environment in an increasingly negative light (Dubbelt & Rispens, 2016).

The study conducted by Dubbelt and Rispens (2016) supports the findings of the current study, where it became evident that the participants felt distressed and anxious (job demands) when they observed unethical behaviour among colleagues and leaders (management) within the ODL institution.

The participants also lamented management’s response to perceived unethical behaviour within the institution. According to them, some managers’ inadequate responses to unethical behaviour, including inaction, create a setting where unethical behaviour does not receive the condemnation it ought to. Participants voiced their concern that unethical behaviour might be perceived as acceptable by employees, if undesirable behaviour goes unpunished. The unease experienced by participants is further aggravated when unethical behaviour is displayed by management. Managers’ questionable behaviour fosters distrust between employees and managers, and has a draining effect on the wellbeing of employees (psychological job demand), including the academic researchers within the ODL institution. Likewise, managers’ inactions in addressing employees’ ethical concerns strengthen this distrust since the perception is held that managers cannot be trusted to be ethical if they fail to address employees’ unethical behaviour.

In a study conducted by Page *et al.* (2019), it was found that for employees, the most valuable aspects of an organisational culture are the virtues of integrity, psychological safety, professional responsibility, shared values, respect, trust, and recognition. Thus, to rectify any distrust that employees have towards management, managers will have to demonstrate qualities that support a culture of ethics within the ODL institution. In Table 7.3, the qualities that leaders should have to endorse a culture of ethics are identified. Moreover, the significance of such behaviours by leaders (managers), in supporting a culture of ethics, is explained.

Table 7.3: Leadership qualities and demonstrated behaviours required within the ODL institution to support a culture of ethics

QUALITY AND DEMONSTRATED BEHAVIOUR	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE QUALITY AND DEMONSTRATED BEHAVIOUR
<p>Uphold an ethical reputation and consistently demonstrate ethical behaviours within the ODL institution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When employees work under the leadership of an ethical leader, they experience more satisfaction with their working conditions and the organisation (Mitonga-Monga <i>et al.</i>, 2019). • Leaders’ ethical reputation forms the foundation for the organisation to promote a moral framework and ensure organisational success (Bhana & Bayat, 2020; Yasin, 2021). • Ethical leadership is a means to demonstrate ethical behaviour to subordinates, and as such, promote sound decision-making,

QUALITY AND DEMONSTRATED BEHAVIOUR	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE QUALITY AND DEMONSTRATED BEHAVIOUR
	suitable communication, and organisational trust (Bhana & Bayat, 2020).
Demonstrate responsibility within the ODL institution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible leaders increase employees' organisational commitment and contribute to employees' feelings of being proud to be part of the organisation (Yasin, 2021). • Responsible leaders also foster the support of the organisation's stakeholders (Yasin, 2021). • When leaders demonstrate ethical work practices, observable by subordinates, they encourage their subordinates to conduct their work in a similar fashion and promote employees' ethical responsibility (Tucker, 2017).
Demonstrate personal and clearly defined ethical norms and values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The values and norms demonstrated by leaders have a direct influence on the organisational culture, and this demonstrated behaviour will encourage new employees to behave in a similar manner (Page <i>et al.</i>, 2019).
Uphold and adhere to the norms and values of the ODL institution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important that the leaders and the organisation share the same norms and values (SHRM, 2021) since leaders can directly influence the way in which work is conducted; workplace respect is upheld, and the engagement of employees is supported (Page <i>et al.</i>, 2019).
As leaders within the ODL institution, they should advocate and demonstrate high moral values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders should have high moral values, because in their leadership capacity, they can demonstrate the purpose and value of HEIs in society (Baloyi, 2020). • Leaders who demonstrate ethical behaviour will advocate the required moral values to support the attainment of the HEI's goals and objectives (Bhana & Bayat, 2020).
Demonstrate their accountability within the ODL institution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the execution of the organisational strategy, leaders need to be committed and involved, to demonstrate their accountability as leaders in leading the organisation in the preferred direction (Reddy & Scheepers, 2019).

QUALITY AND DEMONSTRATED BEHAVIOUR	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE QUALITY AND DEMONSTRATED BEHAVIOUR
<p>Clearly communicate and demonstrate what is expected at the ODL institution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •With unambiguously stated expectations and demonstrations of expected behaviours, all stakeholders, including employees, external collaborators, and students, will be aware of the norms and values upheld by the organisation and what their required behaviours should be (Bhana & Bayat, 2020; Mitonga-Monga <i>et al.</i>, 2019; Tucker, 2017).
<p>Inspire followers to strive to reach the objectives of the ODL institution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Leaders within the organisation have an obligation to inspire employees to achieve the strategic objectives of the organisation in a trustworthy way (Baloyi, 2020).
<p>Treat employees within the ODL institution fairly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •When ethical leaders treat their subordinates fairly, the employees will devote their time to the organisation, be more satisfied with their work, and their performance will increase (Mitonga-Monga <i>et al.</i>, 2019).
<p>Leaders should demonstrate ethical behaviour and support an organisational culture that is perceived to be supportive of employees within the ODL institution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Employees perceive leaders who support a positive and favourable workplace, characterised by a supportive organisational culture and ethical values, as leaders who provide the necessary resources for them to perform their duties (Mitonga-Monga <i>et al.</i>, 2019). •With perceived resources being provided by leaders, employees feel encouraged to perform better, and these resources support their wellbeing (Mitonga-Monga <i>et al.</i>, 2019).
<p>Consistently communicate and demonstrate their cultural identity within the ODL institution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Leaders should, on a continuous basis, communicate and demonstrate their cultural identity within the organisation; not only to employees, but also to prospective employees (SHRM, 2021).
<p>Leaders should encourage employees to voice their ideas within the ODL institution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •When leaders encourage employees to voice their ideas, they promote a work environment within the organisation that is perceived as psychologically safe for employees (Page <i>et al.</i>, 2019).

QUALITY AND DEMONSTRATED BEHAVIOUR	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE QUALITY AND DEMONSTRATED BEHAVIOUR
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a psychologically safe work environment, employees are more inclined to follow their leaders (Page <i>et al.</i>, 2019).
<p>As leaders within the ODL institution, they should demonstrate genuine concern for their subordinates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical leaders who demonstrate genuine concern for employees are perceived by their subordinates to be objective, honourable, and sincere individuals (Mitonga-Monga <i>et al.</i>, 2019).

Source: Own compilation

In addition to the abovementioned distrust that employees hold towards managers, a different perspective also became evident; seemingly distrust between employees and managers is mutual. Participants indicated that management does not trust employees, including academic researchers, either. The current management style within the ODL institution is perceived as restrictive, controlling, and a demonstration of a lack of trust in subordinates. Several participants believed that the strict bureaucratic regulatory systems, including research ethics regulation, are developed in reaction to observed unethical and cumbersome behaviours by employees within the institution. The bureaucratic approach followed for research ethics regulation illustrates the overarching approach followed by management, who continuously add more rules and regulations to regulate employee behaviour within the institution. Participants indicated that strict research ethics regulatory systems were thus developed to instil safety measures to increase ethical research. When employees perceive their work context as restrictive and bureaucratic, it is perceived as job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Schaufeli, 2014).

In a culture of ethics, employees need to be trusted, managers should be supportive and enable employees to perform their work, and employees should honour the norms and values of responsibility and accountability. When employees have the freedom to operate as autonomous agents and are entrusted with responsibilities, the basic need of autonomy, competence and relatedness is supported (Schaufeli, 2017). Employees are also more inclined to be engaged when these needs are fulfilled (Rahmadani *et al.*, 2019). Within the micro-context, which focuses on the culture of ethics within the ODL institution, specifically, the participants held that for academic researchers to engage in research ethics, management's bureaucratic approach should be reconsidered.

7.5.4 Agents: HRM practitioners who support a culture of ethics

In the conceptual framework, the role of the agents is fulfilled by HRM practitioners within the ODL institution, and their role is to support a culture of ethics within the university. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2021c), support can be understood as to offer approval or encouragement to someone or something because you want the person or thing to succeed. It entails offering practical and emotional support, providing the right conditions, and preventing something from falling in value or becoming less strong.

Within the context of this conceptual framework, 'support' should accordingly be understood as HRM practitioners encouraging employees to uphold ethical behaviour because they want a culture of ethics to successfully manifest within the ODL institution. In their role to offer 'support', HRM practitioners will provide practical and emotional support to employees, ensure that the right working conditions are provided to employees, and prevent the organisational reputation or the preferred organisational culture to deteriorate. The agents (HRM practitioners) are visually represented with a purple diamond shape in Figure 7.3.



Figure 7.3: Agents: Human Resource Management practitioners supporting, facilitating and co-creating a culture of ethics

From a symbolic perspective, purple is known for invigorating brain activities that can be utilised to solve problems (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). It is also used to portray knowledge and insight (Singh & Srivastava, 2011). Purple furthermore promotes rational thoughts and psychological balance and vigour (Olesen, 2019). Likewise, an expectation exists that HRM

practitioners, as the managers of human capital, will exhibit the required knowledge and offer necessary insight to support an organisational culture of ethics within the ODL institution. Arulrajah (2015), Harris (2016), Mitonga-Monga *et al.* (2019), and Chidi (2012) support this view and maintain that HRM practitioners are involved in managing employees within an institution, and this division of management has a significant role in supporting a culture of ethics in an organisation. In essence, in the management of human resources, the HRMs are focused on ethical standards in three distinct aspects, which include the behaviour of employees, the values that govern the conduct of these employees, and the ethical standards of the organisation (Chidi, 2012; SHRM, 2021). As explained in Section 7.5.3.3, an organisation must have a culture of ethics to guide employees to behave appropriately and achieve organisational objectives (Arulrajah, 2015; Lee, 2020; SHRM, 2021; Tucker, 2017).

To instil a culture of ethics within the ODL institution, HRM practitioners need to support employees' job and personal resources. These specific supportive roles are discussed in Section 7.5.7 as part of the procedure of the conceptual framework. Such resources promote a culture of ethics to be cultivated within the ODL institution. By increasing academic researchers' resources to complement their current lived experiences, WE can be advanced. Within the present study's setting, engagement in research ethics can therefore be encouraged when HRM practitioners underpin a culture of ethics within the ODL institution. By advancing suitable, practical settings where ethical behaviour is supported and enabled, organisations can counteract exhaustion, cynicism, and decreased professional efficacy (Huhtala *et al.*, 2015). Within an organisational culture of ethics, academic researchers can feel motivated, engage in research ethics processes and procedures, and conduct ethical research.

The two arrows on each side of the purple diamond are illustrative of the pathways for action. Turquoise symbolically directs the way forward for success and weighs up these pathways' advantages and disadvantages (EBC, 2018). Symbolically, turquoise refers to the restoration of our emotional dispositions during periods of mental stress and fatigue (EBC, 2018; Olesen, 2019). It has the ability to positively influence our emotions, thus assisting in the process of creating emotional balance and stability (Bear, 2019; Olesen, 2019). For this reason, the colour turquoise seemed fitting for the two arrows.

The one turquoise arrow in Figure 7.3, directed towards the recipients (academic researchers), is demonstrative of who would benefit from the activities performed by the HRM practitioners. The second turquoise arrow, directed towards the procedure (support of job and personal resources), is demonstrative of the way in which the HRM practitioners will support and

facilitate a culture of ethics within the ODL institution. As stated earlier, the procedure of the conceptual framework is discussed in Section 7.5.7. Still, it is worth pointing out that the turquoise arrow directed to the procedure can symbolically portray the envisioned pathways to restore emotional balance and wellbeing in instances where academic researchers experience stress and fatigue (burnout).

7.5.5 Recipients: Academic researchers

The recipients in this conceptual framework are academic researchers employed at the ODL institution conducting research involving human participants, implying that their research studies require research ethics regulation and approval by an ERC. The recipients are the beneficiaries of the procedure (support and facilitation of job and personal resources) facilitated by the agents (HRM practitioners). In the conceptual framework, these recipients (academic researchers) are visually portrayed with the yellow inner circle, as demonstrated in Figure 7.4. The outer yellow circle provides clarity of the specific setting in which these recipients will be supported.

Academic researchers are typically responsible for knowledge creation and innovative thinking, and portray traits such as intelligence, taking pleasure in mental challenges, and being open-minded. Similarly, yellow is symbolically associated with intelligence, open-mindedness (Singh & Srivastava, 2011; Nunes, 2018), finding innovative ways to do things (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016), decision-making, knowledge creation, retaining information and having a clear state of mind (Olesen, 2019).

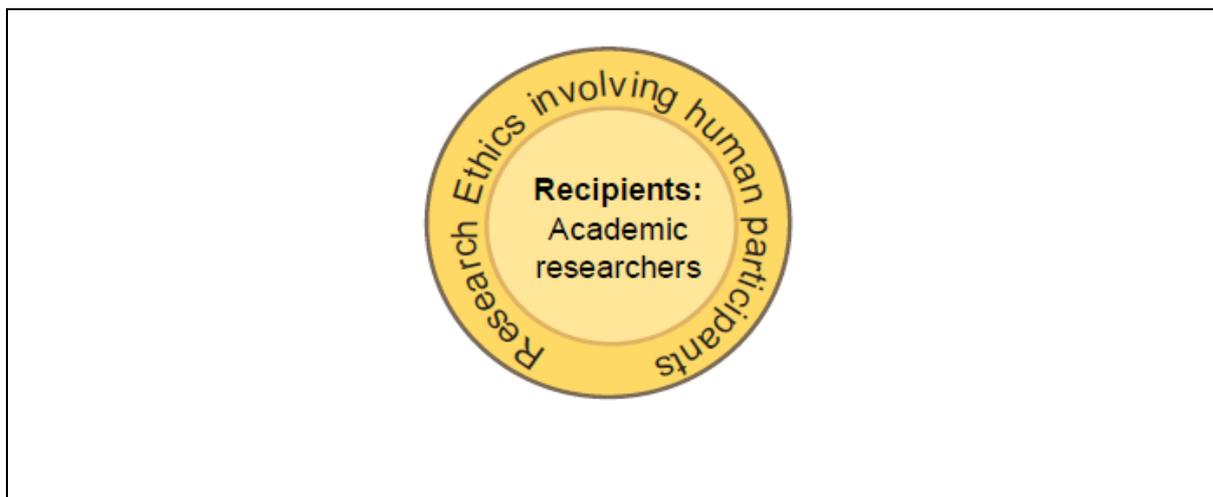


Figure 7.4: Recipients: Academic researchers enabled with job and personal resources to engage in research ethics

From the research findings (phase two as discussed in Chapter 6), it is evident that academic researchers do have access to some job and personal resources in the context of this HEI. Job resources include access to information (although not always easy to obtain); job crafting behaviours; and personal resources such as the perceived ability to control the extent of their knowledge related to research ethics; resilience in the face of challenges related to research ethics-related processes and procedures; and a personal value orientation that is compatible with desired conduct for ethical research (see Section 6.5.1.1). Certain participants believed some academic researchers are currently engaged in research ethics within the ODL institution despite perceived hindrances that might impair their wellbeing and negatively influence their engagement in research ethics. In the next section, I describe illustrations of engagement experienced by academic researchers, evident in their demonstrated behaviours. These discussions are then followed by illustrations of aspects that have a negative influence on academic researchers' capacity to engage in research ethics within the ODL institution.

7.5.5.1 Academic researchers engaged in research ethics conduct research in a sanctified way

Participants believed academic researchers who are engaged in research ethics would conduct research in a sanctified way. To 'sanctify' refers to the notion that something is created which is morally right and acceptable (Longman Dictionary, 2021), respectable, it is as it should be, and it should not be changed (Collins Dictionary, 2021b). In this study, research that is conducted in a sanctified way should be understood as research that is done in a respectable, morally correct, and acceptable way, and this approach to research should not be changed. With this understanding, it is rational to believe that researchers who conduct research in a sanctified way believe that ethical research is significant and important. Bakker (2018), Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) and Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) also uphold that employees who regard something as significant take pride in performing the task. They also accept the challenge(s) associated with the task (dedication), and demonstrate the characteristics of engaged employees. Academic researchers should experience pride in the knowledge that their research activities are conducted in an honourable manner. When challenges arise (including ethical challenges) in the process of conducting research, these academic researchers would not be inclined to take shortcuts and compromise the integrity of the research or welfare of participants to ease the procedures. They will accept the challenge and be dedicated and continue to conduct the research in a sanctified way. The support that HRM practitioners can give academic researchers to engage in research ethics, thus resulting in

research that is conducted in a sanctified way, is discussed in Section 7.5.7 as part of the conceptual framework procedure.

7.5.5.2 Academic researchers engaged in research ethics devote time and energy to source knowledge and advance their understanding of research ethics

According to the participants, engagement in research ethics is demonstrated by the time and energy devoted to actively source knowledge to better understand research ethics. This is done by consulting scientific literature, studying research and research ethics policies and procedures, and/or interacting with other academic researchers. Similarly, Schaufeli (2018) and Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) uphold that WE is evident when employees display vigour and dedication. Academic researchers engaged in research ethics should thus be dedicated and devoted to obtaining a better understanding of the phenomenon (research ethics), while demonstrating perseverance and being persistent in acquiring the desired knowledge. They should invest time and energy to interact with literature or consult with knowledgeable colleagues, and accordingly demonstrate their dedication in this undertaking (Dingwall & McDonnell, 2015; Giraud *et al.*, 2019; Head, 2020).

Access to information related to research ethics, either verbally or written, can be understood as a job resource. This resource aids academic researchers in their journey to achieve their work goals (ethically sound academic research, which is approved by an ERC, thus adhering to the ODL stipulations). Nonetheless, it should be noted that this information on research ethics (understood as a job resource) is not always readily available. To obtain information on research ethics – that knowledgeable colleagues already enjoy – participants believed academic researchers need to demonstrate job crafting behaviours. Different types of job crafting behaviours can be demonstrated by employees, which can include cognitive, physical, and relational task boundaries. Changes to relational boundaries (sometimes referred to as social boundaries) entail changing the quality and/or quantity of interactions with colleagues (Le Blanc, Demerouti & Bakker, 2017). The demonstrated job crafting behaviour involve changes to relational boundaries where academic researchers obtain support, guidance, and insight from colleagues knowledgeable on research ethics. They reflect a willingness to invest time and effort to actively seek support. It is also demonstrative of changes in cognitive boundaries, as these academic researchers make efforts to expand their own knowledge and understanding of research ethics-related processes and procedures. The HRM practitioners' support for academic researchers who require knowledge and wish to advance their

understanding of research ethics is discussed in Section 7.5.7, as part of the conceptual framework procedure.

7.5.5.3 Academic researchers engaged in research ethics exert physical and mental energy and devote time to apply for research ethics approval

Participants believed engagement in research ethics is reflected when academic researchers are involved in the physical and mental activity of applying for research ethics approval for proposed research studies. This perception corresponds with the position held by Bakker (2018), Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) and Bakker and Oerlemans (2019), who explain that WE is evident in the demonstration of vigour, which entails high levels of energy and mental resilience being displayed by employees while working.

For the participants, the decision to comply with the research ethics application process demonstrates academic researchers' engagement in research ethics, since time and energy are dedicated to ensuring that their research studies will be conducted in an ethically rigorous manner. Several participants shared that the interaction with an ERC was perceived as fulfilling, informative and meaningful. In agreement, Brown, Spiro and Quinton (2020), McAreavey and Muir (2011) uphold that the research ethics application and approval process is supposed to be meaningful and important, and the process should be valued by academic researchers. When employees believe that work efforts are meaningful and important, these employees are more inclined to be engaged in their work (Bakker, 2017; Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019). The willingness to invest time, energy, the willingness to accept the challenge and experience a sense of significance in the task at hand are also demonstrative of their engagement (Bakker, 2017; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). The support that HRM practitioners can give academic researchers, to further their understanding of the significance and importance of their work (including conducting ethically sound research and applying for research ethics approval), is discussed in Section 7.5.7 as part of the conceptual framework procedure.

7.5.5.4 Academic researchers engaged in research ethics comprehend that ethical conduct is a persistent and progressive process

Participants believed that research ethics engagement transpires when academic researchers comprehend that this is a persistent and progressive process that prevails throughout a research study. Likewise, absorption (one of the attributes of WE) also requires employees to be engrossed in and concentrated on their work (Schaufeli, 2018; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Thus,

engaged academic researchers would demonstrate absorption and not frequently lose their focus, become disconnected, or regard research ethics as a fleeting thought or experience. The support that HRM practitioners can give to academic researchers to support their job and personal resources, which can ultimately support academic researchers' absorption in their research-related activities, is discussed in Section 7.5.7 as part of the conceptual framework procedure.

Even though it is encouraging to report on academic researchers' demonstrated engagement in research ethics, the hindering factors to engagement, also identified by participants, cannot be ignored. The research findings indicate that academic researchers (the recipients in this conceptual framework) presently face several challenges within the ODL institution, which deter their engagement in research ethics. These challenges included both job demands and inadequate job or personal resources. These challenges are discussed below.

7.5.5.5 Academic researchers displaying disengagement from research ethics

The data revealed that different categories of academic researchers are disengaged in research ethics, in particular, the process of obtaining research ethics approval. It is worth clarifying that disengagement in research ethics does not automatically indicate that these academic researchers are unethical in their research conduct. It is rather an indication that a feeling of disengagement with the processes and procedures of research ethics regulation within the ODL institution exists. The primary narrative offered by participants is that research ethics regulation and oversight were not always part of the academic research environment. While some academic researchers simply forgo to gain a better and deeper understanding of the rationale or need for research ethics regulation, others actively resist the research ethics regulation process, arguing that the process is coerced and academic researchers were never given a choice on the matter. A final group of academic researchers bemoan the research ethics approval procedures and maintain that it is a burdensome and compliance-driven process.

The formalisation of the research ethics regulation processes thus means that academic researchers have to invest more energy and effort to achieve a work outcome (e.g. a completed research project). Previously, the same work outcome required less energy and strain. With the formalisation of the research ethics regulation, a new job demand thus arose. This additional job demand was added to the extensive work responsibilities that academic researchers already face (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6). When employees are exposed to high job demands, it can lead to psychological detachment and exhaustion (Bakker, 2017; Bakker

et al., 2014; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2017). Thus, when academic researchers disengage in research ethics, it is conceivable that they might be either exhausted or psychologically detached from research ethics. The support that HRM practitioners can give to academic researchers to support their job and personal resources, which in turn can help academic researchers manage the job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014), is discussed in Section 7.5.7.

7.5.5.6 Insufficient research ethics information fuels academic researchers' disengagement in research ethics

Participants indicated that the necessary information related to research ethics is not always sufficient or readily available. This indicates that the required job resources to enable academic researchers to conduct ethical research is perceived as insufficient, thus contributing to the challenges these individuals face in their work. A lack of sufficient or readily available information is responsible for a perception that ERC members inadequately guide academic researchers concerning the correct research ethics processes and procedures. The perceived lack of information might also diminish the quality of the research ethics review process and reviewers' ability to provide constructive and scientifically relevant feedback. In addition, participants indicated that some supervisors do not have the necessary knowledge to guide and support their students in the research ethics application process, resulting in time delays and adding to the distress of their students. Alternatively, ill-informed supervisors place the responsibility on ERCs to guide the student in the research ethics application process.

ERC members can also perceive the research ethics review process as a job demand. Their perception is that some supervisors fail to execute their responsibility in guiding students in the research ethics application process. This responsibility is consequently redirected to the ERC, who is then forced to provide guidance and comprehensive feedback on poor quality research ethics applications in order to assist the student and adhere to their committee mandate. The supervisory responsibility of research ethics is therefore given to the committee, adding to their workload.

A number of the participants indicated that they are engaged in research ethics but voiced a sense of powerlessness with the research ethics application process because of their inability to meet the sought-after requirements. They wanted to follow the correct procedures to obtain research ethics approval for their studies, but it was very difficult since the ERCs' management style is bureaucratic, and the processes and procedures are unclear. Within the work

environment, restrictive bureaucratic systems (seen as red tape) are perceived as hindering job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Schaufeli, 2015; Schaufeli, 2014). Uncertainties relate to where or to whom research ethics applications should be submitted, submission dates, expected turnaround times, and required quality standards to ensure research ethics applications are approved.

Researchers' inability to meet vague requirements or follow unclear procedures causes frustration and creates anxiety when they submit applications. Social sciences researchers feel frustrated and are reluctant to share their proposed research studies with ERCs because their proposed research topic, methodology, or both could be rejected (Hedgecoe, 2016; Iphofen, 2017; Kruger *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, even if applications are not entirely rejected, applicants might face the task of addressing major revisions. The feedback provided by the ERC must then be incorporated – the researcher cannot use their own discretion regarding recommendations – if the applicant wants to obtain research ethics approval because of the ERCs' rigid management style.

When ERCs and supervisors are unable to assist academic researchers (including students) with information on the correct procedures to follow when applying for research ethics approval, the research ethics application process will be regarded as a job demand due to a lack of support. For students, specifically, this job demand can be aggravated when neither their supervisor nor the ERC are able to assist them effectively in the research ethics application process. A number of scientific research studies have confirmed that insufficient support from supervisors and colleagues can create burnout and job dissatisfaction (Maslach, 2017; Plantiveau *et al.*, 2018; Sabagh *et al.*, 2018).

When academic researchers are unable to meet the sought-after requirements of ERCs, they will have to employ a great deal of mental energy in an effort to obtain research ethics approval. In the absence of sufficient job resources, these academic researchers will experience fatigue. Additionally, academic researchers applying for research ethics approval will be exposed to job demands that can include role ambiguity and unattainable performance demands. When job demands are too high and accompanied by a shortage of resources, it can result in burnout (Schaufeli, 2017). Moreover, burnout can result in negative organisational outcomes, reduced work satisfaction, and lower levels of organisational commitment (Bakker *et al.*, 2014). The support that HRM practitioners can give to academic researchers to support their job resources, such as sufficient access to the required information to obtain research ethics approval, is discussed in Section 7.5.7.

7.5.5.7 Conflicting responsibilities and multiple role demands diminish academic researchers' engagement in research ethics

Several participants indicated that employees have conflicting work responsibilities and multiple role demands, which influence their ability to engage in research ethics. Employees within HEIs, including academic researchers, have numerous job responsibilities that require attention, and these responsibilities are sometimes in conflict (see Section 4.6). Since the research ethics application process is a time-consuming activity, it contributes to the pressure experienced by academic researchers. According to participants, it is conceivable that academic researchers choose not to engage in research ethics in an attempt to manage multiple work responsibilities. Some participants experienced task overload, others explained that they find it difficult to strike a balance between their work responsibilities and private lives (work-life balance), and some participants' lived experiences were a combination of these stressors and conflicts.

With the interpretation of the data, it became increasingly evident that academic employees are subjected to quantitative demands (excessive workload), high expectations to be productive, and role conflict. Quantitative demands can be understood as the volume of work assigned to an employee (Sabagh *et al.*, 2018). These different job demands can cause academic employees to burn out (Sabagh *et al.*, 2018; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2017). When an employee suffers from burnout, it will have a negative impact on the wellbeing of the employee and adverse consequences for the organisation, which can include reduced work productivity, ill-health, dissatisfaction with work, and anxiety (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Maslach, 2017).

These lived experiences of participants agree with the findings of Bezuidenhout and Cilliers (2010), Janse Van Rensburg and Rothmann (2020), who observed that a multitude of demands on academic employees could lead to stress, exhaustion of personal resources, fatigue, cynicism and reduced self-efficacy. Work-life balance is attained through effective management of role conflict, yet this balance is in jeopardy when personal and job resources (required to meet job demands) are threatened or deteriorated (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Furthermore, work overload has a direct influence on work-family conflict, psychological disorders, job dissatisfaction, the intention to leave the employment position, and emotional exhaustion (Converso, 2019). The support that HRM practitioners can give academic researchers to support their job and personal resources, which in turn can help academic

researchers manage their job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014), is discussed in Section 7.5.7.

7.5.5.8 Distance education and challenges of control triggering academic researchers' disengagement in research ethics

A key question that arose during the analysis of the data was whether DE plays a role in academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. As stated in Section 6.5.1.3.d, the participants had varied views on whether engagement in research ethics will differ for academic researchers who work at an ODL institution and those who work at a traditional, residential university. Some participants indicated that engagement in research ethics at the different HEIs will be the same, and that the differences in pedagogical approaches will not influence academic researchers in their research activities, including research ethics. These participants maintained that the ethical principles remain the same for ethically sound research, irrespective of the HEI to which they are affiliated.

However, some participants indicated that the geographical separation between the student and supervisor, typical to an ODL institution, has a negative influence on these employees' engagement in research ethics (academic employees in a supervisory capacity). The geographical separation between the research supervisor and the student who conducts the fieldwork creates a sense of loss of control for the supervisor. The supervisor could therefore either be unaware of ethical transgressions, or could be aware, but unable to intervene due to geographical separation. Supervisors' inability to oversee student researchers' fieldwork due to geographical separation from the ODL institution, causes anxiety for these supervisors. Experiences that result in a lack of control or role stress can be understood as demanding features of the job (Bakker *et al.*, 2014).

In contrast, when employees experience job control over their work, it is perceived as a job resource to those employees (O'Connor, 2014; Schaufeli, 2017). Furthermore, when employees have control over their work environments, it is perceived as a personal resource (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Personal resources support WE since it gives employees a sense of empowerment to achieve their work goals (Schaufeli, 2012a:5; Van Wingerden *et al.*, 2017:54). The support that HRM practitioners can give academic researchers to support their job and personal resources, which in turn can help academic researchers to manage the job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014), as explained above, is discussed in Section 7.5.7.

7.5.5.9 Being an ERC member is a contentious part of an academic employee's work

Several of the participants either previously served on an ERC or were serving on one of the ERCs when the interviews were conducted. These participants indicated that serving on ERCs were a contentious part of academic employees' work. Participants indicated that committee work is emotional labour and not always appreciated by academic researchers. Most of the participants indicated that the application review process was a cause for interpersonal conflict among ERC members, and between committee members and research ethics applicants. Participants experienced role conflict, since their mandate as ERC member is to earnestly review research ethics applications, but in doing so, they face the possibility of creating interpersonal conflict with colleagues.

Research studies have also found that conflict between employees is directly related to the intention to leave the institution and has a negative influence on job satisfaction (Converso, 2019). Role conflict (e.g., as experienced by academic employees who serve on ERCs) is the most important predictor of burnout (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2017). HRM practitioners within the ODL institution thus have a critical role in supporting these employees with this responsibility. HRM practitioners can alleviate their experiences of these strenuous job demands by supporting them with job and personal resources at their disposal. When employees have sufficient resources, they can better manage their job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). The specific support that HRM practitioners can offer academic researchers is discussed in Section 7.5.7.

7.5.6 Dynamics: Job demands-resources theory

In this conceptual framework, the JD-R theory ('dynamics') is used to explain the identified energy source to support a culture of ethics within the ODL institution. In support of this culture of ethics, HRM practitioners employed at the ODL institution were identified as the agents who facilitate academic researchers' job and personal resources.

The JD-R theory advocates that resources and job demands are catalysts of two relatively independent processes, which include a motivational process and a health impairment process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Hakanen *et al.*, 2008; Schaufeli, 2015; Schaufeli, 2017; Taris *et al.*, 2017). To portray the JD-R theory in the conceptual framework, as the identified dynamic source, the motivational and health impairment process was illustrated. The JD-R

theory is represented with three colours; health impairment is represented with the red flow diagram, and the motivational process is represented with the blue flow diagram. These two flow diagrams are tied together with an overarching grey rectangle, identifying the selected theory as the dynamic source utilised to explain the activities that need to transpire for academic researchers to be engaged in research ethics at the ODL institution. The blue and red arrows are directed towards the recipients (academic researchers). The outline of these arrows is stippled to explain that the influence on the recipients is fluid, and the actual amount of job demands or resources will have an influence on the academic researchers' lived experiences. The visual representation of the JD-R theory is illustrated in Figure 7.5.

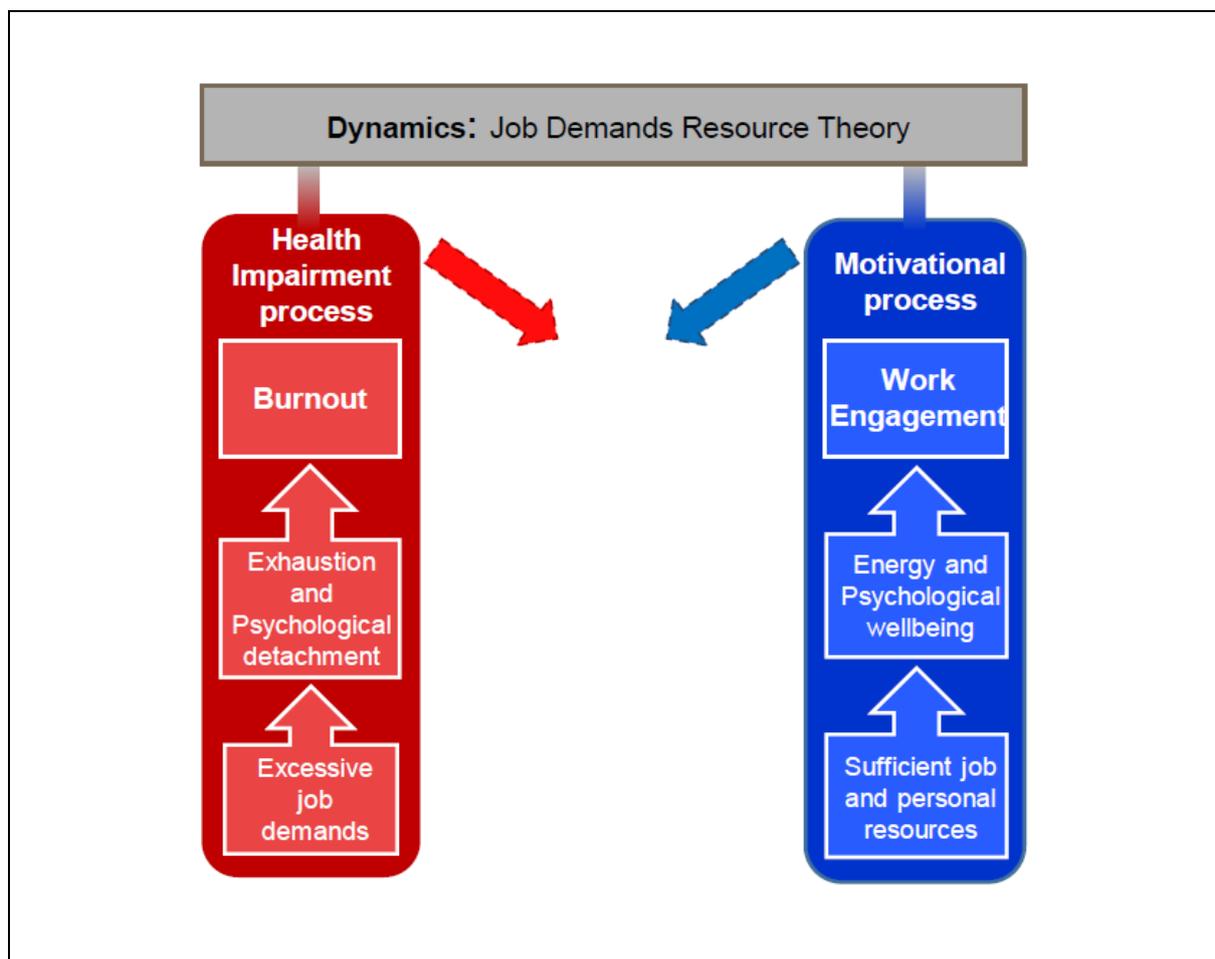


Figure 7.5: Dynamics: The motivational process and the health impairment process of the JD-R theory as energy source for the required action

The health impairment process is symbolised with the colour red. Since red is an intense colour, it is often associated with concepts such as to stop, discontinuation and break down (Olesen, 2019). Thoughts of demand and aggression can be sensed when thinking of red

(Kurt & Osueke, 2014). It also illustrates danger, error, warning, strain, fatigue, being empty, and being aggressive in several contexts (Kurt & Osueke, 2014; Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). Correspondingly, closely related to the negative connotation of the symbolic meaning of red, the health impairment process also has an adverse influence on the wellbeing of employees and lead to strain, fatigue and feelings of detachment (emptiness).

The motivational process is symbolised with the colour blue. It symbolically portrays dedication, vigour, insight and trust, and helps alleviate stress, support personal transformation, innovation and increase productivity (King, 2019; Nunes, 2018; Olesen, 2019). Blue fosters logical and intellectual thoughts, concentration, trust, efficiency, reflection and calmness (Bourn, 2011; Kurt & Osueke, 2014; Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). It is considered to support reliability, trustworthiness (Olesen, 2019; Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016) and confidence while establishing optimism (Bourn, 2011). It is supportive in establishing goals in a logical, stress-free manner (King, 2019) that aid wellbeing (Bourn, 2011; Nunes, 2018), a balanced psychological state of mind, and concentration (Olesen, 2019; Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). In a similar vein, the motivational process also leads to vigour, dedication, eased strain, encourages productivity, confidence (work-related personal resources), and a balanced psychological state of mind.

The overarching rectangle, depicting the JD-R theory (dynamic source), is symbolised in grey. The colour grey is an unemotional colour (Bourn, 2011; EBC, 2018; Olesen, 2019). It is detached, neutral, impartial and indecisive (Bourn, 2011; EBC, 2018; Ferreira, 2019; Olesen, 2019; Singh & Srivastava, 2011). It can be understood as the 'middle-of-the-road' colour (Nunes, 2018), with a lack of a clear sense of direction (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). Therefore, this colour is associated with a willingness to compromise and conform (EBC, 2018). Symbolically, grey considers the options (Singh & Srivastava, 2011), is dependent on other colours (EBC, 2018), and calculates its options accordingly (Ferreira, 2019). In essence, grey will thus be influenced by other colours working with it. Likewise, the JD-R theory takes a neutral and impartial position, apart from maintaining that job characteristics can be demonstrated using two categories, namely job demands and resources (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Similar to the colour grey that will be influenced by other colours, job characteristics (the number of resources or job demands present) will determine employees' work and personal outcomes (their wellbeing).

In Chapter 2, Section 2.4.3.1, a comprehensive review of the JD-R theory was provided. Nonetheless, a brief synopsis is offered here. The basic premise of the JD-R theory is that irrespective of the specific work context/milieu, there are always two processes at play that

influence personal and organisational outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2017). The one is job and personal resources, which leads to positive personal and organisational outcomes via WE (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Mudrak *et al.*, 2018). This is, accordingly, referred to as the motivational process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Mudrak *et al.*, 2018). The other is job demands, which lead to negative personal and organisational outcomes via burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2017). This is, consequently, referred to as the health impairment process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018).

Negative personal and organisational outcomes resulting from burnout include depleted organisational commitment, dissatisfaction with the job, sickness absence, occupational injuries and accidents, poor work performance, the intention to leave the organisation, and reduced productivity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Schaufeli, 2014). Positive individual and organisational outcomes via WE include organisational commitment, improved wellbeing, intention to stay in the organisation, extra-role behaviour, employee safety, personal initiative and work-unit innovativeness, and superior work performance (Schaufeli, 2015; Schaufeli, 2017). Furthermore, adequate resources (job and personal) have a mitigating impact on job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Park *et al.*, 2019). In essence, the JD-R theory holds that burnout has an adverse effect on work performance and organisational outcomes, whereas WE has a positive effect on job performance and organisational outcomes (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Han *et al.*, 2019).

The sub-themes discussed in Sections 7.5.4.5 to 7.5.4.9 provided insight on aspects that hinder academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at the ODL institution in SA. In addition, Section 7.5.3 provided insight into the context of this study and identified a number of challenges that academic researchers face. As explained above, these hindering job factors can be understood as job demands or insufficient job and personal resources, according to the JD-R theory. These aspects formed the foundation for HRM practitioners to serve as agents to support and facilitate job and personal resources.

7.5.7 Procedure: Facilitation of job- and personal resources to support a culture of ethics

A green rectangle was selected to represent the procedure of the conceptual framework. The agents (HRM practitioners) should facilitate different personal and job resources to support the motivational process to facilitate academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at

an ODL institution. The visual illustration of the procedure was presented in Figure 7.6. The two arrows directed towards the motivational process demonstrate the positive relationship between job and personal resources and the positively associated influence on employee wellbeing. The arrow directed at the outcome of the conceptual framework demonstrates the positive relationship between the facilitation of job and personal resources and academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. The arrows (pathways for action) were illustrated with the colour turquoise.

The colour green is used to signify the procedure applied in the conceptual framework, and is symbolic of growth, wellbeing, stability and creative intelligence (Olesen, 2019; Singh & Srivastava, 2011; Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). It signifies a balanced and an invigorated psyche (Singh & Srivastava, 2011; Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016), and is associated with perceptions of harmony, renewal, encouragement, equilibrium, peace, innovation, and emotional motivation (Bourn, 2011; Kurt & Osueke, 2014; Olesen, 2019). Green also supports a sense of optimism, willpower, benevolence, clear conceptualisation, devotion and perseverance (Bourn, 2011). In the same way, the implementation of the procedure can lead to positive outcomes.

The arrows were illustrated with turquoise to indicate the pathways for action. As mentioned in Section 7.5.3, turquoise symbolically directs the way forward for success, and weighs up the advantages and disadvantages for these pathways (EBC, 2018). It restores our emotional dispositions during periods of mental stress and fatigue (EBC, 2018; Olesen, 2019). Since turquoise has the ability to positively influence our emotions, it aids in the process of creating emotional balance and stability (Bear, 2019; Olesen, 2019). In the presented conceptual framework, the arrows are also demonstrative of the way forward in order to realise the intended outcome. With the actions proposed by these arrows from the procedure to the motivational process (dynamics), the colour symbolically supports the process of restoring employees who experience stress and fatigue (excessive job demands). The turquoise arrow leading from the procedure to the outcome signifies the pathway to success (academic researchers who are engaged in research ethics).

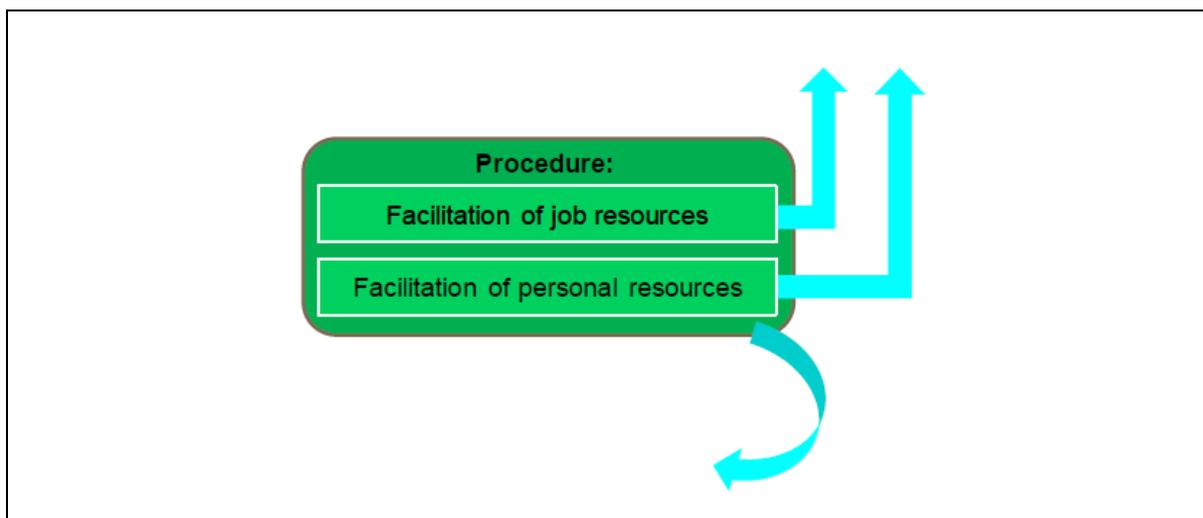


Figure 7.6: Procedure: The facilitation of job and personal resources of academic researchers to support engagement in research ethics

The procedure to facilitate personal and job resources will be an activity carried out by the HRM practitioners (agents) in the ODL institution. In phase two of the study, I discovered that HRM practitioners can support academic researchers in various aspects of their work. With the support provided by HRM practitioners, more job and personal resources will become available for academic researchers. These additional resources, in turn, will support the motivational process of these employees and mitigate their job demands. The varied support that HRM practitioners should provide academic researchers is discussed below.

7.5.7.1 Providing focused onboarding for academic employees

According to participants, the ODL institution does have induction or orientation programmes to introduce new employees to the institution. General induction programmes are not sufficient to familiarise the new academic employees (academic researchers) with the scholarly practices, including engagement in research ethics, required for their positions within the ODL institution. HRM practitioners should support and facilitate the implementation of a focused onboarding programme for academic employees (academic researchers). New academic employees (academic researchers) should be familiarised with the various aspects of their employment positions. One of their work tasks is to conduct scientific research, therefore necessitating information on all research-related processes and procedures. The onboarding programme should include information on the research ethics policies and regulatory procedures within the ODL institution.

Onboarding influences new employees' behaviour and helps develop and uphold the institution's culture (Champoux, 2011). HRM practitioners therefore have to ensure that during the onboarding process, the core norms and values of the organisation and the desired behaviour for employees are clearly communicated to new employees (SHRM, 2021). With onboarding, the institution not only aims to influence the new employee's desire to stay with the institution, but also alert them of the expected values, norms and acceptable behaviours within the institution (Champoux, 2011; Wörnich *et al.*, 2018). The HRM practitioners are therefore responsible to, *inter alia*, ensure that new employees are carefully informed about the endorsed ethical culture of the university.

When onboarding is done successfully, it leads to several positive individual and organisation outcomes (Klein *et al.*, 2015). Onboarding programmes can give new employees the needed resources to fulfil their work duties and approaches to manage their job demands (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015). Since new employees often feel anxious in their efforts to successfully move to their newfound roles, these individuals are inclined to spend a lot of time and energy to manage this anxiety (Allen *et al.*, 2017). Such uncertainties and disorientation can be alleviated with onboarding processes where resources, such as information and training, can be offered (Bakker, 2017); in doing so, the new employee will feel valued and appreciated (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015). Albrecht *et al.* (2015) believe that sufficient resources will help new employees fulfil their need for meaningfulness, safety, and efficacy. In turn, the organisation can benefit from the enthusiasm and positive energy that newcomers bring to their roles (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015; Bakker, 2017).

7.5.7.2 Engaging leadership

In addition to the need for organisational leaders to be the custodians of a culture of ethics within the ODL institution, the findings from phase two draw attention to the appeal from employees for a supportive and engaging leadership style by managers. The current leadership style within the ODL institution is often perceived as restrictive, burdening, and regulatory in nature, creating a culture of distrust between management and their subordinates. In contrast to the current management style within the ODL institution, the seminal authors, Alimo-Metcalfe *et al.* (2008) explain that engaging leadership is founded on integrity, honesty and transparency; a sincere appreciation of others and their involvements; together with the ability to be decisive and to solve complicated problems.

This call for an engaging leadership style by management, and the characteristics of this form of leadership, is comparable to the need raised by participants for an ethical culture within the

ODL institution. My understanding of this further clarifies the view of Rossouw and Van Vuuren (2013), who uphold that an organisation's ethical culture originates with the leaders of the organisation (as stated in Section 7.5.3.3). This view is reiterated by Bonner *et al.* (2016), Demirtas and Akdogan (2015), who maintain that since managers are role models, their behaviours can influence the behaviours of others; accordingly, they are regarded as the most important factor to create an ethical culture and ethical working conditions within organisations. Huhtala *et al.* (2015) similarly state that HRM practitioners should support and develop managers – as role models for their subordinates – to help them exhibit exemplary ethical behaviour by being honest and reliable in their personal capacity, and upholding the ethical values of the institution. Also, Babalola, Stouten and Euwema (2016) and Page *et al.* (2019) are convinced that managers can inspire employees to uphold ethical behaviour in the workplace through social learning.

Engaging leaders who serve in managerial positions enable and empower the employees under their supervision, rather than controlling or restricting these employees (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2012). These managers handle employees with appreciation and respect. They demonstrate support and commitment; motivate, empower, develop, expand and reward the skills and competencies of their subordinates; and relate to their followers (Basinska *et al.*, 2018; Marchington & Wilkinson, 2012). With an engaging leadership style, managers will demonstrate trust in academic researchers to be ethical in their research endeavours.

Managers who are ethical are committed to ethical values like being honest and truthful; acting justly; and being considerate of others (Mostafa & El-Motalib, 2020). These virtues are generally associated with and expected from managers, therefore, when corporate scandals occur, uncertainty and distrust are created (Moorhead & Griffin, 2012). The research findings revealed that some of the participants believed that unethical behaviour occurs within the ODL institution, but that such behaviour is not addressed by management. When managers fail to address employees' unethical behaviour, the perception is created that these managers are also unethical. As Moore *et al.* (2019) explain, managers are important role models, not only because they have to demonstrate appropriate behaviour, but also because they have the authority to punish unethical behaviour and praise and reward ethical behaviour. It is therefore vital for HRM practitioners within the ODL institution to emphasise managers' positions as role models.

Thus, if an engaging leadership style is adopted by management, intolerance towards unethical behaviour should be demonstrated. As stated by Villegas *et al.* (2019), ethical conduct does not unexpectedly occur, but through management's unambiguous statements

and actions. For management to be effective, managers need to demonstrate high standards of ethical conduct, and employees should be held to the same standard (Moorhead & Griffin, 2012; Tucker, 2017; Yasin, 2021).

Managers also play an important role in cultivating and managing employees' WE (Rahmadani *et al.*, 2019). These engaging leaders (managers) provide employees with organisational resources and access since they desire competent employees who will be able to realise organisational objectives (Basinska *et al.*, 2018; Schaufeli, 2017). Through specific actions taken by engaging leaders, they can encourage the fulfilment of employees' fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, capability and belonging (Schaufeli, 2017). When these needs are fulfilled, employees are more prone to be engaged at work (Rahmadani *et al.*, 2019). Engaging leaders can inspire, connect and strengthen employees, which leads to resources such as work autonomy and social support among co-workers (Nikolova *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, engaging leadership can counteract experiences of burnout and increase the possibility for WE being experienced by employees (Schaufeli, 2017).

7.5.7.3 Professional development, training, coaching and mentorship

One of the main functions of HRM practitioners is to identify employees' learning and development needs, and subsequently provide these employees with the required infrastructure to develop these skills and abilities (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015; SHRM, 2021). HRM practitioners thus have the responsibility to assist academic researchers in their professional development. Huhtala *et al.* (2015) maintain that HRM practitioners should ensure that ethical components, aligned with the organisation's ethical culture, form part of the training programmes provided to employees and managers. Also, Page *et al.* (2019) uphold that with the empowerment of employees (e.g., professional development), a psychologically safe work environment is created, which is beneficial to uphold the organisational culture. The study's participants indicated that development initiatives should include training (including research ethics training), coaching and mentorship. In the context of this study, academic researchers also required HRM practitioners' support in developing their research skills and abilities. Moreover, as part of researchers' development process, strong emphasis should be placed on ethical research practices.

Training is the process whereby employees obtain capabilities and competencies to contribute to organisational goals (Wärnich *et al.*, 2018). Training in research ethics will thus help academic researchers to obtain the required skills and competencies to successfully conduct ethical research within the ODL institution. Horn (2013) claims that research ethics training

programmes should be holistic in nature, stating that the 'ethics of responsibility' should be taught together with critical thinking competencies. Horn (2013) further recommends that case studies should be used where group discussions can take place since this form of training is more effective than simply teaching ethical principles and codes. Similarly, Lategan (2012) cautions that the assigned time and attention devoted to aspects related to research ethics, while training academic researchers, are insufficient.

Just over a decade ago, Serrat (2010) stated that coaching and mentoring had become essential elements within the modern work environment, and according to the participants, this still rings true today. Scholarly literature is in discord to precisely define the differences that exist between coaching and mentoring as career development initiatives (Pelan, 2012; Rolfe, 2015; Serrat, 2010; Van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020). Pelan (2012) believes that it is because the concepts are used interchangeably by scholars and practitioners alike, while Van Coller-Peter and Cronjé (2020) state that it is not only the concepts themselves that pose the problem, but also the fact that the language that is utilised within practice and literature are remarkably similar.

Van Coller-Peter and Cronje (2020) explain that the value of theoretical knowledge is founded on the ability to implement this knowledge in the workplace. Yet the ability to transfer this newfound knowledge to practice, is dependent on effective coaching and mentoring (Van Coller-Peter & Cronje, 2020). To this end, Rolfe (2015) states that debates on the differences between coaching and mentoring are less important than considering the similarities between the two professional development initiatives.

- Coaching and mentoring is focused on the empowerment of employees, the development of talent, fostering commitment, increasing productivity, and encouraging success (Burgess *et al.*, 2018; Rolfe, 2015; Serrat, 2010; Van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020).
- Both facilitate access to information, encourages the development of skills needed to effectively manage and resolve problems, make appropriate decisions, demonstrate constructive behaviour and take positive action (Rolfe, 2015; Van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020).
- Both coaching and mentoring uphold the theoretical founding principles of adult learning, which complements formal training and theoretical understandings received in education (Serrat, 2010; Rolfe, 2015; Van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020). Furthermore,

both offer individual interaction, conversations and discussions to realise personalised learning and development (Rolfe, 2015; Van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020).

- Coaching and mentoring can be conducted face-to-face or from remote locations, and is flexible enough to cater for individual styles, time constraints and personal requirements (Rolfe, 2015), thus making it ideal for an ODL institutional setting.

Still, scientific scholars uphold that although there are some similarities, coaching and mentoring are distinct (Pelan, 2012; Serrat, 2010; Van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020). These scholars provide several reasons to sustain their perspectives, as illustrated in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4: Differences between coaching and mentoring

COACHING AND THE ROLE(S) OF THE COACH	MENTORING AND THE ROLE(S) OF THE MENTOR
A coach offers support to the coachee in his or her career development (Pelan, 2012).	A mentor gives guidance to the mentee (Pelan, 2012).
The coach does not necessarily have specific knowledge or experience that is superior to that of the coachee (Serrat, 2010). Yet, coaching calls attention to the value of cross-disciplinary skills (Serrat, 2010).	Usually, the mentor is an expert, with knowledge, proficiency and experience that is relevant for the developmental needs of the mentee (Pelan, 2012; Van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020).
Since coaches are not necessarily experts in the field of interest, they do not give advice; rather, they provide encouragement and support the coachee's continuous development (Pelan, 2012; Van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020).	Since the mentor is considered an expert, it is acceptable for them to give advice and share their expertise (Pelan, 2012; Van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020).
The purpose of coaching is to enhance the performance and skills of the coachee (Pelan, 2012).	The purpose of mentoring is to help the mentee succeed by providing guidance about an organisation, an industry, or their career (including career advancement opportunities) (Khan <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Pelan, 2012; Wörnich <i>et al.</i> , 2018).
The working relationship between the coach and the coachee is that of peers; it is	Traditionally, mentees will observe the expertise of their mentors, and it is

COACHING AND THE ROLE(S) OF THE COACH	MENTORING AND THE ROLE(S) OF THE MENTOR
<p>collaborative in nature, and begins with the strengths of the coachee (Pelan, 2012).</p> <p>With coaching, communication is not directive in nature (Pelan, 2012; Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020). The objective of this form of communication is to encourage the resourcefulness of the coachee to initiate or seize development opportunities that they are capable and ready to accomplish (Van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020). Furthermore, coaches frequently ask open-ended questions to help coachees strategise solutions and facilitate problem-solving (Pelan, 2012).</p>	<p>particularly beneficial when the mentee is starting their career or commencing a new work position (Pelan, 2012; Van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020; Wörnich <i>et al.</i>, 2018).</p> <p>With mentoring, the communication is more directive in nature since the relationship involves the offering of guidance, support and assisting the mentee in resolving problems (Van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020).</p>

Bakker *et al.* (2014) believe that training can contribute to the optimisation of job resources like social support and feedback on the employee's performance. Likewise, participants indicated the need for training, including research ethics training, to support their engagement in research ethics.

According to Horn (2013), a key strategy to produce successful academic researchers is to provide mentorship to develop these scholars. These mentors should ensure that they clearly communicate to the mentees the importance of responsible research conduct, research integrity and responsible behaviour (Horn, 2013). Although mentoring is not a quick process, it provides a valuable way to improve work performance and WE, and encourage employees' learning opportunities (Burgess *et al.*, 2018). Mentoring can also be used in the onboarding of new employees to facilitate their integration into their new employment position (Allen *et al.*, 2017). This agrees with the views of participants, who also believed that onboarding would be beneficial to new academic employees (academic researchers) (also see Section 7.5.7.1). Through mentoring (initiated by HRM practitioners), an academic researcher, who is well versed with the research ethics processes and procedures of the ODL institution, can guide new employees in the research ethics application processes and procedures.

Albrecht *et al.* (2015) confirm that continuous coaching, mentorship, training, and other support will assist employees to regard their work as meaningful, and experience more psychological safety. These authors further maintain that employees' engagement is encouraged when they have the opportunity to learn and develop throughout their careers (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015). In essence, Albrecht *et al.* (2015) believe that HRM practitioners can facilitate WE by providing a superior work environment, by giving applicable training, coaching and mentorship to employees, and offering sufficient job resources to these employees. With HRM practitioners' support in the ODL institution, it will thus be possible to establish coaching relationships where peers can support one another in solving ethical challenges regarding research endeavours, to ensure that it is conducted in an ethically responsible manner.

7.5.7.4 Research ethics as part of performance agreements and performance appraisal

In general, most performance appraisal systems are alike. All of these systems connect the organisational strategy and strategic plans to the individual employee in terms of monitoring and reviewing progress, realising performance prospects, and re-emphasising anticipated performance standards (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2012). Performance management systems reflect employees' strengths and weaknesses and can accordingly motivate these employees through promotion opportunities and salary increases, as well as improving self-awareness and self-esteem (Ahuja *et al.*, 2018; Krishnan *et al.*, 2018; Wörnich *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, it can serve as a motivation to advance their performance in development areas (Ahuja *et al.*, 2018; Krishnan *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, HRM practitioners have the responsibility to ensure that an ethical component forms part of performance agreements and appraisals, aligned to the organisation's ethical culture (Huhtala *et al.*, 2015).

In the ODL institution, academic researchers should demonstrate intended involvement in ethical research endeavours as part of their performance agreements. The performance management system (IPMS; the Integrated Performance Management System) used within the ODL institution comprises different KPAs to which employees should aspire. Ethical research activities should form part of these KPAs, which can then be evaluated during performance appraisals. Recognition and performance feedback should also be given for the efforts made by academic researchers to be ethical in their research activities.

Commitment to research ethics endeavours can be monitored in different ways, depending on the employees' confirmed performance agreement. For example, recognising and rewarding

the efforts made by supervisors to assist their students in conducting ethical research, including assisting students to obtain research ethics approval for their studies. The appraisal should further consider the number of students who were successfully guided to obtain research ethics approval. Another example is recognising employees for continuously making an effort to up-skill themselves and enhance their own knowledge of research ethics, in part as academic scholar, and as part of their responsibility as supervisors. Furthermore, while ethical research behaviour should be acknowledged and rewarded, unethical behaviour should be made known and disciplined.

The current performance management system used in the ODL institution was perceived to be subjective in nature, and employees' performance is not always impartially evaluated. According to Khan *et al.* (2018), the performance management system should be formulated and managed in a fair and objective manner. Its focus should be on development and incentives in order for employees in the institution to regard it as essential. According to Ololube *et al.* (2016), only when academic employees are treated fairly will they exhibit positive and loyal behaviours towards the ODL institution. It will not be possible for the ODL institution to gain the desired performance from employees if its performance management system is not perceived as fair (Khan *et al.*, 2018).

According to Albrecht *et al.* (2015), employees should regard the organisation's performance appraisal process as fair and reasonable for the employee and supervisor to have a meaningful discussion during performance agreement and assessment. A study conducted by Shneikat (2016) revealed that when employees experience injustice in their organisation, they can experience emotional exhaustion. However, when a performance management system is fairly structured, it will have a beneficial influence on WE and promote positive organisational outcomes (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015).

7.5.7.5 Providing proactive support to academic researchers

HRM practitioners need to be proactive in the support they provide academic employees; in their capacity as researchers, but also in other areas of their work responsibilities. McGowan (2015) also observed that a proactive approach should be employed to support employees' wellbeing. The support that participants referred to were broader than research-related support activities; participants referred to different aspects of their work contexts. One participant gave an example of resolving grievances between employees. For this participant, such support is perceived as reactive, and a proactive approach from HRM practitioners would

be to provide conflict management skills and training, thereby preventing conflict (grievances) from occurring in the first place.

The perception voiced by this research participant supports McGowan's (2015) claim that if an organisation longs for an engaged workforce, it is imperative for the organisation to be mindful and proactive in promoting its employees' wellbeing (McGowan, 2015). She elaborates on this perspective by stating that HRM practitioners should not wait for a problem to come to the fore and subsequently offer unsatisfactory solutions; HRM practitioners should give support before a problem arises (McGowan, 2015).

To explain the difference between a reactive and proactive approach to support, McGowan (2015) provided the following example:

Employees in the contemporary work environment are exposed to various stressors and function in complicated settings. If the HRM department thus provides a depression hotline as a supportive measure, it is reactive in nature. This is because they wait for employees to become depressed before support is provided. Furthermore, the employee first needs to seek support (call the hotline) before the HRM department attempts to offer support and provide (inadequate) solutions. In contrast, a proactive approach by the HRM department would be to provide training, where employees can learn methods to effectively manage stress; creating awareness of self and others in the workplace; facilitating constructive teamwork by offering training on effective communication skills; and ensuring that the organisational values are clear and that employees treat each other with respect.

This example of a proactive approach that should be followed by HRM practitioners to support employees, carries a strong resemblance to the example sketched by the research participant. In both scenarios, HRM practitioners intended to, or indeed did provide support, but in both instances, the support offered were reactive in nature. In contrast to a proactive approach, a reactive approach will facilitate the opposite outcomes as intended, and will promote laborious behaviour and a lack of engagement among employees (McGowan, 2015).

Other participants indicated that the HRM practitioners should ease the administrative tasks placed on academic researchers by, for instance, arranging research ethics training for employees, and they should not wait for academic employees to initiate such activities. In essence, the support that participants referred to related to the alleviation of hindering job

demands through a proactive approach from HRM practitioners, who would be able to foresee future needs and address it in advance.

HRM practitioners within the ODL institution should reconsider their approach to supporting academic researchers. According to participants, the current support provided by the HRM department is insufficient or reactive in nature. Also, Zolkifi (2014) stated that although HRM practitioners have transformed into strategic partners in most organisations, there are still instances where HRM departments operate reactively to situations. Working in a support department, these HRM practitioners need to be proactive and identify academic researchers' needs in a timeous manner and pre-empt situations to offer assistance and guidance in a constructive way. The JD-R theory upholds that support offered by colleagues are perceived as a job resource (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Schaufeli, 2012a).

In its support function, the HRM department can thus be regarded as a resource for academic researchers. According to Bakker (2017), job resources can be defined as the physical, social, psychological, or organisational facets of the job that contribute to achieving work goals. However, if this support department fails to assist academic researchers proactively, the support they could have offered is lost.

7.5.7.6 Ethical values embedded in the recruitment strategy

An institution's success hinges on its employees' effectiveness, thus making the recruitment of employees a critical function for HRM practitioners (Wärnich *et al.*, 2018). The recruitment and selection process can be understood as the steps taken by the institution to make job vacancies known, with the prospect of drawing a number of qualified applicants to fill vacant positions within the institution (Chidi, 2012; Van Aswegen, 2016). Several studies found that the recruitment and selection process should be ethical if the organisation wants to survive in a contending environment (Bhoganadam & Rao, 2014; Mitonga-Monga *et al.*, 2019; SHRM, 2021). In a challenging context, Shekhawat (2019) maintains that excellent academic employees are the foundation of any HEI since dedicated, hardworking employees are the main contributors to the success of these institutions. Therefore, the recruitment strategy should be embedded in clear ethical values.

Three specific areas should be focused on in an ethical recruitment process. First, the recruitment process itself must be ethical and transparent. HRM practitioners and managers should be the custodians of the organisation when recruiting and selecting employees to prevent or limit unethical behaviour within the organisation (Villegas *et al.*, 2019). When HRM

practitioners and managers dishonour this responsibility and do not appoint the most suitable candidate, the likelihood of appointing an individual that could negatively influence the institution and its stakeholders, is increased (SHRM, 2021; Villegas *et al.*, 2019). Examples of unethical and sketchy recruitment practices in organisations include, among other things, favouritism and nepotism. When nepotism or favouritism infiltrate the recruitment and selection process, it is to the detriment of the institution since these employees were not selected on merit and excellent performance, and will not be able to perform on the expected requirements (Shekhawat, 2019). Therefore, it is essential that HRM practitioners and managers set clear ethical standards for the institution to illustrate integrity as a shared guiding value (Villegas *et al.*, 2019).

Second, the ODL institution needs to promote itself as an ethical organisation within the labour market to attract the largest possible group of suitably qualified applicants from which prospective employees can be selected. Mitonga-Monga *et al.* (2019) and Villegas *et al.* (2019) explain that when an institution openly declares its ethical orientation when recruiting and selecting potential employees, it serves as a demonstration of the dedication and importance that is placed on ethical behaviour within the institution. Arulrajah (2015) notes that within the contemporary labour environment, the institution's ethical status is regarded as one of the main elements of an organisation's capability to attract and hold on to talented employees. Also, Van Aswegen (2016) explain that there should be sufficient motivation for potential employees to choose to apply for a position at a specific institution. Employees with high moral and ethical values are attracted to organisations that support and facilitate ethical conduct within the institution – thus organisations that mirror the personal ethical orientations of these individuals (Huhtala & Feldt, 2016). Within this ODL institution, potential candidates should be motivated to apply for vacant positions based on the high ethical standards that are upheld by the university.

Finally, as part of the selection process, suitable candidates should be evaluated to determine if their personal value orientation is in agreement with that of the ODL institution. According to Villegas *et al.* (2019), behavioural questions should be included in compiled interview questions to assess a possible candidate's ethical predisposition and personal character traits, such as integrity, self-discipline and trustworthiness. It can also be beneficial to conduct integrity assessments or sketch ethical dilemmas and formulate questions from there (Mostafa & El-Motalib, 2020). Albrecht *et al.* (2015) and Bakker (2017) state that HRM practitioners and managers could be intentional in their employee selection procedures by combining, for example, structured interviews, verifying references of previous employment, and measuring job applicants' attributes. With the placement of high quality and ethically oriented people, an

institution can uphold or develop a positive ethical culture within the workplace (Arulrajah, 2015; Villegas *et al.*, 2019).

In earlier research, some scholars maintained that it is possible to select employees for WE (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015). The desire to recruit employees who are engaged in research ethics is self-evident. WE, in turn, leads to positive organisational outcomes (Van Wingerden, Derks, & Bakker, 2018), such as commitment to the organisation, intention to stay, extra-role behaviour, and better work performance (Schaufeli, 2017).

Individuals' personality traits can influence the WE they experience (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, HRM practitioners can play an important role in organising selection procedures that evaluate possible candidates' personality traits. Naturally bearing the skills, qualification, knowledge and work experience in mind, HRM practitioners should select candidates with specific characteristics, who will be more inclined to be engaged in their work (Bakker, 2017). Therefore, candidates who score well on conscientiousness, emotional stability, extroversion and proactivity, are more inclined to be vigorous and motivated employees, who are focused on realising organisational objectives (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015; Bakker, 2017).

Furthermore, according to Bakker (2017), HRM practitioners can have a significant influence on employees' WE, since the fundamental process of WE is structured. Therefore, when an organisation recruits new employees, HRM practitioners can incorporate elements that promote WE in the employment position's design. Albrecht *et al.* (2015) advised that when an employee is selected based on their inclination to experience WE (aside from inherent job requirements), it is important that this likelihood is fuelled and promoted by successfully orientating (see Section 7.5.7.1) the new employee in the organisation.

7.5.8 Outcome: Academic researchers engaged in research ethics

The target outcome of implementing the conceptual framework is academic researchers who are engaged in research ethics at an ODL institution. The outcome of the conceptual framework is represented as an orange-coloured oval (see Figure 7.7). In line with the envisioned outcome of this study, orange also signifies positive outcomes. The colour orange stimulates optimism and upliftment (Olesen, 2019). It signifies a favourable, balanced and enthusiastic state of mind, wellbeing, and is used to portray emotional energy (Bourn, 2011; Singh & Srivastava, 2011). It is also associated with motivation, hope, change, ambition (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016), creativity, success and determination (Bourn, 2011). Likewise, the envisioned outcome of the conceptual framework's implementation is academic

researchers who are engaged in research ethics. The motivational process of the JD-R theory was successfully supported and facilitated. Moreover, the job and personal resources of these employees were fostered, and academic researchers demonstrate a positive state of mind, energy, and employee wellbeing.



Figure 7.7: Outcome: Academic researchers who are engaged in research ethics at the ODL institution

As stated above, the envisioned outcome of this conceptual framework is academic researchers who are engaged in research ethics. Since no definition presently exists to define engagement in research ethics, the following definition is proposed to define this research phenomenon:

An academic researcher who is engaged in research ethics can be defined as an individual who conducts research in a sanctified way, devotes their time and energy to source knowledge and advance their own understanding of research ethics, exert physical and mental energy, and devote time to apply for research ethics approval. These individuals comprehend that ethical research conduct is a persistent and progressive process.

7.6 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The aim of Chapter 7 was to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution in SA. The organising principles of Dickoff *et al.* (1968) guided the development of the conceptual framework. The context of this conceptual framework refers to the setting or the environment in which activities take place. The environment (context) of this framework was structured into

three interconnected settings, which included the macro-context (HEIs in SA), the meso-context (an ODL institution in SA), and the micro-context (culture of ethics in an ODL institution). The agents, who were identified to facilitate and co-create the outcome, were the HRM practitioners within the ODL institution. The procedures to be facilitated by the agents was to support academic researchers' (recipients) job and personal resources to promote and support a culture of ethics. The JD-R theory (dynamics) was used to explain the identified energy source to support, facilitate and co-create a culture of ethics within the ODL institution. The outcome of the conceptual framework is academic researchers who are engaged in research ethics. This chapter was therefore dedicated to the realisation of the third phase of the data analysis.

In the final chapter of this thesis (Chapter 8), an overview of the research study, together with the conclusions drawn from the study, are presented. Propositions for implementing the conceptual framework, recommendations for future research, and the limitations of the study are offered. The possible contribution of this research study, as identified in Chapter 1, is also confirmed. Chapter 8 concludes with the final conclusions of the r study and my personal reflections on doctorateness.

CHAPTER 8

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

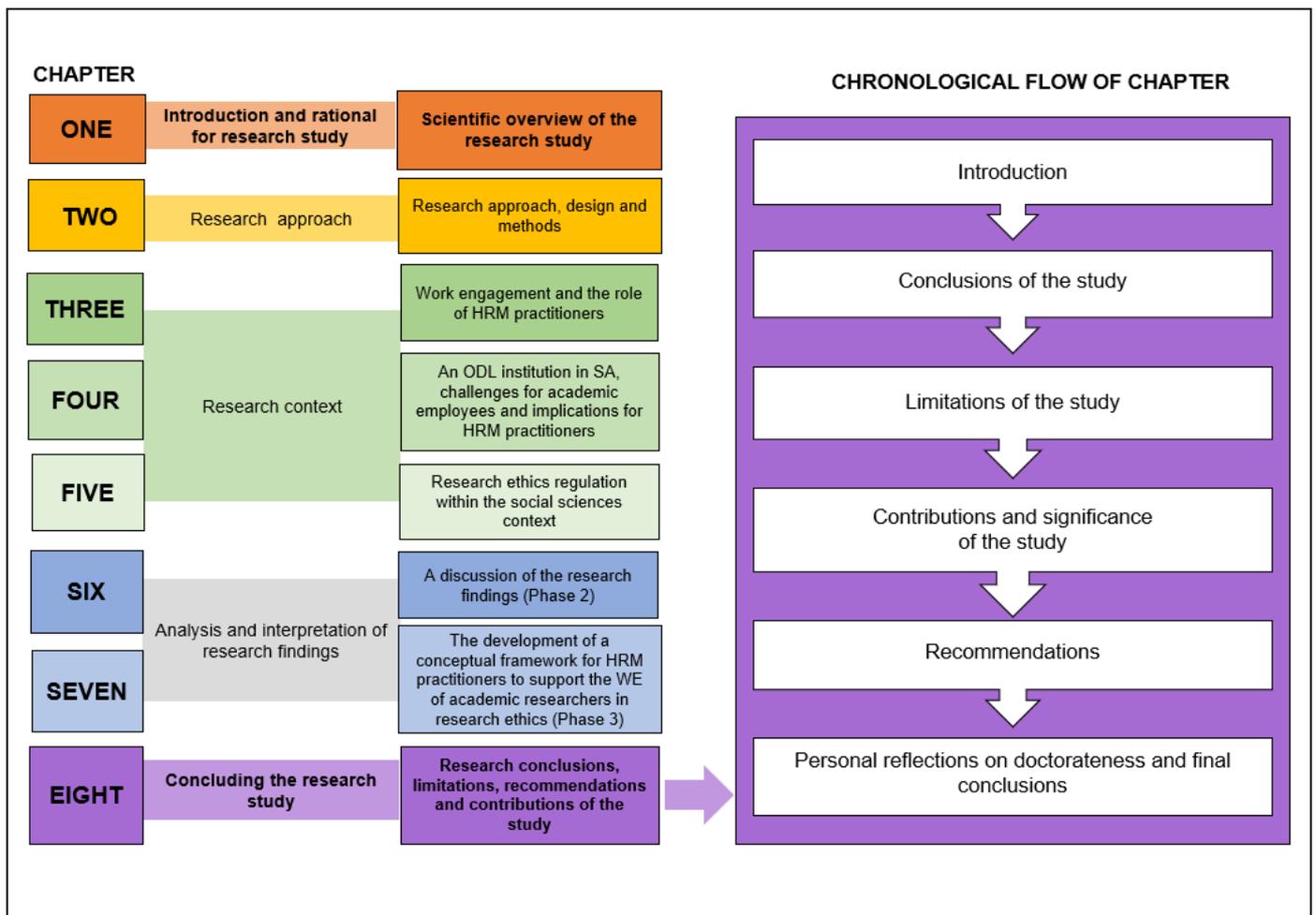


Figure 8.1: Composition and structure of Chapter 8

Source: Own compilation

8.1 INTRODUCTION

As indicated in Chapter 1, this study set out to explore academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution, and discover how HRM practitioners who work at the institution can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. In the previous chapter, the third phase of the data analysis and interpretation was realised with the development of a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic

researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. In this final chapter, an overview of the study, research objectives, and conclusions are presented. This section is followed by the acknowledgement of the limitations of the study. Thereafter, recommendations for HRM practice, HRM education, and future research opportunities are discussed. Following these recommendations, a section is dedicated to depicting the contributions made with the realisation of this study, and the significance of this research. The chapter ends with the final conclusions of the study and a personal reflection on my doctorateness.

8.2 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

The overall purpose of the research undertaking was to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The thesis was presented over eight consecutive chapters. To realise the overarching purpose, the study was executed over three sequential but interrelated research phases. Each phase, together with the specific objectives articulated for the study, is restated below. The conclusions arrived at, with the realisation of these objectives, are also presented in this section.

In Chapter 1, I provided the background and rationale for conducting the study and articulated the problem statement. The problem statement informed the research questions, the specific aim, and the study's objectives. In this chapter, I also explained the fundamental concepts and significance of the study. A brief overview of the research approach that was followed for this study was offered, and the delimitations of the study were stated.

In Chapter 2, I explained the research approach, design and methods chosen for this study. Interpretivism was identified as the most appropriate paradigm to address the research problem. The IPA was chosen as the preferred researcher design. In this chapter, I thus explained the methods used to collect, analyse, and interpret the data for each of the three research phases. In addition, I also focused on the measures I took to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research findings, and the ethical considerations I upheld throughout the study.

Having presented my worldview and the research approach, design, and methods I adopted for the study, I turned to the first of the research phases, which gave structure to the study. The conclusions I reached are accordingly structured according to these phases and are presented below:

PHASE ONE:

The purpose of phase one was to obtain a deeper understanding of academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. This phase was supported by a narrative analysis of scholarly literature in relation to the five objectives stated below.

Research objective 1:

The first objective was to obtain a deeper understanding of academic employees' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution through a narrative analysis of scholarly literature. I focused on an overview of 'engagement' from different theoretical perspectives to select a WE theory that could inform the conceptual framework. The first objective of phase one was realised in Chapter 3.

Research objective 2:

The second objective was to obtain a deeper understanding of academic employees' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution through a narrative analysis of scholarly literature, focusing on HRM practitioners' role in supporting WE within organisations. The second objective of phase one was also realised in Chapter 3.

Research objective 3:

The third research objective was to obtain a deeper understanding of academic employees' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution through a narrative analysis of scholarly literature, focusing on how the contemporary HE environment supports their engagement. The third objective of phase one was realised in Chapter 4.

Research objective 4:

The fourth research objective was to obtain a deeper understanding of academic employees' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution through a narrative analysis of scholarly literature, focusing on HRM practitioners' role in support of WE within HEIs. The fourth objective of phase one was also realised in Chapter 4.

Research objective 5:

The fifth research objective was to obtain a deeper understanding of academic employees' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution through a narrative analysis of scholarly literature, focusing on the connection between research ethics and the engagement of academic employees in social sciences. The fifth objective of phase one was realised in Chapter 5.

The following conclusions were made for phase one of the study:

To fulfil the objectives set out for phase one of the study, I employed a narrative literature analysis to obtain a deeper understanding of academic employees' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution (see Section 2.4.1.1). With this methodology, I am confident that I achieved the objectives of phase one by analysing scholarly literature (journal articles and books), government documents, legislation, codes and policies, news reports in general media, internet sources, conference proceedings, theses, and dissertations.

Consequently, my first conclusion is methodological in nature. Various approaches to conducting literature analyses are available, including descriptive, systematic, theoretical, meta-analysis, critical, and narrative reviews (see for e.g., Grant & Booth, 2009; Ferrari, 2015; Waterfield, 2018; UWO, 2020). As explained in Section 2.4.1.1, different approaches exist since the purpose of these literature analyses also differs (Grant & Booth, 2009; Snyder, 2019; Tight, 2019). In deductive research, for example, the investigation is based on theories and well-defined concepts, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria are meticulously defined (Bryman *et al.*, 2015:97; Snyder, 2019). This is done in order to answer a particular research question and in hypothesis testing (Snyder, 2019).

Conversely, for inductive research, the objective of literature analysis is to create understanding and not gather specific knowledge (Bryman *et al.*, 2015). Interpretative researchers aim to generate theory from the study findings (Bryman *et al.*, 2015). This means that these academic researchers do not have clear concepts and definitions prior to the collection and interpretation of empirical data (Bryman *et al.*, 2015). A narrative literature analysis enables the interpretative researcher to obtain this needed initial impression of the subject field they wish to understand (Bryman *et al.*, 2015:97).

In line with the objectives of a narrative literature analysis (Baumeister & Leary, 1997) (see Section 2.4.1.1), I set out to evaluate different engagement theories (see Section 3.3); examine the state of knowledge in HE (see Sections 4.2 – 4.4 and 4.6); the JD-R theory as a theory of engagement (see Sections 3.3.4 and 3.4), and discourses on research ethics regulations and guidelines (see Sections 5.3.2 and 5.4). I also set out to provide a historical account of unethical research studies and the consequential codes and declarations for research ethics regulation (see Sections 5.3 and 5.3.1), and the development of IPA as an approach to data analysis (see Section 2.3) and problem identification (see Sections 1.3 and 4.6). Given the purpose of the current study, I therefore concluded that a narrative literature analysis was the most fitting approach to successfully realise phase one of this study.

The second conclusion I made was that although the origin of the concept 'engagement' is not clear, it is clear that employees' engagement is important to the success of an organisation and the wellbeing of the individual employee (see Section 3.2). Although scholars use 'employee engagement' and 'work engagement' (WE) interchangeably, WE is the preferred term to use in an academic arena since it is more specific (Schaufeli, 2014). Even so, within the scientific arena, different theoretical perspectives are upheld to define and explain WE (see Section 3.2). Earlier psychological research focused on the negative side of psychology, and this study area only later focused on the positive aspects of employee wellbeing. To this end, I realised that burnout is the antithesis of engagement (see Section 3.3.2), even though this was not the focus of the present study.

After careful consideration and analysis of the different theories to understand WE, I selected the JD-R theory as the most appropriate theory to understand WE in the context of this study (see Section 3.3.4). I came to the conclusion that the shortfalls of the traditional job design and job stress theories are intercepted by the JD-R theory, which considers job stress theories and job design theories together, and by doing so, describes how job demands and resources have unique and accumulative effects on job stress and employees' motivation (see Section 3.3.4). The scholars who developed the JD-R theory, as a theory to understand WE, also proposed a definition of WE, which was adopted for this study. According to these scholars, WE can be defined as "a persistent, positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002:74) (see Section 1.6.3). To this end, I conclude that the JD-R theory, as a theory of engagement, was the most suitable to be utilised in phase three (Chapter 7) to interpret the research findings (phase two, Chapter 6).

The third conclusion I made concerning the narrative analysis of scholarly literature is that HRM supports the belief that organisational goals and employee needs are equally important and the needs of the one should not be reached at the expense of the other (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2018). This means that organisational outcomes should not take precedence over employees' wellbeing in the said organisation (see Section 3.5). This understanding emphasised the importance of WE for HRM practitioners, since they carry the responsibility to support employees' wellbeing and increase organisational effectiveness.

In terms of the JD-R theory, it is understood that job and personal resources are vital to support WE (motivational process) and, in turn, WE is known to improve employee wellbeing and promote positive organisational outcomes (organisational effectiveness) (Han *et al.*, 2019). In terms of the JD-R theory, it is thus clear that HRM practitioners should support employees'

WE (also in research ethics) by initiating and managing the motivational process (job and personal resources) to achieve positive outcomes (Basinska *et al.*, 2018).

The fourth conclusion I made pertained to the HEIs' role in society and academic employees' role within these institutions. HEIs play a critical role to provide quality education, creating knowledge and empowering individuals to co-create a successful society (Erdem, 2016; Jouda, 2016). Over the last three decades, HEIs have been exposed to various changes and challenges that altered this educational landscape forever (Grobler & Horne, 2017). Some of these changes and challenges are global phenomena, while others are unique to SA. Also, the ODL institution where this study took place was not protected from these external changes and transformations, which inevitably influenced employees' lived experiences of these institutions, including academic employees. With the narrative literature analysis, I realised that these changes and challenges within the work context influence academic employees' experiences of WE as well (see Section 4.6).

Even though HRM practitioners' role in academic researchers' engagement in research ethics has not been previously explored, the insights I gained from my examination of the literature was that academic researchers could benefit from support in managing the changes and challenges they face at work. This support should include support to engage in research ethics.

Academic employees' roles have always been multidimensional. However, the literature analysis confirmed that the demands placed on academic employees had increased significantly within the HE landscape, both globally and locally (see Sections 4.5.1 to 4.5.5). The many job demands faced by academic employees can lead to stress, exhaustion of personal resources, fatigue, cynicism, reduced self-efficacy, feelings of being overwhelmed, overstrained and incompetent (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010; Diedericks, 2017). Moreover, job demands (the stress or health impairment process) are recognised as one of the main reasons for burnout (Bakker *et al.*, 2014:399). Burnout, in turn, is associated with several negative reactions among employees to their work, including dissatisfaction with their jobs, depleted organisational commitment, absenteeism, intent to leave their employment positions, turnover, ill-health, and negative organisational outcomes (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Maslach, 2017; Maslach & Leiter, 2008) (see Section 3.4.2). Academic researchers who experience burnout will not be able to engage optimally in research ethics (including the ERC application processes and procedures) and might not comply with an HEI's regulatory framework. These processes and procedures are often experienced as a burdensome job demand (see Section 5.8.2).

Conversely, job and personal resources (the motivational process) is one of the key drivers of WE, and WE, in turn, leads to improved wellbeing and positive organisational outcomes (Bakker *et al.*, 2014, 2014; Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Han *et al.*, 2019). Job resources include opportunities for development, autonomy, feedback on work performance, justice, skill variation, leadership and social support from both supervisors and co-workers (Schaufeli, 2012a), flexible working hours, equipment and participation in decision-making (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018), supervisory coaching, innovative climate, job control, information, opportunities for learning and the attainment of varied skills (O'Connor, 2014) (see Section 3.4.2). These resources also can support employees to cope with job demands (see Section 3.4.3). Academic researchers who have sufficient job and personal resources will be able to engage in research ethics (a positive organisational outcome) via the motivational process. With sufficient resources, academic researchers will also be better equipped to manage their job demands related to research ethics (including the ERC application processes and procedures).

I also realised that it is vital to understand that although the health impairment process and the motivational process both have an influence on employee wellbeing, it remains two distinct processes, according to the founding principles of the JD-R theory. This signifies that the absence of job demands (health impairment process which could result in burnout) does not automatically mean that job and personal resources are sufficient (motivational process manifests), WE are felt, and the consequential outcomes are positive (see Section 3.4.3).

In light of this insight, I conclude that academic researchers at the ODL institution will engage in research ethics if they have sufficient job and personal resources within the context of this study. First, this is possible because job and personal resources have an intrinsic motivational role since it fosters, *inter alia*, employees' growth, learning and development, which helps these employees achieve their work goals (Schaufeli, 2012b). Second, sufficient job and personal resources can support employees to handle job demands and realise their intended outcomes (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). This also means that HRM practitioners should support academic researchers in engaging in research ethics; not specifically focusing on lessening job demands, but rather supporting these employees with abundant resources.

The fifth conclusion I made for phase one of this study, was related to academic employees' role in their capacity as academic researchers. As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, universities have three core functions, including teaching, community service, and

academic research (Erdem, 2016; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). This is true for the ODL institution where this study was conducted as well.

In SA, all research involving human research participants must be reviewed by an ERC and approved before the study may commence. This process is compulsory and is regulated by the National Health Act (61 of 2003) (see Section 5.5). The definition of health research provided by the National Health Act (61 of 2003) also includes research in social sciences where human participants are involved. The ODL institution where the study was conducted is strictly compliant with national legislation, and all academic research involving human participants conducted at the institution is regulated. However, before the promulgation of the National Health Act (61 of 2003), research in social sciences was less regulated; many academic researchers conducting social sciences research involving human participants thus demonstrate resistance to engaging in the research ethics review processes and procedures in HEIs. This is true for academic researchers in the ODL institution as well.

The objective of research ethics regulation is to ensure that the interest of the research study never surpasses the wellbeing or dignity of the research participants (Kruger, Ndebele & Horn, 2014; Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012). The need for research ethics regulation becomes apparent when it is understood that nearly all regulations are developed in response to unethical research, underpinned by the exploitation and violation of the dignity of human participants (Al Tajir, 2018; Heale & Shorten, 2017). While some academic researchers value research ethics oversight, most scientific literature refers to the resistance and frustrations upheld by social sciences researchers. The majority of these works do not question the norms and values that are underscored with research ethics, but rather the processes and procedures involved with the approval process. Different reasons became evident in the narrative literature analysis, but a general concern voiced repetitively was the belief that the research ethics regulations used to evaluate social science research are inappropriate for these study areas, since it originated from biomedical sciences, which is vastly different (Dingwall *et al.*, 2017; De Wet, 2010; Kruger *et al.*, 2014).

As mentioned, the HE landscape has been subjected to several changes and challenges over the last few decades. The academic employees who are employed at these institutions were therefore also exposed to these changes and challenges. What became evident is that academic employees face challenges in the contemporary HE milieu because of the variety of tasks they need to fulfil in these employment positions. These academic employees also have a plethora of tasks to fulfil in their capacity as researchers, one of which is to obtain research ethics approval before the study can commence. According to the JD-R theory, all

facets of an employee's work (irrespective of the work environment) can be demonstrated using two categories, which include job demands and job resources (Bakker *et al.*, 2014) (see Section 3.4.1). To this end, it can be concluded that, in accordance with the JD-R theory, academic employees' lived experience of their research function can be understood in terms of job and personal resources and job demands. Furthermore, it can be concluded that it would be possible for academic researchers to engage in research ethics if they have sufficient resources to support the motivational process and handle job demands.

Recognising that academic employees are central to the functioning of HEIs, a lack of suitable support (for sufficient resources and subsequent WE to manifest) is detrimental to the success of these HEIs (Berebitsky & Ellis, 2018). As a final conclusion of phase one of the study, I deduced that HRM practitioners could use the JD-R theory to establish the levels of WE experienced by academic employees and determine the support needed for academic researchers to engage in research ethics at an ODL institution.

PHASE TWO:

The purpose of phase two was to obtain a better understanding of how HRM practitioners can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution, by collecting qualitative data by means of semi-structured individual interviews, naïve sketches, and field notes. The purpose of phase two was fulfilled by realising the three objectives stated below.

Research objective 6:

The first objective was to explore how academic researchers make sense of the phenomenon 'engagement in research ethics' at an ODL institution. The first objective of phase two was realised in Chapter 6.

Research objective 7:

The second objective was to explore what academic researchers' experiences were of engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The second objective of phase two was realised in Chapter 6.

Research objective 8:

The third objective was to explore how HRM practitioners make sense of their role in supporting academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. The third objective of phase two was realised in Chapter 6.

The following conclusions were made for phase two of the study:

To fulfil the objectives set out for phase two of the study, qualitative data were collected using multiple methods, which included semi-structured individual interviews, naïve sketches and field notes. I used non-probability purposive sampling to recruit information-rich participants. Thirteen informed participants voluntarily consented to participate in the study. The purposive sample included employees within the ODL institution with proficiency in the roles and functions of HRM practitioners, together with experience in research ethics as part of their academic endeavour to conduct research involving human participants.

I conducted semi-structured, individual interviews with each of these participants, and they were also asked to complete a naïve sketch on the research phenomenon. In addition, I took extensive field notes for each participant while collecting data. These different sources of data were coded, which involved two independent coding procedures. I independently analysed the data to identify themes and sub-themes, and the data were also analysed by an independent co-coder. These independently discovered themes and sub-themes, and the meaning-making thereof, were cross-checked to ensure that consensus was reached about the identified themes. Through the use of two coders, who initially worked independently to analyse the data, and thereafter establishing similarity between the identified themes (accurate interpretation), I ensured that the findings were reliable and dependable (Church *et al.*, 2019; Joffe, 2012; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

The interpretation of the semi-structured individual interviews and the naïve sketches were conducted in accordance with IPA. I believe that the IPA was the most appropriate approach to analyse the data, because this approach is dedicated to a detailed examination of personal meaning and how individuals make sense of their lived experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Spiers & Smith, 2020). After analysing the data, I described the findings and carried out a literature control to compare and integrate the findings with existing scholarly literature (Creswell, 2014).

With the interpretation of the data, I learned that diverse perspectives exist among academic researchers about what 'engagement in research ethics' entails. These perceptions included the belief that engagement in research ethics is demonstrated by conducting research in a 'sanctified way'. To 'sanctify' refers to the idea that something is created which is morally right and acceptable (Longman Dictionary, 2021), respectable, it is as it should be, and it should not be changed (Collins Dictionary, 2021b). It was therefore concluded that academic research

that is conducted in a sanctified way refers to academic research that is done in a respectable, morally correct, and acceptable way, and this approach to research should not be changed.

Other participants explained that engagement in research ethics is evident when time is dedicated, and effort and energy is invested, on research-related activities. I also came to the understanding that for some academic researchers, engagement in research ethics is evident when they are involved in the physical and mental activity of applying for research ethics approval for proposed research studies. Some participants believed the application process reflects academic researchers' commitment to conducting ethically rigorous research. Other participants explained that engagement in research ethics is persistent and progressive in nature, thus engagement in research ethics is not intermittent. With these shared lived experiences, I concluded that engagement in research ethics is essential, that it is multifaceted and diverse.

The concept 'essential' refers to something that is of the utmost importance or absolute necessity to a particular subject, situation, or activity (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021a; Collins Dictionary, 2021e; Merriam-Webster, 2021f). It can also refer to the basic or most important qualities of someone or something (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021e). I therefore concluded that when academic researchers denote that engagement in research ethics is essential, they believe that engagement in research ethics is of utmost importance. It is necessary and refers to the fundamental qualities of an academic researcher who regards this phenomenon as critically important. Multifaceted, in turn, refers to having a variety of different aspects, elements or important features (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021a; Collins Dictionary, 2021f; Merriam-Webster, 2021g). I concluded that engagement in research ethics was understood as a phenomenon that comprises many different aspects, with different features that are believed to be important for academic researchers.

Finally, the concept 'diverse' denotes something that is distinct or unlike other elements or qualities (Collins Dictionary, 2021d; Merriam-Webster, 2021e). It can also refer to someone that is distinct and differs from others (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021d; Merriam-Webster, 2021e). To this end, I concluded that academic researchers have different views of what engagement in research ethics entails; what one academic researcher believes is a distinctive element of engagement in research ethics, does not imply that the next academic researcher would agree.

The next conclusion I reached is that participants perceived their work experience as complicated and concerning. The participants explained that within the HE environment,

ethical research practices are supposed to manifest, yet they experience this environment as complicated and concerning, and reflective of the larger employment environment of academic employees. Participants felt that their work environment seemingly echoes cumbersome and disturbing manifestations of unethical behaviour within the wider societal framework of SA. The participants believed that undesirable conduct within the ODL institution resulted in a bureaucratic research ethics regulatory system as a safety measure to proliferate ethical research.

Participants shared aspects within their work environment that hamper their engagement in research ethics (see Section 6.5.1.3). Different explanations were given, yet I conclude that academic employees, in their capacity as academic researchers, face a number of job demands, including the processes and procedures of research ethics regulation in the ODL institution. Participants also believed that in order to engage in research ethics, the person should have an individualistic and personal ethical predisposition.

A significant discovery I made with the interpretation of the research findings of phase two was that participants were of the view that a well-balanced and successful ODL institution is critical for academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. The participants indicated that a well-balanced and successful ODL institution could only be achieved if a culture of ethics is a strategic objective of the ODL institution. I thus conclude that for academic researchers to engage in research ethics, the ODL institution should ensure that the organisational culture is reflective of a culture of ethics. Additionally, the university's strategies should reiterate that the preferred organisational culture is one of ethics, and these strategies should be aligned to this organisational culture. Furthermore, the participants indicated that the HRM practitioners within the ODL institution have a critical role to fulfil in supporting and enabling a culture of ethics within the institution (see Section 6.5.1.5). The conclusions of how HRM practitioners can achieve this endeavour, forms part of the conclusions of phase three of the study.

PHASE THREE:

Research objective 9:

The purpose of phase three was to develop a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. This purpose was realised in Chapter 7.

The following conclusions were made for phase three of the study:

In order to fulfil the purpose of the last phase of the study, I utilised the thinking map of Dickoff *et al.* (1968). It poses six questions that must be satisfied in order for a conceptual framework to be functional (see Sections 2.4.3.1 and 7.5.1). As I immersed myself in the research findings, I realised that it would be difficult and confusing to explain the course of action of the conceptual framework if I followed the question sequence provided by these scholars. For the conceptual framework to be functional, I thus changed the sequence of the questions (and in doing so, the answers to the questions). This enabled me to logically explain the course of action of the conceptual framework developed for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution (see Section 7.5.1).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, many academic researchers have used the JD-R theory to demonstrate the ways in which job and personal resources and job demands influence WE and burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Hakanen & Bakker, 2017) (see Section 3.4.1). In the same chapter, I came to the conclusion that the JD-R theory, as a theory of engagement, is the most appropriate theoretical perspective for this study to analyse and interpret participants' lived experiences and their engagement in research ethics. For the construction of the conceptual framework (phase three), I leaned on the JD-R theory to understand, explain, and make predictions about WE, burnout, and organisational outcomes.

Although numerous academic researchers have used the JD-R theory to study engagement, in phase one, I realised that this research undertaking was one of the few qualitative studies to investigate employees' WE using the JD-R theory as theoretical perspective. I therefore heavily relied on the principles of trustworthiness and authenticity (see Section 2.5) to ensure the quality and scientific rigour of this study. To this end, various strategies were used to safeguard the study's trustworthiness and authenticity (see Section 2.5.6).

The study took place in an ODL institution in SA. As mentioned earlier, the participants indicated that a culture of ethics needs to be realised and evident in the ODL institution to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. Furthermore, the participants were of the perception that HRM practitioners within the ODL institution have a critical role to fulfil in supporting a culture of ethics. This undertaking should be done by providing sufficient job and personal resources for academic researchers to optimise their motivational processes. Furthermore, these resources will help academic researchers to better manage the job demands they experience.

The participants made several recommendations on how HRM practitioners can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics by offering ample job and personal resources. These resources included onboarding that is specific to integrate new employees into a culture of ethics supported at the ODL institution. For academic employees, the onboarding process should also focus on research and research ethics processes and procedures followed at the ODL institution. The participants noted a need for engaging leadership, where they feel trusted and supported. Participants also noted the need for professional development and specifically mentioned the need for training (including research ethics training), coaching and mentorship. Participants were of the view that in order for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics, performance agreements and appraisals need to be revised to incorporate research ethics as a performance criterion.

An interesting conclusion I reached was that the support that HRM practitioners should offer to academic researchers is not limited to research-related activities. Specifically, academic employees highlighted the need for support in other facets of their work as well (e.g., administrative support). Participants identified the need for proactive support from HRM practitioners within the ODL institution. Finally, the participants believed that engagement in research ethics would be furthered if ethical values are embedded in the ODL institution's recruitment strategy. This belief is based on the perception that an ethical recruitment strategy will demonstrate a culture of ethics at the ODL institution. It will aid in recruiting employees with the same norms and values underwritten at the ODL institution. Even though no previous studies exist on academic researchers' engagement in research ethics, at the end of phase three, with the construction of the conceptual framework, I concluded that HRM practitioners indeed have a critical role in supporting academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. This role can be realised with the utilisation of the conceptual framework.

The final conclusion I made related to the envisioned outcome of the conceptual framework. Since no definition currently exists to define an academic who is engaged in research ethics, I conclude that it is essential to propose such a definition. To this end, the following definition is offered:

An academic researcher who is engaged in research ethics can be defined as an individual who conducts research in a sanctified way, devotes their time and energy to source knowledge and advance their own understanding of research ethics, exert physical and mental energy, and devote time to apply for research ethics approval.

These individuals comprehend that ethical research conduct is a persistent and progressive process.

8.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Certain limitations were identified for this study, and the findings should be understood and interpreted with these limitations in mind.

The study was restricted to one specific ODL institution in SA. This means that participation was also restricted to purposively selected employees employed in that specific work context (see Section 2.4.2.2). The decision to conduct the study at a single HEI was made to abide by the theoretical foundations of the IPA, which stipulates that a non-probability purposive sampling method is the most appropriate sampling technique to answer the research question (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Spiers & Smith, 2020). A purposive sample was chosen as the most appropriate sampling technique to enable me to answer the research question (Creswell, 2012; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). A further theoretical foundation of IPA is that a homogeneous sampling group should be identified for the research undertaking (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2017). The main objective of IPA is to give full appreciation to each participant's lived experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Still, with the chosen population and sampling technique, it should be acknowledged that conclusions drawn are limited to a specific ODL institution, and the findings cannot be generalised to other HEIs in SA or elsewhere. However, to mitigate this limitation, I strictly adhered to the measures of trustworthiness. In particular, I focused on the measure of transferability (as sub-criteria for trustworthiness) by extensive record-keeping on every aspect of the processes and procedures followed in this study. The records for this study will thus enable other academic researchers to evaluate the applicability of the findings to their settings. It is thus foreseen that with careful consideration, it will be possible that the conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics can be adapted to fit the specific context of other HEIs.

The second limitation that should be acknowledged is the exclusion of other population groups in order to honour the theoretical principles of IPA (homogeneous sample), as stated above. With the inclusion of other population groups, it is possible that alternative lived experiences could have come to the fore. The first group of potential participants that were excluded were employees of other HEIs with proficiency, knowledge, and experience in HRM practices and research ethics. This was done because these individuals were not employed at the ODL

institution at the time of data collection, thus deterring a homogeneous sample selection. Furthermore, the research ethics practices and procedures at other HEIs might be different from the practices of the ODL institution where this study took place.

The second group of potential participants who were excluded were postgraduate students of the ODL institution with proficiency, knowledge, and experience in HRM practices and research ethics because they were not employed at the ODL institution at the stage of data collection. Again, with the inclusion of this group of potential participants, it would not be possible to have a homogenous sample for the study. As alluded to above, with the inclusion of these population groups, it is possible that these participants could have shared different lived experiences and further perspectives of academic researchers' engagement (see Section 1.6.1 for the definition of academic researchers) in research ethics might have been obtained. This study is limited to portraying the lived experiences of academic researchers and their perception of engagement in research ethics at a single ODL institution in SA.

The final limitation that needs to be acknowledged relates to the chosen methodology of the study. This study entailed an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of participants using multiple data collection methods (see Section 2.4.2.4). To this end, the analysis, interpretation, and reporting of the qualitative data was a very lengthy process (see Section 2.4.2.5). IPA is a very thorough type of data analysis, but it is also a time-consuming case-by-case examination, in order to achieve the needed depth and understanding (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2011). The implication is thus that the descriptions and interpretations of their lived experiences occurred only at one point in time. The participants' lived experiences can thus differ if the exploration of their lived experiences had happened at another time.

8.4 CONTRIBUTIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the study is founded on the originality of its contribution and ability to address relevant research areas. With this study, I aimed to obtain a deeper understanding of academic researchers' lived experiences at an ODL institution, and how these lived experiences play a role in their engagement in research ethics. From there, I set out to discover how HRM practitioners can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. With the realisation of this study, I am optimistic that the findings will positively contribute to academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL

institution. The contributions of this study have provided insight and advanced knowledge in the following three areas: theory, methodology, and practice.

This study made several theoretical contributions. Globally, this is the first research study with the specific focus of studying the WE in research ethics experienced by academic researchers at any HEI. This study is also the first research study in SA and internationally to explore the role that HRM practitioners can fulfil in supporting the engagement in research ethics experienced by academic researchers at HEIs. Prior to the realisation of this study, no conceptual framework existed for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL or any other HEI. The main theoretical contribution of this research study is thus the construction of a practice-oriented conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. It was determined that academic researchers' WE in research ethics can be influenced by the HEI's organisational culture. It was also discovered that job and personal resources could support the WE experienced by academic researchers in research ethics. The findings of this research furthermore contribute to the subject field of HRM, and shed insight and awareness in the potential supportive role that HRM practitioners can play in organisations to support the WE of employees.

A number of significant methodological contributions were made with the realisation of this study. Most scientific research on WE is conducted in a positivistic paradigm, with a deductive approach, using quantitative data collection and analysis methods. This is also true for research studies on WE that favour the JD-R theory for understanding and interpreting data. Very few qualitative research studies have been conducted to investigate WE with the use of the JD-R theory as a theoretical framework. The research I conducted – as interpretivist researcher following an inductive approach, using qualitative data collection and analysis methods – thus contributes to the scope of methodological possibilities for analysis and interpretation of WE research with the use of the JD-R theory as theoretical framework.

To my knowledge, this study takes the position as a forerunner of any research in the field of Management Sciences that utilise IPA as a preferred method for data analysis to investigate WE using the JD-R theory as theoretical framework for interpretation (see Sections 2.4.2.5.b and 6.2). This contribution is significant because it acts as a directive for WE researchers who could consider employing a qualitative approach, using IPA as a method of analysis in their respective studies.

With the realisation of this study, a seminal contribution is made by utilising the organising principles of Dickoff *et al.* (1968) to develop a conceptual framework to explain WE according to the JD-R theory (see Section 7.5.1). Prior to this study, no conceptual framework existed to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an HEI.

A practical contribution of this research study was that it ascertained the views and lived experiences of academic researchers conducting research involving human participants, at an ODL institution in SA. These shared lived experiences enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of how they understand engagement in research ethics, their job demands and resources available to them. I also discovered what they believed to be essential for academic researchers to engage in research ethics at the ODL institution and how HRM practitioners can play a role to realise this. Therefore, through this study, a significant contribution is made with the various recommendations offered to HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. Furthermore, the information that became known through the empirical data of this study can be used to develop and strengthen a culture of ethics at the ODL institution.

Based on the findings of this research study, HRM practitioners are in a better position to assist management within the ODL institution to understand the importance of an ethical culture in the institution. They can also promote academic researchers' engagement in research ethics based on the status of the institution's organisational culture.

By using the recommendations offered for the current research study, academic researchers' engagement in research ethics may be optimised. This will yield positive outcomes for the individual employee and the ODL institution. This positive outcome is even more significant in the current turbulent and challenging HE environment across the globe. Furthermore, academic researchers' engagement in research ethics will be to the benefit of future research participants, given that these academic researchers will be cognisant to be ethical in their research undertakings.

8.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, together with the identified limitations thereof, some recommendations are made. Recommendations are included for future research, for HRM practitioners within the ODL institution, and for education.

8.5.1 Recommendations for future research

The first recommendation I wish to make is to evaluate the conceptual framework.

Experts can determine the value of the conceptual framework that was developed for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics. This study was conducted under the guidance and supervision of two experts in qualitative research and conceptual framework development. Their expertise aided in the construction of the conceptual framework. Nonetheless, the first recommendation would be for a group of experts to evaluate the conceptual framework to make recommendations and final refinements.

It is recommended that the developed conceptual framework should be presented to a group of experts with extensive knowledge, proficiency, and experience in the following areas:

- Academic research specifically involving human participants necessitating research ethics oversight.
- HEIs.
- HRM practices.
- Conceptual framework development and theory generation.

The evaluation by such a group of experts would aid in ensuring that the conceptual framework is meaningful and comprehensive. Such an appraisal can be conducted with the evaluation principles offered by Chinn and Kramer (2015; 2018). I wish to recommend these evaluation principles, since these principles uphold that the conceptual framework's value is founded in how it can contribute to what is envisioned for practice with its implementation. For this study, the conceptual framework's value is thus founded in HRM practitioners' proficiency in pragmatically supporting and facilitating academic researchers' engagement in research ethics involving human participants at an ODL institution. According to Chinn and Kramer (2015; 2018), the value of the conceptual framework can be established by answering the following questions:

- I. How clear is the conceptual framework?
- II. How simple is the conceptual framework?
- III. How general is the conceptual framework?
- IV. How accessible is the conceptual framework?
- V. How important is the conceptual framework?

It is therefore recommended that experts evaluate the conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution with the aid of these questions.

The second recommendation I wish to make is the development of guidelines for the conceptual framework.

In Section 8.5.2, recommendations for business practices are made to HRM practitioners employed at the ODL institution. The recommendations were derived from the research findings and the resulting conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. These recommendations should be further refined, and formal guidelines should be developed for these HRM practitioners. The purpose of these guidelines should be to offer clear details and appropriate blueprints of the course of action that should be followed with the implementation of the conceptual framework. The guidelines developed for the conceptual framework should be intended to guide HRM practitioners in supporting academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution.

One possible approach to present guidelines for the implementation of the conceptual framework is in accordance with Dickoff *et al's.* (1968) organising principles. The blueprint or guideline for each activity should thus be discussed separately. This will ensure that the guidelines proposed for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution are comprehensively aligned with the activities proposed in the conceptual framework.

In addition to the two abovementioned recommendations, further academic research on the following scholarly topics and research areas might yield noteworthy findings.

- It is recommended that a comparative research study is conducted at residential HEIs in SA to investigate if academic researchers experience the same job demands and resources at their institutions of employment.
- It is recommended that research is conducted on the relationship between the organisational culture evident in the organisation and the WE experienced by employees.
- It is recommended that the role that HRM practitioners can fulfil to support employees' WE (different employment positions) at HEIs should be further investigated.

- It is recommended that research is conducted on the relationship between unethical behaviour at HEIs, psychological detachment, exhaustion, and burnout among employees, as well as their intention to leave these institutions.

8.5.2 Recommendations for HRM practice

The following recommendations are made specifically for HRM practitioners within the ODL institution:

A key priority for HRM practitioners should be to support and facilitate a culture of ethics as a strategic objective within the ODL institution (see Sections 7.5.3.3 and 7.5.7). In support of this endeavour, it is recommended that employees' ethical behaviour within the ODL institution should be acknowledged and rewarded (Reddy & Scheepers, 2019). In a similar fashion, undesirable and unethical behaviour observed by employees in the ODL institution should not be ignored, and all efforts should be made to remedy this unwanted behaviour. Additionally, it is recommended that all policies and procedures of the ODL institution are revisited and unambiguously aligned with the strategic objectives of the university as an ethical institution, where a culture of ethics manifests (Tucker, 2017). It is vital that HRM practitioners within the ODL institution recognise this need and take the responsibility to realise this recommendation in support of a culture of ethics within the ODL institution. A culture of ethics will support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics.

It is recommended that HRM practitioners should proactively implement initiatives to rebuild trust between employees and management, which is founded on ethical norms and values (see Section 7.5.7.2). It is thus recommended that HRM practitioners facilitate and support transformation from a perceived bureaucratic regulatory system to a more trusting and engaging management style. The management approach, as currently perceived, should be replaced by a supportive and enabling management style (Alimo-Metcalfe *et al.*, 2008; Basinska *et al.*, 2018; Marchington & Wilkinson, 2012; Mitonga-Monga *et al.*, 2019). Trusting employees to behave ethically should be a cornerstone for this management style. Within the research findings, it became apparent that the trust between management and employees can be improved by investing in employees' professional development; investing time on new employees to ensure they become accustomed to the values of the ODL institution; supporting employees in resolving conflicts; providing honest feedback to employees (e.g., performance appraisals); ensuring that management take note of concerns that employees may have; managers should set the example and demonstrate adherence to the policies and procedures

of the ODL institution; and managers should demonstrate clear ethical values and never compromise on those.

A discord exists between the stated values of integrity, ethics and responsibility by the ODL institution and the perceptions that research participants had. Participants were of the view that unsettling, unethical and corrupt behaviour is evident in the institution (see Sections 6.5.1.2.a and 7.5.7.2). It is therefore recommended that HRM practitioners more explicitly declare the consequences of unwanted conduct by employees. These disciplinary actions should be uncompromising and consistently applied. The stated values of the ODL institution should be evident in the behaviour of employees. When employees' behaviour is not in accord with a culture of ethics within the ODL institution, such conduct should not be tolerated and should be condemned. This should be done to ensure that the stated organisational values of integrity, ethics and responsibility are aligned with the perceptions of employees and society at large.

It is recommended that new employees be comprehensively informed about the university's endorsed ethical culture during the onboarding programme by the HRM practitioners employed at the ODL institution (see Section 7.5.7.1). HRM practitioners also need to develop and implement a focused onboarding programme for academic employees (academic researchers) specifically. The onboarding programme should include information on the research ethics policies and regulatory procedures within the ODL institution. The rationale for these policies and procedures should be clearly explained to new academic employees and should be aligned with the stated values of integrity, ethics, and responsibility by the ODL institution (see Section 7.5.3.3).

It is recommended that HRM practitioners review the performance management system currently used within the ODL institution (see Section 7.5.7.4). The performance management system should be revisited to ensure that it is operationalised in an objective, just and impartial manner. As part of the re-evaluation of the current performance management system, any identified possibilities for biased performance reviews should be eradicated. Moreover, HRM practitioners should include measures to evaluate the ethical conduct and behaviours of employees. Accordingly, employees' ethical conduct and behaviours should form part of the performance agreements and performance reviews at the ODL institution. Employees' expected conduct should be clearly aligned with the institution's ethical culture. The performance agreements, particularly for academic employees (academic researchers), should be revised to ensure that a part of their performance agreements is assigned to research ethics. The focus of this performance criteria should not be to penalise academic

employees, but rather to give employees recognition and feedback for the efforts demonstrated to be ethical in research-related activities. When academic researchers require training to develop or further their research skills and abilities, HRM practitioners should ensure that the training programme being offered has a strong emphasis on ethical research practices (see Section 7.5.7.3).

It is recommended that the recruitment and selection strategy and accompanying policies and procedures of the ODL institution should be embedded in clear ethical values (see Section 7.5.7.6). The recruitment process administered by HRM practitioners within the ODL institution should thus be ethical and transparent. HRM practitioners who are responsible for recruiting new employees should ensure that potential candidates are aware that the ODL institution places a high value on and prioritises ethical conduct. These norms and values should thus be evident in employees' conduct and aligned to the culture of ethics within the ODL institution. A further recommendation would be that a proportion of the selection process should have an ethical component to evaluate candidates. This section's focus should be to evaluate the potential candidate's ethical inclination and determine if their personal values and norms are aligned to the ethical standards upheld in the ODL institution.

8.5.3 Recommendations for education

Since many participants expressed concerns about having limited knowledge and guidance about research ethics when they applied for research ethics approval, it is recommended that research ethics training should form part of the formal proposal module(s) for masters' and doctoral candidates (see Sections 6.5.1.3.b). The training should focus on the rationale for research ethics regulation in social sciences, as well as the research ethics policies and regulatory procedures adopted within the ODL institution. These postgraduate students should understand that the values of integrity, ethics, and responsibility are clearly stated by the ODL institution, and it is expected that students honour these values in their research undertakings. It is foreseen that comprehensive training on research ethics will help students in applying for research ethics approval; support sound research practices adopted by students; and safeguard research participants involved in research conducted by students. It is recommended that the SOPs for research ethics adopted at the ODL institution should be shared with these students as part of the training (see Section 5.6). These SOPs will support students' understanding of the procedures they need to follow to obtain research ethics approval.

The second recommendation for education is specifically focused on adult learning to support academic employees' continuous professional development (academic researchers) (see Section 7.5.7.3). It is recommended that HRM practitioners within the ODL institution provide the required infrastructure for academic employees to develop their research skills and abilities, with an inseparable foundation in ethical research practices. HRM practitioners should also ensure that these professional development initiatives are aligned with a culture of ethics, which should be evident at the ODL institution.

The research participants mentioned the need for specific professional development initiatives for academic employees (academic researchers), which included training (also research ethics training), coaching and mentorship (see Sections 6.5.1.5.b.iii and 7.5.7.3). It is therefore recommended that these professional development initiatives take precedence over other professional development opportunities (e.g., job shadowing, job rotation, self-study courses, consultation etc.). It is recommended that the research ethics training opportunities are detailed and specific to ensure that the needs of the academic researchers and the needs of the ODL institution are met. It is further recommended that these training opportunities should provide the theoretical underpinnings of research ethics, and the training should express the expected behaviours from academic researchers in their research projects. The explicit statement on academic researchers' expected ethical conduct should be founded in the ODL institution's culture of ethics. Although different approaches are followed for coaching and mentoring employees, several scholars agree that these professional development initiatives are focused on the empowerment of employees, the development of talent, fostering commitment, increasing productivity, and encouraging success (Burgess *et al.*, 2018; Rolfe, 2015; Serrat, 2010; Van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020). To this end, it is recommended that HRM practitioners identify specific academic researchers with proficiency, knowledge, and experience in research ethics (the theoretical underpinnings and processes and procedures within the ODL institution) to mentor and coach developing academic researchers, as well as established academic researchers who are new employees at the ODL institution (as part of their onboarding).

8.6 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON DOCTORATENESS AND FINAL CONCLUSIONS

My PhD journey ends here, with a personal reflection of my own doctorateness. In line with my ontological beliefs as an interpretivist researcher, I understand that my experience was unique and personal. I write these reflections with the appreciation that my experience might

seem familiar to a few readers, but it is also possible that my journey, and specifically my experience thereof, is vastly different from other PhD candidates. I am at ease with this understanding. I do not wish to convince anybody that the experience is similar for all doctoral students. I simply wish to give a detailed account of my PhD journey and honestly reflect on my experience and appreciate the development I underwent during this period.

I believe that an authentic and truthful reflection of this journey can only be offered in the presence of self-awareness, the willingness to be vulnerable, the acceptance of your initial ignorance, your own short-sightedness and overconfidence brought about by inexperience. It is only at a later stage that you realise and can admit and acknowledge your shortfalls; and begin to understand the importance of the phenomenon you are investigating, the responsibility of your undertaking, and your duty to do justice in this task.

At the onset of my PhD I, like many others, were given the forewarning that it was not going to be easy. Silently brushing it off, probably like many others, I believed that this would not be the case for me. I would be the exception. I was yet to learn. These seasoned academic researchers were not trying to discourage me; in fact, now at the end, I believe they were simply attempting to prepare me for a long, and more often than not, very difficult and lonely journey. The truth of the matter is, a doctoral degree is hard – very hard. Is it worth it? Without a doubt in my mind, I can answer: Absolutely! I developed so much as a scholar, but more than that, this journey took me on a path of self-discovery and personal growth as well.

Yet, to get to this answer took me seven years. Before getting to this point – the concluding thoughts of my thesis – I faced several challenges which I had to overcome if I wanted to make a success of my research study. During this time, I adapted my research objective, I amended my chosen methodology and probably most significantly, I changed co-supervisors. This was not an easy decision for me. My then co-supervisor was, and to this day remains, an excellent supervisor, mentor, and academic scholar. However, as the research study gained momentum and took shape, it became increasingly clear that the guidance and knowledge of a WE expert was needed, which was not her field of expertise. Even with this knowledge, I was anxious that I was going to offend and alienate a prestigious scholar and respected senior colleague.

Despite this anxiety, I had to voice my concerns regarding the research study. My main supervisor, my then co-supervisor and I, accordingly had a discussion and together made the decision that I should get a supervisor with proficiency in WE. My former co-supervisor was truly kind and thoughtful and said that she was willing to step aside, on the condition that we find the best expert to support me, since she too believed in the importance of this research

study. Even in the face of a difficult situation, she was collegial and had my best interests at heart. I will forever be indebted to her for her contribution as supervisor, and her collegiality to place my interests as student above her own interests as supervisor. In hindsight, I can see that this event was a turning point in my journey as a PhD candidate. I took the needed responsibility, I faced several uncertainties, but I had the courage to do what was needed in the interest of my research project.

In the doctoral journey, several components must be considered to eventually reach the finish line, apart from conducting the research study. Closely related to the reflection in the preceding paragraph, I believe that one of the key factors for my successful completion of this research study, is my remarkable supervisors. The importance of this working relationship cannot be overemphasised. Within this professional relationship, I continuously received guidance, support, and their reassurance that I was able to complete this research study successfully. The journey of a PhD candidate is a lonely one and at times, self-doubt creeps up. However, my supervisors time and time again reassured me of the value of this research undertaking and my potential as PhD candidate. Throughout this journey, I knew that my supervisors were invested in my development as a scholar.

Nonetheless, I can also acknowledge that a supervisor-student relationship is complicated. Although it is a professional relationship, it is not a relationship deprived of emotions. On a regular basis, emotions altered, at least on my side. Feelings of triumph and progress after submitting a draft chapter (personally thought to be impressive) were quickly shattered when I received feedback from my supervisors. Not to be mistaken – the feedback was always constructive. For every draft, they asked valid questions, requested clarification on vague or incomplete sections, and alerted me to possible pitfalls. It was during those times that the admiration was temporarily replaced with frustration and exasperation. After silently disputing the feedback for a few days, I always came to the realisation that their concerns were valid and that my unspoken counter-arguments were unconvincing. When you have the privilege to work under the guidance of noteworthy supervisors, you need to realise that you will be challenged. These supervisors push you to deliver superior work, which does not occur spontaneously and requires determination and the willingness to work hard. Resilience and perseverance after my work was reviewed, and thereafter undertaking the challenge to improve this work, was a steep learning curve, yet a very valuable one in my development as a scholar.

A second facet indirectly related to the study, was the challenge to “find my own voice”. I think this is a concept that is all too familiar for most doctoral students. Avoiding the problem and

being “silent” did not help either. This only resulted in feedback from my supervisors, stating: “I do not hear your voice in this argument”. When I ventured to “utter my voice”, these efforts were met with comments like “please substantiate this statement with a reference”. Indeed, a challenging and confusing process. In the end, I cannot pinpoint the moment that I “found my voice”. In a way, I think my sense of responsibility accelerated this process, since I experienced an urgency to do justice in the task at hand. Research participants placed their trust in me and were willing to share their lived experiences. It was my responsibility to honour their views and “speak” on their behalf. In the end, I learned how to speak with authority, knowing my field of science and becoming an expert in this study area.

My final reflection on facets not directly related to the research study itself, but which influenced my experience, was my struggle to adhere to time schedules. I simply could not submit a draft chapter to my supervisors when I was not completely satisfied with it. For a large part of my study, I was very critical of myself and disappointed in my inability to adhere to set timelines. On every occasion I missed a deadline, I was felt miserable, dejected and embarrassed. I was letting down my supervisors, and I was not honouring my commitments. This was an immense struggle for me, probably the toughest part of my doctorate journey. These feelings were not brought about by my supervisors. They were kind and encouraging, and although they must have been frustrated, they never criticised or reprimanded me. Maybe they already knew that I am accountable and that I was not going to let them or my participants down. Yet I faced inner turmoil. I am a person of integrity – I know this. When I did not meet a deadline, I believed that I was acting in a dishonourable manner, and for me, that was unacceptable. I constantly found myself caught between a rock and a hard place. I could not submit something that was not “perfect”. My line of reasoning was that I did not want to waste my supervisors’ time with substandard work. I later realised that my need to deliver flawless work was actually counterproductive to the journey. To address this, I had to accept that I, like any other individual, make mistakes, and such mistakes were wonderful learning opportunities. I also learned that my fear of failure could be countered by setting realistic, attainable goals and remaining realistic about possible feedback from my supervisors. I learned that feedback didn’t mean that I failed. It was an opportunity to receive insight from great mentors. The increasing awareness that no one produces great work without overcoming difficulties first, helped me understand that it is not a case of “success or failure” but simply a progression to reaching a set goal. Finally, I also learned that I have to acknowledge and accept my own imperfections. So here, at the end of my journey, I can admit that failing to adhere to time schedules was not ideal, and if I could turn back time, I would have approached the issue of time schedules and my need to deliver “perfect work” very differently. I can also acknowledge that despite these

shortfalls, I am an honourable person, my intentions were genuine, and I never intentionally acted disrespectfully towards my supervisors.

Turning my reflections to the research itself, I think my first disillusionment came when I had to present my research proposal to a panel of senior academic researchers. As mentioned earlier, I honestly believed that I would glide through the process seamlessly. However, on the day of the presentation, the panel of academic researchers asked difficult questions, sought clarification, inquired about the chosen methodology and wanted to know why I did not refer to scientific works, which they thought were essential for my proposed research project. I did not know about these scientific works, let alone citing them, and I struggled to answer their questions adequately. During that meeting, I began to understand that a doctoral study was not the same as a masters' degree. It was vastly different. I was in the presence of remarkable intellectuals, genuine academic researchers and frontiers in their fields of expertise. If I wanted to be part of this group, I needed to put in every effort. I started to understand that this experience was only the tip of the iceberg, and I was embarking on a journey that would continuously lead me to uncharted waters. Since then, I have learned a great deal. The research provided me with the privilege and opportunity to study HRM, WE, HE and research ethics. All four of these subject areas are of great interest to me, and for that reason, this journey was an enriching and fulfilling experience.

My journey towards a doctoral degree came to an end with the presentation of this thesis. In the first chapter, I guided the reader through the orientation and rationale as to why it was important to conduct this research. Definitions and key concepts that were used in the study were specified. The study was conducted in three phases, which aided to logically structure the study. I stated the purpose of the study and provided the research objectives. I also explained my philosophical perspective as researcher. My philosophical perspective as interpretivist researcher provided insight into my ontological and epistemological beliefs regarding phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography. These perspectives endorsed the methodology I adopted for this study.

In Chapter 2, I explained the research approach, design and methods I employed for this study. In line with the focus of this chapter, I paid attention to the selection of participants, the data collection methods and the analysis of the data. The data analysis and interpretation were performed in two phases (presented in Chapters 6 and 7). How these phases were approached was thus also clarified. The data were obtained through semi-structured individual interviews, naïve sketches, and field notes. IPA was the selected method to analyse the data. Furthermore, I thoroughly explained the measures used to ensure the trustworthiness and

authenticity of the findings. The chapter was concluded with a detailed discussion of the ethical considerations followed for this research.

Having presented my worldview and the research approach, design, and methods I adopted for the study, I turned to providing a comprehensive narrative literature analysis of scientific research already performed in the study areas of interest. The literature chapters represented the first phase of the study. In the third chapter, I offered extensive insight into HRM practitioners' critical role in organisations, and offered a comprehensive explanation of the development of the concept 'engagement' in the workplace. Attention was paid to the different theoretical positions held by scholars regarding the concept 'engagement'. The presentation of these theoretical positions informed the theory I selected for the interpretation of the research findings. For this study, I chose the JD-R theory, and I reiterated the specific definition of engagement chosen for this study.

In Chapter 4, I offered a comprehensive narrative analysis of scholarly literature of the contemporary HE environment in SA. This chapter included the discussion of the ODL institution where this study was conducted. Furthermore, I provided insight into the role of academic employees (including their role as academic researchers) and the challenges they face in the current HE environment. The implications of these challenges in the HE milieu and the role of HRM practitioners, specifically within HEIs, were also analysed.

Chapter 4 was followed by the final literature chapter of this thesis (Chapter 5), which focused on research ethics involving human participants. The chapter commenced with a clarification of the purpose of research ethics governance in social sciences. The current research ethics processes and procedures for research involving human participants and the need thereof was contextualised in terms of a historic overview of ethical transgressions involving human participants across several disciplines. The positive and negative perceptions of research ethics regulation held by social science academic researchers towards the current governing structures and procedures were also reflected. The chapter concluded with a discussion of HRM practitioners' role in HEIs in the promotion of academic researchers' engagement. With the conclusion of this chapter, I also concluded the first phase of the study.

In Chapter 6, the second phase of the study, I presented the research findings obtained via the empirical fieldwork conducted. I found the fieldwork of this study extremely satisfactory and rewarding. During the early stages of my doctorate journey, I sometimes wondered whether my area of interest was relevant or necessary. However, the moment I commenced with the fieldwork, I realised that this research was indeed vitally important. With each semi-

structured individual interview, I obtained information from participants who were willing to share their lived experiences with me. With these insights, I increasingly realised the privilege of conducting these interviews and collecting this data.

The purpose of phase two was to obtain an in-depth understanding of how HRM practitioners can support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. Different themes and sub-themes were identified and discussed, supported with verbatim quotes, extracts from naïve sketches, and verifications from my field notes. Moreover, each theme was interpreted with the support of existing literature. In this process, I obtained valuable knowledge and experience in terms of data analysis and reporting of the research findings.

In Chapter 7, the third and final phase of the analysis and interpretation of the data was presented. In this phase, I developed and constructed a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics at an ODL institution. Amidst the research, I acquired a significant amount of knowledge and experience in terms of accessing scientific literature and the analytical assessment thereof; data collection; data analyses and interpretation; and the reporting of the research findings. These activities were, however, not entirely novel to me as I did have some exposure in previous research projects. However, to develop a conceptual framework was a new endeavour for me. Upon the completion of Chapter 7, I thus felt extremely proud. The accomplishment of creating something that has not existed before was very fulfilling and rewarding.

I trust that the research findings, the conceptual framework, the conclusions of this study and the recommendations for future research, education and practice would be regarded as positive contributions to the field HRM in HEIs, within the SA context. I am optimistic that the outcomes of this research study will provide insight into how job and personal resources can be advanced for academic researchers to promote their engagement in research ethics. I appeal and encourage the HRM practitioners and managers within this ODL institution to utilise this newfound knowledge to improve the lived experiences of academic researchers, and employees in general, within the ODL institution. My hope is that the research findings can aid in academic researchers' engagement in research ethics, and that this will be to the benefit of all future research participants.

As I end, I wish to offer the following two quotes:

“If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets as a Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry...

No work is insignificant. All labour that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence.”

~ Martin Luther King, Jr. ~

“Today I shall behave, as if this is the day I will be remembered.”

~ Dr Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel) ~

With these quotes in mind, my sincerest hope is that when people are called to be academic researchers, they will use their talents, skills, and knowledge to uplift humankind. That their work will be done with painstaking excellence. I hope that these scholars have the unwavering courage to do right and to flee from evil. I hope that their academic research undertakings are ethical and praiseworthy. My deepest longing for academic researchers is that they are engaged in their research endeavours and that ethical conduct will always prevail. That the memories they create as human beings and the research they perform throughout their careers are virtuous, honourable and worth remembering.

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ANNEXURE A: RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

[REDACTED] HRM ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date 25 August 2017

Dear Ms Marié Uys

NHREC Registration # : (if applicable)

ERC Reference # :
2017_HRM_014

Name : Marié Uys

Student: [REDACTED]

Staff: [REDACTED]

Decision: Ethics Approval from August 2017 to December 2019

Researcher(s): Name Ms Marié Uys

E-mail address, telephone [REDACTED]

Supervisor (s): Name Dr Retha G. Visagie

E-mail address, telephone [REDACTED]

Co Supervisor: Name Prof Adéle Bezuidenhout

E-mail address, telephone [REDACTED]

Working title of research:

A Human Resource Management practitioner framework to support academics' engagement in research ethics

Qualification: PHD

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the [REDACTED] Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for Ms Marié Uys for 5 years.

The low risk application was reviewed by the [REDACTED] Ethics Review Committee on 17 August 2017 in compliance with the [REDACTED] Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

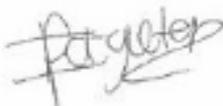
1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the [REDACTED] Policy on Research Ethics.

2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the HRM Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date December 2019. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number 2017_HRM_014 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Signature

Chair of DREC :

E-mail:

Tel:



Signature

Executive Dean :

E-mail:

Tel:

ANNEXURE B: PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT RESEARCH INVOLVING EMPLOYEES WORKING FOR THE ODL INSTITUTION WHERE THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED

**RESEARCH PERMISSION SUB-COMMITTEE (RPSC) OF THE SENATE
RESEARCH, INNOVATION, POSTGRADUATE DEGREES AND
COMMERCIALISATION COMMITTEE (SRIPCC)**

19 September 2017

**Decision: Research Permission
Approval from 22 September 2017
until 21 September 2018.**

Ref #: 2017_RPSC_058
Ms. Marié Uys
Student #: [REDACTED]
Staff #: [REDACTED]

**Principal Investigator:
Ms. Marié Uys
Department of Human Resource Management**

[REDACTED]

Supervisors: Dr. Retha Visagie & Prof Adelé Bezuidenhout

[REDACTED]

A study titled: "A Human Resource Management practitioner framework to support academics' engagement in research ethics"

Your application regarding permission to conduct research involving [REDACTED] employees, students and data in respect of the above study has been received and was considered by the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC) of [REDACTED] Senate, Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC) on 15 September 2017.

It is my pleasure to inform you that permission has been granted for the study. You may:

1. Specify the selection criteria of the information-rich participants in order to obtain a list of prospective participants.
2. Contact the prospective participants in the list provided in point 1 above and request to conduct semi-structured interviews with them, as well as request them to complete a naïve sketch regarding the research phenomenon.

3. Contact experts and request them to evaluate the developed framework as well as request them to complete an open-ended questionnaire.
4. Gain access to the following requested [redacted] documents:
 - [redacted] Annual reports (2012-2016)
 - [redacted] Policy on Open Distance Learning (2008)
 - Speeches delivered by Professor [redacted] (Principal and Vice-Chancellor of [redacted])
 - [redacted] Strategic Plan (2016-2030)
 - [redacted] Policy on Research Ethics (2016)
 - [redacted] Policy for Master's and Doctoral Degrees (2017)
 - [redacted] Policy on Academic Integrity (2017)
 - [redacted] Research and Innovation Policy (2016)
 - [redacted] Policy on Scholarly Publishing (2016)
 - Standard Operating Procedure: Permission for conducting research involving [redacted] employees, students or data (2016).

You are requested to submit a report of the study to the Research Permission Subcommittee ([redacted]) within 3 months of completion of the study.

The personal information made available to the researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) will only be used for the advancement of this research project as indicated and for the purpose as described in this permission letter. The researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) must take all appropriate precautionary measures to protect the personal information given to him/her/them in good faith and it must not be passed on to third parties. The dissemination of research instruments through the use of electronic mail should strictly be through blind copying, so as to protect the participants' right of privacy. The researcher hereby indemnifies [redacted] from any claim or action arising from or due to the researcher's breach of his/her information protection obligations.

Note:

The reference number 2017_RPSC_058 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants and the Research Permission Subcommittee.

We would like to wish you well in your research undertaking.

Kind regards,



Prof [redacted] – RPSC member

Email: [redacted] Tel: [redacted]

Prof [redacted] – Acting Executive Director: Research

Email: [redacted] Tel: [redacted]

ANNEXURE C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER (PHASE 1)

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Ms Marié Uys and I am doing research under supervision of Dr R.G. Visagie the Manager: Research Integrity, Directorate: Research Support, [REDACTED] and Prof. A Bezuidenhout in the Department of Human Resource Management towards a PhD degree in Human Resource Management at [REDACTED]. I have received funding from the Directorate Student Funding ([REDACTED]) for registration and research related expenditures. We are cordially inviting you to participate in a study entitled:

A Human Resource Management practitioner framework to support academics' engagement in research ethics

WHAT IS THE AIM/PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The overall aim of this study is to develop a conceptual framework as a frame of reference for Human resource management practitioners to support academics' engagement in research ethics at an ODeL institution.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited to participate in this qualitative research study because of your employment position and your knowledge of research ethics related practices within [REDACTED]. To participate in this study you either need to be employed as 1) a human resource management practitioner within [REDACTED] or alternatively 2) as an academic within [REDACTED]. In addition, you need to meet the following criteria:

1. A Human resource management practitioners [REDACTED] needs to:
 - a) Be employed for three years or more at [REDACTED]
 - b) Experience of the research ethics clearance process within [REDACTED]. Experience is understood as practical contact with and observation of the research ethics clearance application process. To this end, you should be busy with or you should have completed a postgraduate qualification (Masters or PhD) at [REDACTED]. In addition, your qualification requires/required research ethics approval and this pre-requisite is met.
2. Academic within [REDACTED] needs to:
 - a) Be qualified as a human resource management (HRM) practitioner or have an equivalent HRM qualification.
 - b) Have experience of the research ethics clearance process within [REDACTED]. Experience is understood as practical contact with and observation of the research ethics clearance application process. Accordingly you should:
 - ✓ be busy with or completed a postgraduate qualification (Masters or PhD) and this qualification requires/required research ethics approval and this pre-requisite was met.

AND/OR

- ✓ be a supervisor of students who are busy with a postgraduate qualification (Masters or PhD) and this qualification requires research ethics approval and this pre-requisite was met.

AND/OR

- ✓ be conducting research for non-degree purposes and this research study requires research ethics approval and this pre-requisite was met.

In order to obtain permission to access your contact details for the purpose of this research, I obtained [redacted] permission [redacted]. I also obtained permission to request you to refer me to additional participants, should you know of suitable candidates. In line with the chosen methodology for the study and in order to reach the research objectives it is envisioned that approximately 6 - 8 Human resource management practitioners within [redacted] and approximately 6 - 8 academics within [redacted] will participate in this research.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY / WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH INVOLVE?

The study involves three phases and in two of these phases data will be collected. You are invited to participate in Phase 1.

Phase 1:

This phase will entail a semi-structured individual interview, which will be audio voice recorded and the completion of a naïve sketch. The questions, which will be asked during the interview, will focus on your experience of research ethics as a researcher (either as an academic or as HRM practitioner who are/ were a postgraduate student at [redacted]). The interview will also focus on the role what you think HRM practitioners can play in the engagement of research ethics by academics. During the interview, I will be taking notes to ensure that I capture all the information you share with me. Please note that my supervisor(s) might be present in the interview to ensure that I follow sound research procedures.

The interview could be approximately 1 hour 30 minutes. The naïve sketch will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The naïve sketch can be completed prior to the individual interview or at the time of the interview.

Phase 2:

The second phase will be dedicated to the development of a conceptual framework for HRM practitioners to support the engagement of academics in research ethics. For this phase, no participants will be involved.

Phase 3:

In phase 3, experts will be asked to evaluate the worth of the proposed conceptual framework by completing an open-ended evaluation questionnaire.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY?

Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information letter to keep and be asked to sign a written informed consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

It is expected that the findings of this research will result in a conceptual framework that can serve as a frame of reference for HRM practitioners to support the engagement of academics in research ethics at [REDACTED]. You will be provided with a summary report of the findings. This will include the conceptual framework as a frame of reference for HRM practitioners to support academics' engagement in research ethics at an ODeL institution as well as recommendations for implementation.

WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The only inconvenience that can be foreseen is the time you will spend to participate in the interview and the time needed to write a naive sketch.

WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

The interview will be transcribed by an independent transcriber, who will sign a confidentiality agreement prior to receiving the audio-voice recording. The transcriptions transpiring from the audio voice recorded interview, the naive sketch and the field may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including my supervisors and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. You will be given a pseudonym (false name) and you will be referred to in this way in the data.

I want to assure you that the confidentiality of information will be protected in all research output(s) emanating from the study. No personal or identifiable information will be disclosed in such a way that you as participant can be identified.

HOW WILL INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

The electronic copies of the data will be retained for a minimum period of five years after the completion of the study in line with the [REDACTED] Policy on Research Ethics by both the supervisors and myself. These transcribed word documents, emanating from the interviews, the naive sketches and my field notes will in a locked cupboard in my office for future research or academic purposes. The electronic data will be stored on in encrypted files on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After this time period has lapsed all information will be permanently deleted (electronic files and records) and paper based information will be shredded.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

No compensation or rewards will be offered to you, for participating in the research. Nor will you incur costs for participating in the research.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL AND INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION?

This study has received written research ethics approval from the Department of Human Resource Management Research Ethics Review Committee, within the [REDACTED]. The reference number of the research ethics approval is: 2017_HRM_014.

The study also received institutional permission from [REDACTED] to conduct the research. The reference number of the institutional permission is: 2017_RPSC_058. A copy

of the research ethics approval certificate and/or the institutional permission can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS?

You will be provided with a summary report of the findings of the study. The summary report will include the conceptual framework as a frame of reference for HRM practitioners to support academics' engagement in research ethics at [redacted] as well as recommendations for implementation.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Ms Marié Uys on [redacted]. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research is conducted, you may contact either Dr R.G. Visagie [redacted] or Prof. A. Bezuidenhout [redacted]. For ethical concerns, the chairperson of the Department of Human Resource Management Research Ethics Review committee, Prof [redacted] can be contacted [redacted].

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Kind regards,



Ms Marié Uys



Dr R.G. Visagie



Prof A. Bezuidenhout

ANNEXURE D: VOLUNTARY INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

CONSENT GRANTED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FOLLOWING STUDY:

A Human Resource Management practitioner framework to support academics' engagement in research ethics

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that Ms Marié Uys asked my consent to take part in this research and that she has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read and understand the study as explained in the participant information letter. I had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a thesis and possibly for journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I understand that the study will entail three phases and that I am invited to participate in phase 1 as explained by the researcher, Ms Marié Uys.

By signing this informed consent document I declare that I am willing to participate in a semi-structured individual interview, to the recording thereof and to completion of a naïve sketch.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name of Researcher: Ms Marié Uys

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

ANNEXURE E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. How do you make sense of the phrase, 'engagement of academics in research ethics'?
2. How would you describe your engagement as an academic in research ethics in this ODeL institution? [This question will be asked to academics]

OR

2. In pursuit of your postgraduate academic qualification, how would you describe your engagement in research ethics in this ODeL institution? [This question will be asked to HRM practitioners]
3. Reflecting on your experience of research ethics in this ODeL institution, what do you consider critical aspects to be engaged in research ethics for an academic working in an ODeL context?
4. Reflecting on your experience, what aspects supported your engagement in research ethics in this ODeL institution?
5. What aspects hindered your engagement in research ethics?
6. How can human resource management practitioners play a role in supporting academics' engagement in research ethics, in particular in an ODeL institution?

ANNEXURE F: EXAMPLES OF COMPLETED NAÏVE SKETCHES

The naïve sketch of Ben:

NAÏVE SKETCH

1. In your own words, please reflect on how you make sense of the phrase 'engagement of academics in research ethics'.

Can be on 3 levels:

- 1 – When academics is busy with research themselves and they must ensure they do it ethical correct.
- 2 – It may be when academics are considering other researchers ethic applications.
- 3 – It may also be when an academic is supervising a student – then he/she is engaged in ethics from a supervisory level.

2. In your own words, please describe your engagement in research ethics in this ODeL institution.

I am currently a D-student and will work with human participants from [REDACTED] so I had to apply for ethical clearance and permission to get access to info of the participants.

3. Reflecting on your experience of research ethics in this ODeL institution, please write down what you consider to be critical aspects for engagement in research ethics for an academic working in an ODeL context?

The first thing what I think is critical is that the bureaucracy between the different application processes, eg. Ethics, MDSP, permission to access [REDACTED] info and R&D leave be streamlined. For the various processes, one is cutting and pasting the Research proposal's content into different formats. The easiest will be to attach the proposal to a basic application form as all info are there.

4. If you reflect on your own experience, what aspects support your engagement in research ethics in this ODeL institution?

Not much

5. If you reflect on your own experience, what aspects hinders your engagement in research ethics?

The bureaucracy

6. Please write down how you think human resource management practitioners can play a role in supporting academics' engagement in research ethics, in particular in an ODeL institution.

I think HRP's can add the practical day-to-day lived experiences. Often academics engage in a theoretical capacity whereby in real life the experience or practice is substantially different.

The naïve sketch of Fred:

NAÏVE SKETCH

1. In your own words, please reflect on how you make sense of the phrase 'engagement of academics in research ethics'.

I believe that you can't impose something on any individual, especially when it is considered to be something new that has not been part of general practice in the past. You need to establish some kind of buy-in through consultation which I consider to be engagement. This is also the case with research ethics that were part of the general conduct of many academics, especially those who are regulated and governed by their respective professional bodies, in my case, the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

2. In your own words, please describe your engagement in research ethics in this ODeL institution.

When joining the [redacted] I was a member of the [redacted] research ethics committee for some time, witnessing the development of the process, including the establishment of a research ethics office at [redacted] Campus. My engagement was specifically in the development of a group / team based ethical clearance process, which is quite unique in [redacted] and very difficult to get buy-in from the bureaucrats as well as my fellow colleagues.

3. Reflecting on your experience of research ethics in this ODeL institution, please write down what you consider to be critical aspects for engagement in research ethics for an academic working in an ODeL context?

The engagement should be done in a **simple** manner, based on **two-way** communication and **full consideration** of the viewpoints of the academics. The simplicity should be based on **minimum regulation** and **maximum trust**, provided that research ethics should be embraced by all researchers in the institution. The engagement is hampered by red tape, unnecessary suspicion and little trust in established researchers.

4. If you reflect on your own experience, what aspects support your engagement in research ethics in this ODeL institution?

At this stage very little support, rather extreme frustration with the over regulation of aspects that are considered to be standard practice according to my professional code of conduct and research protocols. The support that I got from the [redacted] research ethics committee, specifically Prof [redacted] in the development of the group /team based research ethical clearance application over the last 4 years is the only positive experience.

5. If you reflect on your own experience, what aspects hinders your engagement in research ethics?

Over regulation, little trust in established researchers, excessive red tape, lengthy application formats, ever changing templates, emphasis on the bio-medical models related to research ethics and the centralization of processes, lengthening the approval process.

6. Please write down how you think human resource management practitioners can play a role in supporting academics' engagement in research ethics, in particular in an ODeL institution.

To be honest, I don't know how HR practitioners can support the engagement in research ethics, as HR (in this institution) is a typical support function, and is not really involved in the academic functions. Their contribution can be on secondary level, for instance with performance management (infusing research ethics in the IPMS) and from an OD perspective. The OD function could assist academics in streamlining the research ethics processes, as independent investigators, without any conflict of interest. They can for instance investigate the necessity of the red tape, the over centralization of the approval process (especially with certain kind of applications) and to establish a lean process (including the structure) of the research ethics function in the institution. Training with regards to research ethics is not really an HR function, as there are structures in [redacted] that is doing it – they can perhaps play a facilitation role.

One area where HR can be involved, is with the induction of academics – to include something about research ethics, even if it is only on 101 basis.

The naïve sketch of Jenny:

NAÏVE SKETCH

1. In your own words, please reflect on how you make sense of the phrase 'engagement of academics in research ethics'.

Ethical research forms the foundation of the work of an academic. It is crucial that an academic receives adequate support in internalizing the importance of ethical conduct in general and the link from there to ethical conduct in research. It is crucial also for the academic to understanding the impact on the academic profession of unethical research.

2. In your own words, please describe your engagement in research ethics in this ODeL institution.

Ethical research is important in any type of institution and regardless of the portfolio one occupies. I would assume there are more opportunities in an ODeL institution for unethical research given the ICT capability and advances in technology.

3. Reflecting on your experience of research ethics in this ODeL institution, please write down what you consider to be critical aspects for engagement in research ethics for an academic working in an ODeL context?

- Training in the institutional Code of Conduct
- An institutional culture that promotes ethical behavior.
- Ethical conduct displayed by members of Extended Management to set the example for other employees in an institution.
- Academic leadership must display ethical conduct in their management style and performance of their academic-related duties.

4. If you reflect on your own experience, what aspects support your engagement in research ethics in this ODeL institution?

- I received ethical research training during my PhD and after. I support that a researcher must be exposed to sufficient training in ethical research in advance of the submission of a research proposal.

5. If you reflect on your own experience, what aspects hinders your engagement in research ethics?

- None.
- I am fully in support of ethical research in view of my own belief system to conduct your activities with integrity.

6. Please write down how you think human resource management practitioners can play a role in supporting academics' engagement in research ethics, in particular in an ODeL institution.

- The HRD Directorate facilitating the hosting of workshops across the [REDACTED] in the institution.
- The HRD Talent Management Specialist incorporating this aspect in the TMS.
- The Ethics Officer (outside HR) to link to an institutional strategy.
- The Remuneration and Administration Directorate in terms of the annual and ongoing declaration of interest process and incorporating the ethical research drive in that process.
- The Employee Relations office in terms of discipline management in as far as contraventions to ethical research is concerned.
- An integrated strategy between HR officials, the Ethics Officer, the Research Department officials to create a strategy that elevates ethical research.

The naïve sketch of Laila:

NAÏVE SKETCH

1. In your own words, please reflect on how you make sense of the phrase 'engagement of academics in research ethics'.

Academics need to see the process of ethics as necessary to protect themselves as well as the participants in the research and to produce research that will contribute to society as being reliable and trustworthy.

2. In your own words, please describe your engagement in research ethics in this ODeL institution.

It is a very lengthy process but I considered it as necessary and still do. It is also necessary for the enhancement of the research that my students are involved in.

3. Reflecting on your experience of research ethics in this ODeL institution, please write down what you consider to be critical aspects for engagement in research ethics for an academic working in an ODeL context?

The process is very lengthy, taking up a lot of time and I think that the proposal and the ethical process can be combined. I think the ethical process can be streamlined with less unnecessary information- often a repetition of the proposal.

4. If you reflect on your own experience, what aspects support your engagement in research ethics in this ODeL institution?

There exist many unethical practices in research and therefore I regard the process as necessary. Therefore I support it, I am engaged but it can be less complicated to ensure even more engagement.

5. If you reflect on your own experience, what aspects hinders your engagement in research ethics?

I had a very positive experience with regards to my own research ethics application. From my students perspective, they see it as very time consuming.

6. Please write down how you think human resource management practitioners can play a role in supporting academics' engagement in research ethics, in particular in an ODeL institution.

They can streamline the process by introducing a less complicated, shortened document,
address the aspect of confidentiality to protect individuals taking part in the peer-review process and
provide for example a tutorial to students on how to complete the application and what information is required to ensure that it is done correctly the first time.

ANNEXURE G: EXTRACTS OF TRANSCRIBED SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Extract were taken from data analysis documents in accordance with referencing system used to report on qualitative data (see Table 6.2).

An extract from the transcribed semi-structured interview with Anna:

ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT	EXPLORATORY COMMENTS	EMERGENT THEMES
<p>Interview 1:</p> <p>Stages 2 and 3: Initial noting and development of emergent themes</p> <p>What is this about? (consensus discussion)</p> <p>Trust relationship with students (lack of control). Uncertainty can cause disengagement. Negative relationships between supervisors/ committee members. Detailed reviews are not because of engagement in research ethics applications, but rather because of reactive and retaliation exercise. Lengthy application process causes disengagement. HR should provide different forms of support. Coping. Conflict management. Emotional support. Emotional functioning of committees. The negative culture within this committee is causing disengagement.</p> <p>I I do not have a very loud voice, so as long as you are comfortable that you will hear everything.</p> <p>A If I'm unsure I will ask you to repeat something.</p> <p>I As you've seen in the information letter, the aim of the study is to develop a conceptual framework for human resource management practitioners to support academics' engagement in research ethics. To this end,</p>		

<p>I am curious to understand how you make sense of the phrase or concept: engagement of academics in research ethics.</p> <p>A Well, from my perspective, if I just look at the term engagement, work engagement or engagement, I look at it from a scientific point of view. It means that you are very dedicated towards something. It also means that you have a lot of energy or vigour in your engagement. And, lastly, it means that you are totally absorbed in the whole idea. So, for me, it's really important that we understand the term engagement from a scientific point of view and not from a layperson's point of view because it's part of human resource management, it's part of our subject. So I would then have to take these three subdimensions or ideas that, together, form the concept of work engagement and I'll</p>	<p>Academic/ scientific orientation Dedicated, energy or vigour and absorption.</p> <p>Engagement should be considered from a scientific perspective. Not a layperson's perspective</p> <p>Engagement is part of HRM subject matter.</p>	<p>Does this mean that she does not consider the opinion of a layperson valuable? Or credit worthy?</p> <p>The assumption that HRM practitioner/ academic should have clear understanding of the concept?</p>
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have to apply it to research. So, for me, if you are engaged in research, it means you spend a lot of your time and your energy on research-related activities and it means that you really enjoy being involved in research because you dedicate your efforts, your time, your energy in your research activities. And, if I think about the last one, being absorbed, it means that you experience flow. While you are busy with your research-related activities or research, you are not aware of time passing. It's actually a sense of being totally engrossed, absorbed, enjoying the research. So, when I am engaged in my research, I am in a state of mind where my whole being is focussed on this activity of finding an answer to a question. I will be unaware. And, from my own point of view, once I start doing research, I don't notice the time pass, I don't

Engagement in research means you spend time and energy on it.

You enjoy it because you devote your time, effort and energy on it.

Being absorbed means you experience flow. Engrossed in activity.

Engagement in research is being focussed.

know if it's ten o'clock or eleven or one or two or three in the morning. I'm totally busy. My whole being gets absorbed in doing the research, in finding the answer. I forget that I'm reading or how many books I've read or how many articles I've read. So that's my basic understanding. If I'm engaged in research, this is what I'm feeling and what I'm experiencing.

I And, if you had to relate your engagement, related to research, how would you then make the link to research ethics?

A I think, for me, research ethics involves everything. Every aspect of my research must be ethical. It's a personal approach, it's the way I approach the whole design of my research, conducting research, engaging with my participants. And, also, then, on the administrative side, if I think of research

Value based? Personal value?

Research ethics is broad. It is over-arching? Involves everything. Must be – belief/ conviction/ personal principle.

Overarching. Ethics influence the entire study (design)
The way research is conducted and the way researcher interact with participants

ethics from the institutional point of view, from UNISA's side, it means completing those forms. So research ethics or being ethical in research, when I work at [redacted] it means I've gotta complete all those forms and I must get my students to follow the whole process of getting ethical clearance in research. So, from the moment we design the study, we must ask ourselves what are the implications of doing ethical research? This research that we are planning, are we being fair to the participants? So it's a very big process for me, Marie. It starts with the planning, the proposal, then completing all those forms, going through all the steps of getting the ethical clearance, getting the clearance, and then also, when I do the actual research, sticking to what I promised, actually acting towards my participants in an

Ethics has an administrative side. The institutions has an influence? A point of view. The institution has an interest in research ethics.

She and students needs to complete "all those forms". Getting ethics clearance is a process. This process (getting research ethic clearance) is a [redacted] requirement.

From the moment the study is designed ethical research is considered.

Big process. Ethical research starts with the planning and is a continues consideration. Continues until reporting findings. (see p 8)

Ethics includes behaviour. (acting in an ethical way towards participants)

Administrative duty. Compliance? For the sake of adherence to institutional requirements?

Ethical research has an impact on the design of a research study.

ethical way. It's very easy for some people to get the ethical clearance and then say I've got it, I can file it, now I can do whatever I want to, now I can just get the data, but that's not acceptable for me. So I really try to, from the beginning up to the end where we report on the results, do it ethically and that, unfortunately, includes the admin of completing the forms and stuff, that really irritates me but I do it. Although, I think I'm engaged in ethical research but I'm not sure whether I'm one hundred percent engaged in getting the forms completed. So, for me, that's very difficult to reconcile sometimes. I've got one student, I'm speaking as a supervisor, I've got one student who completed those forms and she submitted it to me twenty-four times, twenty-four drafts, and neither me nor her were very engaged

People obtain ethics clearance (compliance to the institutional requirement) however that is not an indication that they will act ethically.

...not acceptable to me.

From beginning until end. See p 7

Completing of forms is irritating

Engaged in ethical research.
Not engaged in the administrative process.

very difficult to reconcile (bring together or merge)

the paper exercise or administrative task is extensive. Time consuming. Causes disengagement. The effort to complete the forms to satisfactory level has a negative influence on engagement

Personal values. Do not want to mislead.

Compliance. Not engaged in the administrative task. Regarded as burden.

Administrative tasks are burden. Hampering to engagement. Process not conducive to engagement

Conflicting emotions. Want to be engaged on values level. Not always engaged in the process (administrative tasks involved)

The effort to complete the forms to satisfactory level has a negative influence on engagement

<p>by the twenty-fourth time that we went through the same forms. So that's my understanding.</p> <p>I So, if I understand you correctly, the administrative burden is causing you to feel disengaged?</p> <p>A Yes, I do think so because there's nothing in my performance appraisal that makes provision for this, although it takes a lot of hours. I've got twenty students. To go with each of them through the ethical clearance, it's a lot of time that's actually just taken for granted. Nowhere, nowhere does anyone ask me how many students did you help to get ethical clearance? They don't even ask me did you get ethical clearance? It's an activity that you do that it's not recognised anywhere and I think, as academics, we sometimes feel that we don't have enough</p>	<p>Part of supervisory role. Time consuming. Not recognised in performance appraisal.</p> <p>This part of supervision is taken for granted. (assisting students to obtain ethical clearance)</p> <p>No recognition.</p>	<p>She would be more engaged in the admin process if she received recognition for the work/ effort.</p>
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hours in the day to cover all the responsibilities. And this is an activity that takes a lot of hours but it's not recognised formally by [REDACTED].

I So you mentioned that there are some academics or employees or people who complete the forms and get the ethical clearance and then they can go ahead and do, if I understand you correctly, almost unethical research or they do not oblige to the rules of what they described in the application form and that certificate is received but they do not conduct everything in the manner that they reported they will do.

A Yes, I do think so.

I So can you share with me how an academic would look like who are [sic] engaged in research ethics?

Academics experience time constraints to fulfil all their duties

Institution does not recognise this activity formally. Negative influence on engagement. ** interesting to observe this comment. Since it is an expected form researchers to obtain clearance, but recognition is absent.

Clarify if researchers obtain ethical clearance, but then conduct unethical research.

Overwhelmed with work responsibilities. Concerned that a lot of time is spent on this part of supervision without recognition. Concerned that if there is no recognition/ measurement of the effort/ work attended to that it might reflect negatively? As if she is not doing enough??

<p>A They would really take it seriously and their promises that they made on those forms and do their best to make sure that, in their own research and their students' research, those promises are carried through, that you don't use data that people actually did not consent for you to use, that you don't make people feel guilty if they don't participate in your interviews. I know, because I'm an academic and I engage with other academics, that it's often an exercise of getting the form and then just sending the student out to go and do the research. For myself, it's very difficult sometimes to know what the student actually did. I have to trust the student. I sent the student out, I try to follow up, I try to make sure that they are doing exactly what they promised in their ethical application, but I'm not there. I don't know if they're lying to me. I</p>	<p>An engaged researcher will display the following characteristics: Serious about their commitments to ethical research Promises/commitments should be honoured</p> <p>Use only data to which people consented</p> <p>Voluntary participation without undue influence</p> <p>Only a paper exercise Supervisors send out students to do fieldwork, without proper supervision or attention.</p> <p>She experience discomfort to trust the student to adhere/honour the commitments made when ethics clearance was obtained.</p> <p>As committed (engaged?) supervisor she tries to be involved as possible. Make sure students honour their commitment when conducting fieldwork.</p> <p>Geographically separated from students.</p>	<p>Interesting – since the supervisor is also linking their name to the ethics application. There should be a commitment / honouring</p>
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<p>don't know if someone else is actually doing it, so how can I promise that a student in Ethiopia or in Kenya or...my students are all over Africa, I can't promise that they are actually doing what they said they would do, and that causes feelings of guilt in me sometimes because sometimes I have my doubts but I can't go to Ethiopia or I can't go to Kenya, [redacted] won't send me there, to go and support the student while he or she is actually doing their interviews. So I just trust that they are doing what they said they will do but I don't know for certain, and it makes it a bit difficult for me sometimes. My own research, I've got control over. I know what I promised, I know what I'm doing, I'm doing it to the best of my ability to make sure that I'm ethical. Sometimes, I doubt whether the student is actually doing what he or she says</p>	<p>Unsure if students are conducting their own research.</p> <p>Conflicting emotions about adding/ linking her name to ethics application, because she cannot guarantee that research will be conducted in ethical way.</p> <p>Guilt. For linking her name to a promise which she is unsure if it will be honoured??</p> <p>She experience doubt that research is conducted ethically, but has no control over it.</p> <p>Lack of support from university? Or maybe it is just not practical?</p> <p>Again trust relationship between supervisor and student.</p> <p>Difficult – possible influence on the engagement she experience</p> <p>Engagement easier with own research? She has control/ can honour ethics commitments</p> <p>She wants to be ethical</p>	<p>of scientific conduct between supervisor and student.</p> <p>This supervisor experience distrust and anxiety that students will be unethical in their fieldwork.</p> <p>There is thus a gap in the trust relationship between "co-researchers" / supervisor-student relationship.</p> <p>Is this guilt towards the participant or towards the university who issued an ethics clearance certificate? But she is not always convinced that the research will be done ethically.</p> <p>She would experience less anxiety if she could be present during fieldwork.</p> <p>Not possible.</p> <p>Wonder if their value orientation is correct. Ethics value based?</p>
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<p>they are doing, but I have no control over it, and that makes it difficult for me. So, sometimes, you do disengage to protect your own feelings of stress or worry about what is actually happening in a place that's far away from you or removed from you.</p> <p>I Before we move on to the next question, do you think there's anything that you would like to add about your understanding of engagement, of academics in research ethics?</p> <p>A I would just like to add that, over the last year or two, I've experienced, in my life, that this has really become a point of conflict between academics. If I don't like you and you get my ethical form to review, people are sometimes...they are using this to get to one another and it's causing conflict and it's sometimes, I think, because there are not</p>	<p>Unsure if students are ethical or even wants to conduct ethical research.</p> <p>Difficult – this can hamper her engagement</p> <p>Disengagement to protect herself</p> <p>Research ethics is conflicting point between academics.</p> <p>Personal orientation towards colleagues has influence on objectivity of review.</p> <p>In situations where conflicting colleagues have to review their opposing colleagues' ethics application, the opportunities exist where such scholars have the opportunity to</p>	<p>Disengagement to protect yourself. From what? Too unpleasant/ threatening on personal values, if ethical transgressions occur, rather disengage than "permitting" it.</p> <p>Contentious relationships/colleagues with conflicting views or perceptions in other areas of work, has spill over effect on research ethics – review of applications. Outcome of application is affected by personal conflicts</p>
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<p>clear rules or regulations, and maybe [redacted] is trying to put clear rules and regulations in place and that's why they require so many forms, but it's something that almost happen [sic] every month that, whenever we discuss an ethical application, it turns into a huge fight. So, as an academic, I feel there's a lack of respect between academics. They try to get to one another through students, through ethical applications that are not approved.</p> <p>I Can you clarify what you mean by the conflict or phrase get to one another?</p> <p>A I sometimes feel that it's a tit-for-tat situation. You didn't approve my student's application and I spent six months to help the student to get this application through. So, next month, when I get your student, I am not going to let anything slip, I'm going to be extra strict and</p>	<p>taint the ethical application of other scholars' work.</p> <p>Ethics is unclear</p> <p>Many forms of [redacted] might be effort to regulate research ethics.</p> <p>Committee is in continues conflict. With each ethics application to committee, dissimilar evaluations cause fight.</p> <p>Lack of respect between academics.</p> <p>Academics try to jeopardise/ compromise each other through student application evaluations.</p> <p>Negative competition. Punitive on students' applications of each other.</p>	<p>Respect is value orientation.</p> <p>If student's application is reflection on supervisor ability (as portrayed by conflicting colleague), then this will be very contentious issue.</p>
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make sure that everything is in place, not because I'm so concerned about the ethics but because we've got a history of two or three years now that we've been fighting about these ethical applications and all mine are turned down so why must yours be approved? So I'm now going to disallow yours or not... It's difficult to explain, to give examples, Marie, but it's definitely causing a lot of conflict in our department. So I think engagement in other fields are [sic] sometimes negatively affected through engagement in research because it gives academics something or some way of fighting with one another.

I So, if I understand you correctly, there is a spill-over effect?

A Definitely. The spill-over effect from disagreements on ethical proposals that are

Almost retaliating or getting "even" by being extra strict on conflicting supervisor's applications.

The level of attention or detail spent on reviewing the application is not because of engagement. It is a punitive and retaliatory exercise.

Jealous? Covetousness/jealousy between colleagues. Inter-rivalry? Competition.

Difficult to explain or provide examples.

Conflict in department

Spill-over effect. The hostile or negative environment surrounding research negatively influences engagement in other work areas.

Employees fighting in one work area will also have negative relations in other work areas (responsibilities)

If my student is not succeeding I will make sure yours' is also suffering? Something to this effect??

not accepted. So one academic will feel that his or her methodology, their methodological decisions, are being questioned. And it's not just in my department, I know for a fact. I was at a course last week in Cape Town and, at the course, there were a number of other academics and we were sitting and we were chatting and most of them were from other departments and, pretty much the same theme, people feel that other people don't see the value of my research and that's why they are not allowing my ethical clearance. So one lady specifically said all my students' ethical applications are turned down and it's [sic] turned down by people who are not experts themselves. So it's from both sides. The people who turn down the applications feel that they are being victimised, they feel they've got very good reasons why they are

Supervisors feel offended if the methodology etc. of the ethics application are questioned or if application is not approved.

This negative relationship between colleagues are a common occurrence? Not only in single department.

Researchers feel that reviewers do not see value of study and consequently do not provide ethical clearance

Blind leading the blind??

Conflict and complaints/accusations are form both sides. Reviewers feel their evaluation has valid merits for review outcome. Supervisors feels judged and grieved

not approving the ethical applications, and the people [sic] who's the supervisor of the student whose application is turned down feel that they do not have the right to judge my methodology because my methodology is, according to me, it's perfect. So who's going to act as judge? We work in a very complicated environment. We are peer reviewed, there are different opinions, there's not just black and white in research, and I'm not one who believe [sic] in anything must go, the methodology must be right, but there are different opinions and it's causing a lot of conflict and, as a result of the conflict, disengagement.

I'll move on to the next question, and you've touched on a lot of the aspects that I wanna ask in the next question, which is: describe your engagement in research ethics at this

because they regard the methodology etc. sound and without fault.

Complex work environment.

Different viewpoints or opinions between scholars. No definite clear-cut right or wrong answer.

Conflict is causing disengagement.

ODEL institution. And I think we've covered a lot of the aspects of this question but would you like to add something about your specific engagement? Not necessarily your students, although it is all part of it. If you have something that's specifically your view, your understanding –

A My own research.

I ...your own research.

A From a personal point of view, I haven't really had any problems with ethical applications. I must say, from the first time I applied for ethical clearance, and that was for an auto ethnographic study in twenty twelve when I just started at [REDACTED], I can't say, personally, I've ever had any problems. It's a lot of forms and it's a lot of administrative stuff but I completed the forms and, right up to the last application that I had in August for myself, for

No problems experienced ethical clearance applications for own/personal research.

Lot of forms and administrative tasks involved for each research project, but was engaged according to her.

The effort of the "administrative stuff" sounds like some resistance or even disengagement experienced, but the participant provided a contradicting statement and says she was engaged.

personal research. I think I was very engaged. I just went through the motions, completed the forms. I like to plan my research before the time so I know what I want to do. I can't say I've ever been the victim of any unreasonable comments. So I think, personally, I am very engaged. I can't say that anything ever caused me to feel I don't want to apply for ethical clearance again. Everything went smoothly, it was done in time, no issues that I can report on, personally. The issues that I have is [sic] more related to my students and the struggles I have to get the students to get ethical clearance and that's a bit more difficult because it takes time. The difficulty is also just, if you have twenty students, it takes a lot of time. And I don't like the conflict that it causes, I don't like the fights

Engaged

Went through motions... seems like an absent minded exercise.

Prepared and well planned study.
Victim of comments – strong words!

The feedback received is not perceived as unreasonable.

Perceptions that she is engaged because she does not actively want to avoid application process.

Did not have negative experience with the process.

Issues relates to struggle to obtain ethical clearance for student research.

To obtain ethical clearance takes time. And with several students it takes even more time.

The terms used by participant to describe engagement is vigour, dedication and absorption. To "go through the motions" seems like an absentminded exercise and not necessarily that of an engaged researcher.

Just because you are willing to comply to rules, or not actively avoid the process does not mean you are engaged.

that it causes in our committees because it makes me uncomfortable. But, personally, maybe because our committee never reviewed my stuff... the first ethical application I had that served at our committee was the one that served in August. The others went to the college and, with the college, just went through. Then it also goes up to Senex, because it's always ODeL research, I always receive clearance quickly. So, no, I think I can't report on any issues that I had with that. And it's also important, when you send in an article to be reviewed, they require your ethical clearance, so I accept the fact that it's part of the process and I go through it. I would've, in any case, had to make those decisions or do the research to publish the article. So, whatever I would have done in the article,

Her ethics application were not exposed to the critique her students' applications were exposed to.

Conflict in the committee makes her uncomfortable.

Her personal applications did not serve on the departmental level. Her personal applications served at college level. Was approved without delays or conflict.

Another level at which ethical approval needs to be obtained, because it a specific type of research (ODeL).

Ethical clearance is a requirement if you want to publish article. Accepting that ethical clearance is part of the publication process.

An extract from the transcribed semi-structured interview with Mary:

Interview 12:

What is this about?

Different perspectives exist regarding the meaning or understanding of what engagement is. Engagement is not intermittent or interrupted. It is continuous activity/ process. It is essential that engagement is driven from an emotional or values level or perspective. It is not possible to be engaged if the person does not support or believe in the value of the aspect work process? (e.g., research ethics). Cannot be engaged if there is not a personal value attached to it. Engagement cannot be enforced. Engagement occurs when a person believes it will add value or have the personal conviction that something should be done in specific way. Engagement is not merely compliance. It is holistic. Not compartmentalised. A conducive work environment where employees enjoy their work and believe they contribute to the success of the organisation leads to engagement. Engagement is dependent on a conducive environment, however disengagement can occur because of certain behaviour. People might have the values to understand the importance of research ethics and might agree with it (do not want to be unethical) but they do not want the burdensome process of completing forms. Engagement in research ethics might be impaired by the management style. Mentorship is important. HR can assist with the training to ensure optimal performance. The approach to application reviews from committee members are sometimes considered to be negative. The approach of the committee towards applications is causing disengagement of researchers. Experiences of powerlessness can cause further resistance or disengagement. Engagement is displayed by behaviour. The approach should not be compliance orientated. The objective of research ethics is not the question researcher. Not micro-management or the objective to control. It should be values orientated/values driven. ...HR cannot support the engagement of the employees. They can create an environment within which those employees are engaged. HR should change performance management system to include a solid value system that we want to entrench in the organisation. Personal development plans should include research ethics training/ exposure. The focus of induction training is not to ensure that the new employees are competent, it is to ensure that they understand the importance of research ethics.

withdraw from the study, that you are welcome to and you do not have to provide me with a reason. So, if you are comfortable and you have your water, we can start with the first –

M Wait, before you start, just explain to me the focus. So the focus is purely in an academic environment.

I Ja.

M And, if you [sic] referring to HR practitioners, you are referring to the HR practitioners in the academic environment.

I Absolutely.

M So not HR practitioners out there in other organisations, 'cause they really don't care about research and the ethics.

I No. It is absolutely our support staff within our institution, within [redacted], basically. It

could be, because, in essence, I wanna develop a framework but I'm developing it within our institution, but the framework is for human resource management practitioners within the higher education –

M Education environment.

I ...environment to support academics in research ethics engagement. So it's absolutely within this context.

M I understand what you [sic] saying. I'm comfortable with that.

I So, Mary [PSEUD], I am curious, how do you understand the phrase or the concept: engagement of academics in research ethics?

M So, for me, the word engagement is actually a very loaded word because I think it means a whole lot of things to a whole lot of different people. For me,

Engagement is a loaded word.

The concept of what engagement is, is contentious? Ambiguous concept? Unsure... probed this concept. Refer to p.7

<p>personally, and I haven't researched engagement, so it's not as if I know the academic answer, but, for me, true engagement is a continuous process and I think the most important thing is that it's on an emotional or a values level. So I don't think that you can be really engaged if you do not support from a personal values perspective, that is where engagement starts. So you can't say I'm engaged if I do it because I'm told to or because the environment expects it of me. I'm engaged if this is something I want to do because I feel it adds value or this is the way it should be done. So it has to be an intrinsic...that, to me, is what engagement means. So, if you say engagement of academics, is that the submission there? So I would think that it means that research ethics is not</p>	<p>Engagement means different things for different people.</p> <p>Engagement is a continuous process</p> <p>Most important It is on an emotional level It is on a values level</p> <p>Cannot be engaged if it is not value perspective Engagement starts with personal values perspective</p> <p>Cannot be told to be engaged.</p> <p>You are engaged if you believe it adds value ...the way it should be done.</p> <p>Engagement towards something is intrinsic</p>	<p>Different perspectives exist regarding the meaning or understanding of what engagement is</p> <p>Engagement is not intermittent or interrupted. It is continuous activity/process.</p> <p>It is essential that engagement is driven from an emotional or values level or perspective.</p> <p>It is not possible to be engaged if the person does not support or believe in the value of the aspect work process? (e.g. research ethics). Cannot be engaged if there is not a personal value attached to it.</p> <p>Engagement cannot be enforced.</p> <p>Engagement occurs when a person believes it will add value or have the personal conviction that something should be done in specific way.</p> <p>Engagement is not merely compliance. It cannot be enforced. Cannot be externally motivated? Engagement is personal. Personal value agreement to the activity is needed for engagement. Moral value element?</p>
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<p>something that is compartmentalised into certain aspects of our daily work. It is an overarching thing that goes through everything in our day. Not only when you deal with a proposal or only when you deal with writing an article but there are other instances where research ethics come [sic] into play and it has to be a natural part of your decision-making process. It's not something that you now I have to think about research ethics. I think it's part of your value system. If you're an academic, it has to be part of your value system. So, in my opinion, it's not always the case but that is what it should be.</p> <p>I So, when you say engagement is loaded, do you see this as a positive or as a negative...when you say loaded, is it a positive attribute or negative or it...maybe attribute is not the correct word, is it a [sic]</p>	<p>Research ethics is not compartmentalised.</p> <p>Overarching Everything in your day</p> <p>Not only in certain areas of work?</p> <p>Research ethics needs to be a natural part of decision-making process</p> <p>Do not have to think about.</p> <p>Engagement is part of value system.</p> <p>Engagement in research ethics should be part of the value system of academics</p>	<p>It is holistic Not compartmentalised.</p> <p>Meta cognitive thinking? If it is part of your natural decision-making process, is it then part of your personal value system? If a certain decision comes naturally to you?</p> <p>If you are engaged in research ethics, the engagement is not something that you have to actively think about ("switch on"). It is automatic.</p> <p>Engagement towards something transpires from a value system.</p> <p>Ideally all academics should be engaged in research ethics, as part of their value system.</p>
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<p>emotion that you experience? Can you maybe –</p> <p>M I mean loaded in the sense that it seems like such a simple word but it has such a lot of meaning behind it, actually, is what I'm saying. So people say employees should be engaged or academics should be engaged, but they don't really understand that being engaged is not a simple thing. It's a heavy...something that is important. So I think, in the private sector, it's like that as well because everyone is researching employee engagement and trying to do things that will keep employees engaged, but they don't...what I personally think that what they don't understand is that, if people love what they're doing and they love the environment that you create for them in which they can contribute, they will be</p>	<p>The word engagement is a word with a lot of meaning.</p> <p>People don't understand that engagement is not a simple thing.</p> <p>...is important.</p> <p>Engagement is being research in private sector and here in the HE environment?</p> <p>Efforts are made to keep employees engaged?</p>	<p>The concept "engagement" is comprehensive and not necessarily easily defined. Or simplistically explained.</p> <p>People do not comprehend the value or importance of engagement? Or significance of the concept?</p> <p>Engagement is important.</p> <p>Efforts are made to keep employees engaged, but they don't always understand how to do it.</p> <p>A conducive work environment where employees enjoy their work and believe</p>
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engaged. Engagement is not the goal, engagement is a product of an [sic] happy employee or a [sic] employee that buys in on an emotional level to the environment. And it's the same with ethics. If I buy in on the whole research ethics thing, it's not as if today I'm engaged and tomorrow I'm not, and, if you do this, I will engage and, if you do that, I will not. It's part of my value system, and then I'm engaged. So I don't think engagement can be...how can I say? You can't do things, I think, fo...wat is die woord? Artificially push engagement if the motivating factors are not there. On a personal values level, if I don't see the need for being ethical, I'm never going to be ethical. If you dangle seventeen carrots, it's not going to work. But you can, by doing whatever you do in HR, disengage people. I think the environment

If people enjoy their jobs and the work environment in which they can contribute, they will be engaged.
 Engagement is not the goal (it is the result)
 Engagement is a product of happy employees.
 Employees that buy into the environment on an emotional level will be engaged.
 The same with ethics
 If there is buy-in in the research ethics thing the engagement will be consistent?
 ...if you do this, I will engage and, if you do that, I will not
 If there is buy-in, it is part of the value system and then engagement will be present.
 Engagement cannot be artificially pushed without the motivating factors.

they contribute to the success of the organisation leads to engagement.
 Engagement is not a tangible thing that can be obtained. An environment can be created which will be conducive for employees to be engaged?
 The same principle applies for engagement in research ethics. (see comment above).
 Engagement is not dependant on certain conditions or requirements.
 If a person values research ethics, they will be engaged?
 In order for employees to be engaged certain motivating factors needs to be present. Engagement cannot be encouraged or attained without these motivating factors.
 Only when there is a personal value attached to a concept or behaviour (research ethics) will engagement be present. In the absence of personal value, there will not be engagement.

can very easily disengage people, but I think it's difficult for the environment to engage people as a... to say I'm going to do this and this and then people will be engaged, or this action is to engage people. You create an environment and then people engage, but you can do things to disengage people, I think.

I And what would cause disengagement, for you, then?

M I think things like, for example, overly-bureaucratic systems which makes the pain bigger than the gain. So I want to be ethical, I know I have to be ethical, I am engaged in the whole action of being ethical, but the systems make it freaking impossible to be ethical because I have to spend, I'm just taking an example, so much time in filling in forms. Things like

Use an expression to explain herself.... dangle seventeen carrots, it's not going to work.

It is possible to disengage people with certain behaviour.

Difficult for environment to engage people.

Can create environment where people can engage, but do things that can cause disengagement

Disengagement in research ethics can be caused by overly bureaucratic systems

Expression: the pain bigger than the gain

Refers to the expression that donkeys can be motivated by dangling carrots. (move forward/ pull a cart)
 People, however, will not be motivated to act in a certain way (be engaged), if they do not see the need for being ethical.

It is possible to disengage people when the behaviour in the organisation or the environment of the organisation is in contrast with personal values???

It is easier to disengage people, than to engage people?

Engagement is dependent on a conducive environment, however disengagement can occur as a result of certain behaviour

The effort is not worth the reward.

<p>that causes [sic], I think, people to disengage to a certain degree. So they might not disengage totally and say now I'm going to be unethical, but they might say you know what? This is such a... Let's change the study so that we don't have to apply for ethical clearance on that level, we just change it so that it's easier. So the environment makes it more difficult for people to be ethical in what they really want to do.</p> <p>I So you think there might be a chance that people would change the focus of a study to circumvent the system?</p> <p>M Yes, I think so. Especially because academics are remunerated, directly, on their output. So ethics then becomes...or die hekkies wat ek moet spring om ethical clearance te kry becomes a hindering</p>	<p>The intention and motivation exist to be ethical but the system is making it difficult.</p> <p>Time it takes to complete the form is causing disengagement.</p> <p>People can be partially engaged and partially unengaged.</p> <p>Perception that ethics clearance is more difficult to attain on higher level.</p> <p>Make it easier? Ethics clearance is difficult? Environment makes it difficult to be ethical</p>	<p>People might have the values to understand the importance of research ethics and might agree with it (do not want to be unethical) but they do not want the burdensome process of completing forms.</p> <p>Hampering environment. Protocols to follow is causing disengagement?</p>
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<p>factor to achieving my outcome and getting the money and getting my outputs that I want to. So it just makes sense. If I have to do a study and I have to get ethical clearance on whatever level but I get the same research output point if I do this and this, then I think, except if you're an established academic where the type of study has value for you in terms of a [sic] NRF rating or in terms of your career growth, then I think people will be...wat is die woord? [VERNACULAR]. Tempted. They will be tempted to say, no, let's not ask that. We know it's really the question that we should ask but let's try and make it simpler so that we don't have to. I don't know. That's my opinion of it.</p>	<p>People circumvent system, to make research easier? Academics receives remuneration for research outputs.</p> <p>To obtain ethics clearance becomes a burden. Hindering factor to reach outcome.</p> <p>Ethics is a stumbling block?</p> <p>Level refers to the different committee levels. E.g. Department/ college/ university level. Has the perception that it is easier on lower levels?</p> <p>Exception exists with established researchers</p> <p>Researchers might be tempted to alter study to make it easier to obtain ethics clearance.</p>	<p>Causes disengagement?</p> <p>Prevents researchers from obtaining money and outputs. The "rewards" are hindered by the clearance process.</p> <p>To obtain ethical clearance at a platform that is lower is easier. And reward remains the same. Which is a Research output point.</p> <p>The reward is also external. Not necessarily because of engagement. It is for NRF rating or career growth.</p>
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<p>I But engagement, for you, is definitely a values level and a [sic] intrinsic....am I saying it correctly?</p> <p>M Ja, intrinsic, meaning it comes from myself, from within.</p> <p>I And it's an overarching –</p> <p>M It is, because it's ethics. And ethical behaviour is not something that...it's something that you are taught between <i>nil en sewe jaar</i>, you are taught by your parents to be ethical. So, if you get an employee who didn't get that exposure to do the right thing, even if no-one is watching, it's more difficult to expect of them, I think, to be ethical in terms of research, because that's the level at which ethics lie [sic]. It's not something that I do because you say I have to; it's something</p>	<p>Engagement in ethics is intrinsic. Within you. Values level.</p> <p>Ethics is overarching.</p> <p>Ethical behaviour is taught between 0 and 7 years. Thus, as small child.</p> <p>If ethics was not taught or the person did not have the required exposure to ethics, it is problematic to have the expectation that such an individual will be ethical in research automatically.</p> <p>Ethics is on deeper level.</p>	<p>If someone have the values base, or prior exposure to ethical behaviour, one can expect them to be ethical in research conduct??</p> <p>Does this mean that engagement will also be on a deeper level?</p> <p>Value based orientation.</p>
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that I do because I know it's the right thing to do.

I Before we move on to the next question, do you think there's anything you would like to add about your understanding of engagement of academics in research ethics?

M No. I don't know if we're going to get to that later on, but I just think, at the moment... I'm wondering whether the environment is not... and I'm being totally honest, my perception is that the university tends to manage quite negatively. So, instead of saying let's do it this way, motivating from a positive perspective, they tend to motivate from a negative perspective. So, if something doesn't happen, then we put in more regulations and more rules and another

It's not something that I do because you say I have to; it's something that I do because I know it's the right thing to do.

Management style of the university is negative.

If something doesn't happen, then we put in more regulations and more rules.

When there is a lack of compliance even more rules and regulations are added?

committee and more... so we make it more difficult for the people that don't comply to not comply, but we also make it more difficult for people who want to comply or who want to have a positive experience. So it is a little bit depressing in that sense and, so, I'm worried that research ethics gaan ook aan die slag bly with the negative management attitude. So you have to, you have to, you have to, and that's why. There's no thing like, because we're going to be world-class university, world-class universities do it this way, and that's where we are going and that's why we are doing it this way. So, if you can't, on a personal level, see that you [sic] also going in that direction, then that's why you engage with research ethics and do it this way.

Make it difficult not to comply to rules and regulations.
But if you want to comply, there regulations and rules makes it more difficult to have a positive experience.

little bit depressing – negative emotion experienced with management style.
Worried that research ethics will also be compromised/ impaired bit the negative management attitude
"Aan die slag bly" refers to a proverb which suggest that something will be lost as a side effect to something else.

Have to said several times. Forces compliance without a clear explanation or rationale

Provide an example of a possible explanation or rational, with a more positive approach, or reasoning.

going in that direction, then that's why you engage

The management style can cause disengagement? Or at least make it difficult to engage?

Emotions

Engagement in research ethics might be impaired by the management style.

Management style is coercive? Negative.

Personal values have to be aligned with the focus of the organisation

I So you think their management approach

has a [sic] impact on –

M I think so, but, at [redacted]. I don't know any other universities, we tend to, for me, have a very...*wat is eng?* Narrow view of the university and how we fit into the South African landscape, and the global landscape, for that matter, because the academic environment is really one of the few working environments where an academic is an academic is an academic, whether they work in South Africa or in UK, they do the same type of thing, and that's unique, other jobs don't really have that. Even if you are a, let's say, something like a mining engineer, mining engineers will have...the variations to the job content will be a lot bigger than what it will be in the academic environment. So I think it's easier for a university to say this

[redacted] have a narrow or restricted view of its role in SA and global landscape.

Work of academics are the same regardless of the university where you are employed.

Academic position is unique, other jobs (employment positions) are not all the same irrespective of the institution. ...the variations to the job content will be a lot bigger than what it will be in the academic environment

<p>is the bigger picture, but it feels to me like, instead of doing this, we are doing this or we are saying [CROSSTALK] –</p> <p>I Narrowing it down instead of opening it up.</p> <p>M Yes. I don't know why. But I prefer a positive management style. I know that you have to be strict with people and all because you have to, but I like a positive environment because I think people are more motivated if it's positive than if they are constantly being told we're not going to do this now, we...ek weet nie.</p> <p>I Next, please describe your engagement in research ethics at this ODeL institution.</p> <p>I'm not sure, do you have students as well or –</p> <p>M I have only one. That I'm supervising?</p> <p>I Ja.</p>	<p>Made hand gesture to demonstrate that instead of focusing on big picture [redacted] are focusing smaller issues.</p> <p>prefer a positive management style</p> <p>Positive environment will cause people to be more motivated. Engaged?</p>	
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M Ja, I only have one, with Anna [PSEUD], but that student is not...we're struggling a bit with her.

I But did that student obtain research ethics clearance yet?

M No. So she's only going to apply now this year. Her proposal was only approved now.

I So then only focus on your experience then, please.

M So my experience –

I Describe your engagement in research ethics at [CROSSTALK].

M So I think my engagement actually focusses on three. So, obviously, I've been part of the Research Committee in the department, which I think is actually something that everyone that works there,

Her engagement is threefold.

All staff members should work in the research ethics committee since research is part of an academic's job

they have to do it, I think it should not be optional, because it's our job... research is an academic's job, so I don't...but that's my personal opinion, because you grow and you learn in that committee and, so, it's a great experience. It was, for me, on a personal level. Not just the training that we received in terms of ethics, but the questions that other people ask and reading...I get a lot of exposure, when you read a proposal and you see how a person...how they motivate their stuff and what is there and what isn't there, and that's the only way that you really learn is if you see a number of proposals and you can start getting a certain sense of what is good and what is bad.

I Sorry, when you say proposals, are you –

M Or ethics, research ethics applications.

Positive experience.

To be on the committee helps you grow and learn.

Great experience.

Received training, interaction and deliberations/questions asked by other people. Reading.

(Proposals refer to research ethics applications)

Learn by experience. Exposure helps you learn to know what good and bad applications is.

<p>I Applications.</p> <p>M I should say application. Research ethics applications. What I don't understand, and perhaps this is also just where I'm from and worked in the past, it felt to me as if I'm learning with trial and error. So here's a [sic] ethics proposal, I've never seen one in my life, I'm from the private sector, I don't know what you're talking about, but apply your mind and complete this form, evaluate it for us by completing this form, which is fine but there's an element of a certain standard that is acceptable and that is not acceptable. So, when I started getting ethical applications, it felt to me like now I must set my own bar as to what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, which is fine. The only problem is that I do that by trial and error. So, the first one, I'm not really sure and</p>	<p>Learn with trial and error. Uncertainty of what is expected</p> <p>The standard of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable applications or review was unclear.</p> <p>Had to set her own bar. Had to determine for herself what she thought was acceptable or not acceptable.</p> <p>In the beginning she made judgement errors because she was not familiar with process or what acceptable standards are.</p>	
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An extract from the transcribed semi-structured interview with Neill:

Interview 13:

What is this about?

Engagement is an interconnection between awareness and the significance of ethics, specifically awareness in the research context. Engagement is then the extent to which the researcher is aware that ethics should be a central and critical component of the entire research study. Engagement in research ethics is proactive in nature. Good will orientation. Engagement: having an ethical mind-set or an ethical disposition. Engagement in research ethics will have spill-over effect to other areas of work. If research ethics is compliance and a tick-box then the researcher is not fully engaged. Not being transparent is not conducive for ethical behaviour. Stressful and negative experience to work on research ethics committee, because of the negative interaction with colleagues who resist the procedures. Difficult to believe staff members will be engaged in research ethics if they display such aggressive behaviour. Academics who are not engaged: Ethics clearance process is seen as a hurdle or barrier to overcome in the research ethics journey to ultimately gain output points. To a large extent his engagement in research ethics was caused by training. Understanding everything about research ethics is difficult. It is complex. Committed to the process. Attitude and personal disposition can influence the engagement experienced by the academic. Positive experience encourages engagement. Negative experience is discouraging for engagement. In order to be a recognised and respected scholar, the research produced needs to be of a high ethical standard. Engagement in research ethics by all academics are impossible if the leadership fails to display ethical behaviour. An ethical culture needs to be evident in leadership. If leaders fail to be ethical it will not be possible to create an ethical culture. For engagement of all academics in research ethics, the entire ethical culture needs to be aligned and evident in leadership behaviour. If the academic researcher is ethical he/ she will not be receptive of support form an unethical source. Lack of action by management to address unethical conduct can create a culture where questionable conduct is acceptable. His perspective is that if we want to create or support engagement of academics in research ethics, then we need to look at ethics from a value perspective.

Stages 2 and 3: Initial noting and development of emergent themes

ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT	EXPLORATORY COMMENTS	EMERGENT THEMES
<p>I Neill [PSEUD]. I will be asking questions which will focus on the experience of research ethics as a researcher or as an academic. The interview will focus on the potential role that HR practitioners can play in the engagement of academics in research ethics. Please note that I am going to use the word academic and researcher interchangeably. These terms should be understood as an academic employee with a human resource management qualification or as a practitioner who is busy with or who has completed a postgraduate qualification. So, typically, it is someone with a human resource management qualification situated in these departments or our</p>		

support staff in OR Tambo who conducted a postgraduate qualification. And that is why I use academic and researcher interchangeably. Please know that there's really no wrong or right answer. This study is really exploratory in nature and I'm keen to understand how you make sense of the concepts. The interview should last between forty-five minutes to an hour, but it could be longer, depending on our engagement. Also take note that you can withdraw at any time from the study, if you are uncomfortable or anything, you do not have to give me any reason. So you are welcome to withdraw if you want to. So, if you are comfortable, we can start with the first question. Neill [PSEUD], I just wanna make sure, the view is very glaring, do you maybe –

<p>N It's okay, it doesn't bother me.</p> <p>I Do you want me to close the blinds?</p> <p>N No. It doesn't bother me at all.</p> <p>I So we can continue with the first question.</p> <p>I I am curious, how do you understand the phrase or the concept: engagement of academics in research ethics? If you had to think about the phrase.</p> <p>N Firstly, I think it's actually almost like a beautiful interconnection between awareness, on the one hand, the significance of ethics, and particularly ethics within the research context, and then the consciousness of ethics when it comes to the researcher himself or herself. So, firstly, I would say that it's the extent to which I, as a researcher, is [sic] aware of the ethical component of my</p>	<p>It is an interconnection between awareness and the significance of ethics, specifically awareness in the research context.</p> <p>It is about the consciousness of ethics to the researcher himself/herself.</p> <p>It is the extent to which a researcher is aware of the ethical component of his research.</p>	
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research. And, obviously, when I talk about the ethical component of the research, it's actually the entire research process, from the moment when I start to conceptualise my research all the way through to the findings, the analysis, the writing up of the research, and how I eventually present that research. So, in other words, it's the extent to which I'm actually aware that ethics should be a central, a critical, component of the entire research study. Then, for me, I think it's good to be aware of the ethical component, but one also needs to ask the question: to what extent is it significant to me, as a researcher? So, for example, is ethics significant then? And to what extent is ethics significant? And, obviously, the extent to which it is

The ethical component is the entire research process. From the conceptualisation of the research all the way through to the findings, analysis and the reporting.

Engagement is then the extent to which the researcher is aware that ethics should be a central and critical component of the entire research study.

Good to be aware of ethical component, but engagement is also determined by the significance of ethical research to the researcher.

Value orientation of researcher?

<p>significant will then determine to what extent I work proactively in order to ensure that I adhere to all the ethical requirements during the entire research project. So significance also plays an important role for me, and that's the other component of engagement with research ethics. And then I think consciousness is also important. Perhaps it relates to awareness, but it's almost as if consciousness... sometimes, we can be aware, in inverted commas, on an unconscious level that ethics is important but, within this context, I think that it should be a conscious thing, so I must proactively make provision for ethics and look at ethical considerations when I attend to different components of the research study. So, for me, those three</p>	<p>Engagement – the extent to which ethics is significant will determine to what extent the researcher work proactively to ensure that he/she adhere to ethical requirements.</p> <p>Significance play an important role and is a component of engagement.</p> <p>Conscious effort, being aware/awareness.</p> <p>More than being aware on a sub-conscious level. It is a conscious effort in within the research context.</p> <p>Make proactive provision for ethics and consider ethical aspects in different components of research study.</p>	<p>Engagement in research ethics is proactive in nature. Good will orientation.</p> <p>Significance meaning importance?</p>
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things are very important. And then the presence of ethics, also, across all the research-related activities, as I said earlier on. So from the moment that I conceptualise my study right through how I formulate the research problem, how I decide on an appropriate and applicable relevant research design, right through the entire research project. So it's almost like, I refer to it as, having an ethical mind-set or an ethical disposition, and I think, when I'm aware of ethics, when I'm conscious of it, when it's always top of mind, when I have an ethical disposition, for me, it comprise that I will be fully engaged when it comes to ethics in my research, and, essentially, that's my understanding of engagement of academics in ethical research. Then I think, also, perhaps,

Research ethics is part of all research-related activities.

Engagement: having an ethical mind-set or an ethical disposition.
 There is an awareness of ethics, there is a consciousness of it, it's always top of the researcher's mind, it is a disposition.

I will be fully engaged when it comes to ethics in my research.

Holistic approach to research ethics.
 Engagement will be present with this approach?

indirectly, once ethics, within the research context, becomes such a critical component in my life, it will inevitably become part of my other roles also. So, as an academic, it will not only be relevant when I deal with my research, but when I do my teaching and tuition and learning, for example, or, when I conduct my community engagement work, it will obviously also become important there. When I take up my leadership within my department, when we have deliberations in a departmental meeting, for example, when I relate to my students, when I supervise them, ethics will also become important. So then it's almost as if it becomes an inevitable spinoff when I'm engaged in ethics within a research context, but it's not only applicable to one

If research ethics becomes a critical component of the researcher's life it will unavoidably become part of his/her other roles as well.

Engagement in research ethics will have spill-over effect to other areas of work. Wonder if the opposite will then also be true? If you experience a lack of engagement in research ethics, will this eventually cause an employee to be disengaged in other areas of their work as well?

part of my life as an academic, it will permeate all the other activities, all the other roles that I take up within, for example, our university community. And, eventually, it will even become part of my research identity, who Neill [PSEUD] is as a researcher, for example, and I think, once ethics becomes part of my research identity, once it becomes a fundamental component of my work as a scholar, for me, that will be the ultimate form of engagement then, as an academic within our context.

I So, when you say consciousness, that you should be aware of it, and there's [sic] different spinoffs or there's [sic] different roles that you...you say engage research ethics and, when you're truly engaged, the word you used is spinoff, and then, as

Spill-over effect. If you are engaged in ethical research you will have the same orientation towards other aspects of your work.

When engaged in research ethics, this will become part of your identity as researcher.

Ethical conduct in research will be a fundamental component of his work as scholar. That is true engagement.

<p>academic, for you, there is, in your capacity as academic, you have different roles that you fulfil and, when you are truly engaged, research ethics, or ethics in that sense, will transpire or...what is...?</p> <p>N</p> <p>It will permeate, almost, into all the other activities that I'm engaged in, within our context, throughout the roles that I take up within our university community, and it will essentially become who I am, as a researcher. It's not just something that I have to comply with at the end of the day, a tick-box that I need to tick at the end of the day, or a piece of paper that I need to submit somewhere. It will almost become part of who I am, as a scholar, as a researcher, as an academic.</p> <p>I</p> <p>It's an intrinsic value?</p>	<p>Engagement in research ethics will permeate/infuse/infiltrate into all other areas where he is involved in as scholar.</p> <p>Being an ethical researcher will become his identity.</p> <p>It is not compliance. It is not a tick-box, piece of paper.</p>	<p>If research ethics is compliance and a tick-box then the researcher is not fully engaged.</p>
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<p>N I would say so. It becomes a value then, a lived value, at the end of the day. Then I almost don't even have to think about it anymore. It will become so much part of my life that it will automatically be present, or my conscious will be sensitised to such an extent that it's almost like a radar that goes off, an alarm that rings, whenever I approach a situation that feels or that smells unethical. It's almost as if that radar would be activated, that alarm would be triggered. And I think, for me, that would be a [sic] ultimate form of engagement.</p> <p>I What a beautiful, I don't know what's the English word, <i>vergekyking</i>. Neill [PSEUD], before we move on to the next question, I would really like to know: do you think there's anything else that you would like to</p>	<p>It becomes an intrinsic value. A value that is lived by the individual.</p> <p>When it is a lived value, it is a natural predisposition to be ethical. Not thinking about it anymore. Ethical research will automatically be present.</p> <p>Consciousness is sensitised to unethical behaviour.</p> <p>When you are immediately alerted when you suspect unethical behaviour, you are engaged.</p>	
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<p>add about your understanding of engagement of academics in research ethics? Is there something that you would like to add maybe?</p> <p>N It's actually such an interesting concept and such a relevant one, particularly within our context. A university, for me, it's an environment where there's a lot of competition, it's an environment there's a lot of rivalry, there's a lot of jealousy very often, within our specific context, and, very often, we seem to be rewarded also for the competition, in a sense. And, sometime, instead of collaborating with a colleague and getting a point five for having collaborated with a colleague, I would consciously tell myself, no, I want the full point research output, so I'm deliberately not going to collaborate with</p>	<p>There is a lot of competition/rivalry in a university environment.</p> <p>Competition and jealousy and such behaviour is rewarded (output points)</p> <p>Collaboration in research is not popular, because less output point is awarded.</p>	
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<p>my colleague or I'm going to... some colleagues even hide their research projects because they don't want others to know what they are busy with. And, very often, that attitude can create a lot of jealousy and rivalry and unhealthy competition within the community and, even more so, when the university actually rewards you for being a sole author, for example, instead of creating some kind of space, I would think, for collaboration.</p> <p>When I collaborate with a colleague, whether he or she's in my department or in a different department or even a different discipline, for example, when the fact that I collaborate across specific disciplines, that should actually carry so much more value for me at the end of the day and, very often, we are not rewarded</p>	<p>Researchers deliberately do not collaborate in research.</p> <p>Some colleagues even hide their research projects, because they do not want others to know what they are busy with.</p> <p>This attitude creates jealousy and rivalry and unhealthy competition among scholars.</p> <p>This behaviour is rewarded by university. Sole authorship is regarded as better than collaborative studies.</p> <p>Collaborations across different disciplines is supposed to be of more value, but within the current context this is not the case.</p>	<p>Not being transparent is not conducive for ethical behaviour.</p>
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for that. We look at the sequence of authors and we see this guy is the fourth author or the fifth one or the sixth one, and we tend to ask what could she or he have done then, at the end of the day? Surely, the contribution must have been so little. But we don't think about the interaction that that person has had with other scholars coming from different disciplines. And, for me, that is also important and, very often, we tend to ignore that part of our scholarly work. But the point that I'm trying to make is that the university would then reward the sole author, and it's almost as if you get punished, if you like. And sometimes people almost get caught up in this battle where they actually chase the full research output, this full research unit, to such an extent that it actually

The university is rewarding sole authorships and collaborations are almost punished.

Some scholars become too competitive, to reach certain targets/ number of output points that they might even be tempted to conduct research without obtaining ethics clearance.

<p>becomes unhealthy, that sometimes you might even be tempted to cut corners, you might even be tempted to conduct research within our community without the necessary ethical clearance. And, for me, that's a concern because, sometimes, some of my colleagues will tell me, the way in which we do things within our context, it's like a witch hunt. We've always done it without ethical clearance.</p> <p>Why can't the university executives trust us that we [sic] going to make the right decisions? And then I really get worried when you hear people saying these things, and specifically within the context where ethics has become so important, where we are dealing with issues such as corruptions and nepotism and unethical behaviour within the larger South African</p>	<p>Cut corners.</p> <p>Some colleagues argue that the ethical clearance process is like a witch hunt.</p> <p>They always conducted research without ethics clearance.</p> <p>Questions the motives of the university. Say that the university should trust them to make the right decisions.</p> <p>Major concern for the participant.</p> <p>Very cumbersome within the context where ethics has become very important.</p> <p>In broader societal context issues such as corruption and nepotism and unethical behaviour underscores the importance of ethical conduct.</p>	<p>Exposure to questionable conduct should increase our awareness to ethical conduct in our specific context as custodians of truth finders / research.</p>
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context. So I know for a fact, if these things are happening within the broader South African context, for sure, it's happening within the university context as well. And sometimes we tend to ignore that, we tend to look the other way, and I'm concerned about it. That's why I was so excited when I was approached because it's almost as if ethics should become a strategic objective within the context of the university and, once it becomes part of our strategy, once it becomes part of our vision for the organisation, then it will become part of the culture in the organisation, and then, obviously, ethical behaviour will be encouraged, ethical behaviour will be reward, and, obviously, it would then become almost like a tool of engagement,

If unethical behaviour is happening in the broader societal context, it is happening within [redacted] as well.

In [redacted] this is sometimes ignored and not addressed and that is concerning.

Ethics should become a strategic objective in the university.

If it is part of the strategy, part of the vision of organisation it will become part of the culture.

If ethics is part of the culture, ethical behaviour will be encouraged, ethical behaviour will be rewarded.

The positive reinforcement will become a tool for engagement.

The positive reinforcement of ethical behaviour will become a tool for engagement.

<p>a tool of attraction, a tool of retention, at the end of the day, but I don't see that happening at that moment. So, for me, it's so important then that we ask this question: to what extent are we engaged ethically within a research context? And, in order to ensure that we are not driven by compliance but that the scholar, that the academic, is actually driven by passion, by doing the right thing because it's part of who he or she is, ethics is an important component of our work, it's who we are, at the end of the day, and, very often, it is not my experience of our institution, of our university community, it is seen as people are dragging their feet, almost, and it's a source of concern for me. Particularly also from the perspective of having been a member of the Ethics</p>	<p>A tool for attraction and retention.</p> <p>This is not happening at the moment.</p> <p>It is important that researcher are not driven by compliance. Should be driven by passion to do the right thing.</p> <p>Driven by that fact that being ethical is part of who he or she is.</p> <p>Ethics is an important component of our work, our identity.</p> <p>Not his experience at the institution.</p> <p>Cumbersome to see people "dragging their feet" (not engaged) (doing something slowly, because you do not really want to do it)</p>	<p>Engagement is not associated with such behaviour.</p>
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<p>Review Committee and all the hard, emotional work that I had to do within that community and within my department to sell and advertise these things to them and the resistance that I experienced, sometimes, the verbal abuse that you experience, as a committee member, and it became so bad that I had decided to resign from the committee because that emotional work just became too difficult for me.</p> <p>I So, Neill [PSEUD], I just wanna understand what you [sic] saying. Do you think the current structure for sole authorship and research points is actually causing disengagement or, at least, people causing some sort of resistance because obtaining research ethics</p>	<p>Participant was a research ethics review committee member. As a committee member, he did "hard, emotional work" in the scientific community and within his department.</p> <p>Worked hard to promote and advertise research ethics.</p> <p>The resistance he experienced, and the verbal abuse experienced as committee member (because of the feelings towards research ethical by staff members) resulted in him resigning from the committee.</p> <p>emotional work; difficult for me.</p>	<p>Stressful and negative experience to work on research ethics committee, because of the negative interaction with colleagues who resist the procedures.</p>
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<p>clearance is causing a delay or frustration... please –</p> <p>N Absolutely, that's what I'm saying. And I've heard some of my colleagues actually saying that. It's a source of huge frustration, it's a source of huge irritation, and some of them will even tell you, you have to wait months for the ethical clearance, to obtain the ethical clearance, and sometimes they sit with the perception that the Research Ethics Portfolio is there solely just to make life difficult for us. And it's a real perception. And I'm saying that because I've heard people saying that, I'm saying that because I've been in so many departmental meetings where it was said and where, as a committee, we had to defend the work of the committee, we had to defend the principles and values of the</p>	<p>The current structure is causing disengagement. Researchers are chasing research output points and the clearance process is regarded as a delay in this process.</p> <p>Obtaining research ethics clearance is a source of frustration and irritation. Obtaining ethics clearance is a very time consuming exercise.</p> <p>Staff members have the perception that the research ethics portfolio is only there to make their lives more difficult.</p> <p>He has heard these arguments in several departmental research ethics meeting.</p> <p>Committee members are in a position where they have to defend the work that the committee do/ defend the function of the committee.</p> <p>Committee members have to defend the principles and values of [REDACTED] had to defend the research ethics portfolio in several meeting.</p>	<p>Difficult to believe staff members will be engaged in research ethics if they display such aggressive behaviour.</p>
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organisation, where we had to defend the Research Ethics Portfolio in a lot of these departmental meetings. So this is my experience. So this is what I think is happening out there and that's why I'm saying that. And, yes, I am saying that the fact that...and I'm sure there's merit, in the university, granting a full research unit for a person who's solely responsible for a specific research project, but I think the unintended consequences of that is that, very often, when researchers, when academics, when emerging scholars, when they fight for promotion, for example, and those units become very important, for them, the temptation is real. the temptation could be there to cut corners and to think that all these other steps that we've built into the process, that

He understands the merit of awarding a full output point to a researcher who is solely responsible for research, but there is unintended consequences that concerns him.

The current promotion system is very competitive and research outputs are pertinent. The temptation to cheat/ cut corners/ take shortcuts are real.

All these others steps which are built in are just to make life more difficult.

Ethics clearance process is seen as a hurdle or barrier to overcome in the research ethics journey to ultimately gain output points.

ANNEXURE H: AN EXAMPLE OF MY FIELDNOTES

Fieldnotes during and after the semi-structured individual interview with Denise:

Field notes of interview 4

Interview date:	Starting time of interview:	Ending time of interview:
13 November 2017	9:20	10:18

People present during interview:

Researcher

Participant number 4 (Pseudonym: Denise)

Observational field notes

On the day of the interview I observed Denise's nonverbal behaviour. Attention was paid to her body language, the tone of her voice and other aspects. In general, I experienced her as comfortable and friendly. At one stage she felt unsure of how to clearly express herself and reverted to her mother tongue (Afrikaans) to respond to a question posed. She was visibly engaged in the research phenomenon and spoke with enthusiasm. She made use of hand gestures during the interview. In certain instances she also leaned forward when talking. Denise was willing to share her lived experience, however occasionally it did happen that she felt unsure of what the "correct answer" was. On occasion, she indicated that she hopes that she answered my question and that her answer could be of help or assistance for the results of study. She spoke with enthusiasm when she explained her personal engagement in research ethics. Denise occasionally went of topic of the purpose of the interview and referred to a book that she read and which she thought I should read as well.

Theoretical field notes

Denise was visibly engaged in the interview and the topics we discussed. From the onset of the interview she referred to her religion (Christianity) as her frame of reference for being ethical, which includes the conviction to conduct ethical research. When I asked Denise about her understanding of engagement in RE she indicated that RE is the approach or continued process that a researcher follows from the onset of the study. This entails the way in which the study is planned and executed. She continued by explaining that research will be ethical if the researcher treats participants with the necessary respect and dignity.

Although Denise shared some constraining conditions which might influence the engagement in RE experienced in RE, she remained positive. The majority of the concerns raised by her was

within the capacity of the departmental RERC. She experienced the miscommunication and conflict within the committee as constraining aspects for engagement in RE. She also raised the concern that the feedback the committee offered to researchers were not always constructive feedback. Denise indicated that the conflict within the department was tiring, a cause of stress or even burnout of employees and that it was dividing the department.

Denise was positive when she discussed the possible role HR could play in the engagement of researchers in RE. She indicated that HR should provide different forms of support for researchers. This included communication training; conflict management and team building. She indicated that HR could arrange for RE training to alleviate the burden on academics to arrange it. Denise indicated that HR should recruit and select employees who are ethically inclined. She also indicated that the performance management system should recognise and reward ethical behaviour of employees.

Methodological field notes

When I invited Denise to participate in the study, she agreed to an interview without hesitation. She was however busy with the final stages of her PhD and I had some difficulty in confirming an interview date. On the scheduled day, Denise was late for the interview due to another urgent work issue which had to be resolved. She did inform me prior to the original scheduled time and again apologised upon arrival. Denise explained that she wanted to have enough time for our interview, without rushing back to attend to the other work commitment.

The semi-structured individual interview was conducted in my office. The room was spacious with a desk and comfortable chairs. I was seated across from Denise with the desk between us. Both Denise and I maintained an open and inviting body posture throughout the interview. Prior to commencing with the interview, I ensured that I created rapport with her. This was done by explaining the purpose of the interview, emphasising that there are no right or wrong answers and that I was interested in her experience and understanding of the research phenomenon. The digital voice recorder was placed on the table between us to ensure that both our voices was clearly audible on the recorder. This was only done after voluntary informed consent was obtained from her.

The interview started on time (rescheduled time) and finished only after all the topics of the interview were thoroughly discussed and explored. One person knocked on the office door in spite

of the sign indicating that an interview was in progress. I apologised to her and instructed the person at the door to please return later. There were no further interruptions during the interview. She did not complete the naïve sketch beforehand, but did send it to me at a later stage. The information shared in the naïve sketch was not detailed and, in most instances, she had written only a few words to share her lived experience.

Personal field notes

I was familiar with Denise in a professional capacity, and this familiarity with each other contributed positively to the interview setting. Given that we knew each other in a professional capacity, it might have played a role in her decision to participate in the study. To mitigate this possibility, I emphasised that participation should be voluntary and that she was welcome to withdraw from participation at any stage, without fearing any consequences. I perceived Denise as a hardworking and devoted employee, passionate about her work within the university. Her responses were truthful and honest and I got the impression that she was engaged in RE.

Although Denise was comfortable with her view RE and confident in that she is an ethical researcher, she seemed unsure of how to answer certain questions. On more than one occasion she said that she hoped she answered my question. My impression was that she wanted to be of assistance and contribute to the study but was not always sure of how to respond. I thought that she was sincere in her responses and that her concerns related to her willingness to of help.

Fieldnotes during and after the semi-structured individual interview with Kayla:

Field notes of interview 10

Interview date:	Starting time of interview:	Ending time of interview:
1 December 2017	10h35	11h29

People present during interview:

Researcher

Participant number 10 (Pseudonym: Kayla)

Observational field note:

During the interview I observed Kayla's nonverbal behaviour and it was evident that she was nervous. Whilst creating rapport she noted that she was unsure if she was a suitable participant and whether she will be able to contribute to the study. I made a conscious effort to put her at ease and explained that there is no incorrect answer and I simply wished to learn more about her lived experience of the research phenomenon. I was mindful to reemphasise that participation is voluntary and she was under no obligation to participate if she did not want to. In spite of my attempt to calm her, she remained tensed with the start of the interview. It was only after conversing for a while that she started to unwind. I perceive Kayla as a friendly and supportive person and although she was nervous at the beginning of the interview it was clear that she was well prepared.

Theoretical field notes:

When Kayla started to share her understanding of engagement per se, she explained that it is a positive attribute of a person, and she is of opinion that it is evident when an employee is committed to the organisation. She understood engagement in RE then as the awareness of the value of ethical research. She clarified by explaining that a researcher will be engaged in RE if that person relates to RE and has a positive attitude or idea about RE. She mentioned that ethics is a difficult concept to define because it is interpreted or applied differently by each person. Kayla mentioned that some people might behave ethically because it is expected from the organisation, whilst others behave ethically because of their upbringing and the norms and values they were taught. Kayla also mentioned that someone who are engaged in RE do not necessarily have a positive attitude or someone who wants to do it, but they engage in the process because of their commitment to the organisation.

Contrary to several other participants, Kayla enjoys REC work and likes to review RE applications. She mentioned that she might struggle to complete the RE application as researcher, but that she was good as reviewer to critique other researchers' applications and to identify possible ethical issues. Kayla also said that she believes that academics might 'nit-pick' on aspects that are not ethical issues.

When I asked Kayla to share her first experience of applying for RE clearance she gave me a one-word answer. 'Terrible!' She explained that neither she nor her co-researchers knew what they were doing. They did however receive training thereafter and this made them aware of everything that needs to be considered for conducting ethical research. Kayla then said that she was 'liberated... after that horror of the application'. She mentioned that she is not afraid anymore and she was enjoying it now.

Kayla raised the concern that the RE review processes and procedures are not always fair and consistently applied. She explained that if a researcher has a good network the process is sometimes quickened. The opposite also applies, so the process can be delayed if the researcher is not as well connected. In addition, people are labelled and as a researcher applying for RE clearance, the application are treated in accordance with that person's label.

Kayla said that HR can assist with the engagement of researchers in RE by offering training and mentorship initiatives. In terms of the performance management system, she mentioned that RE can form part of the performance appraisal of supervisors under the scope of teaching and learning. She did however say that the performance management system is at this stage not a fair system. She said that several aspects of employees' work are not taken into consideration and that it is not consistently applied in the different departments.

Methodological field notes:

Kayla immediately agreed to be interviewed when I invited her. I was able to arrange a date and time without any difficulties. I was familiar with Kayla in a professional capacity, which might have played a role in her decision to participate in the study. To mitigate this possibility, I underscored that participation should be voluntary and that she can withdraw from participation at any stage, without fearing any consequences. The interview was conducted at my office at the main campus of [REDACTED].

On the day of the interview Kayla requested that we postpone the interview with an hour. She was still busy with the naïve sketch and she wanted to complete it, prior to the interview. During the interview she kept the naïve sketch with her and used the responses recorded on that document as a reference point to start with when responding to interview questions. The naïve sketch was provided to me directly after the interview. There were no interruptions during the interview and not technical difficulties were experienced.

Personal field notes:

Although Kayla was nervous with the start of the interview, I got the impression that she was engaged, was open and willing to share her lived experience of the research phenomenon. She did however mention that I started the interview with a very difficult question. She was not the first participant to mention this and that was a cause of concern for me. I realised that the first question might be too abstract to start with and that I might have contributed to the nervousness experienced by some participants. I tried to set her at ease during the interview and I think I was fairly successful in doing so. Kayla resigned from the university shortly before the interview was conducted and this may have influenced her responses to some of the questions.

Fieldnotes during and after the semi-structured individual interview with Ellen:

Field notes of interview 5

Interview date:	Starting time of interview:	Ending time of interview:
13 November 2017	11:07	11:54

People present during interview:

Researcher

Participant number 5 (Pseudonym: Ellen)

Observational field notes:

On the day of the interview I observed Ellen's nonverbal behaviour which included her body language and the tone of her voice. She was very friendly and willing to participate in the research study. Nevertheless, it was evident that she was nervous on the day of the interview. I made a conscious effort to put her at ease and explained that there is no wrong answer and that I was simply attempting to understand her personal lived experience of the research phenomenon. Nonetheless I noted that she was nervous at the beginning of the interview. As we progressed with the interview she became more confident and comfortable with the discussion. During the interview she made use of hand gestures to explain herself and in certain instances also reverted to her mother tongue (Afrikaans) to better express herself.

Theoretical field notes:

She experienced uncertainty on what to answer on the first question from the interview guide. After giving a relatively short answer she requested me to "probe" her (the actual term she used during interview). I adhered to her request, and made efforts to further investigate but she remained anxious and uncertain and stated that I was starting off the interview with a difficult question. She became more confident and relaxed with the discussion when we moved on to the next questions.

At one stage Ellen mentioned that she hoped that her feedback will be valuable for my research study. She mentioned that although I maintained that there was no right or wrong answer, participants had to be very knowledgeable of the research topic before they would be able to contribute to the study.

Ellen mentioned some aspects which might have a negative influence on the engagement of researchers in RE which included conflict between committee members. The conflict she referred to related to the review and approval or non-approval of RE applications. She indicated that the lengthy and time consuming process to apply for ethical clearance also plays a role to hinder the engagement of researchers. Ellen also mentioned that some students do not receive the needed support from supervisors. Ellen's perception was that some supervisors do not engage in the RE procedures. Where supervisors do not engage in the RE clearance process, the application is submitted for review, before it is on the required standard for approval. The supervisors therefore leave it up to the RERC to provide feedback to students on applications. The lack of engagement in the RE process creates additional work for committees.

Ellen indicated that it would be difficult for HR to support the engagement of researchers in RE because there already is a lot of support available to researchers. She did however mention some possibilities of the supportive role HR could play in the engagement of researchers in RE. This included the training of administrative staff members to effectively support academics in their administrative tasks. The support of administrative staff does not have to relate to RE specifically, but rather general administrative tasks to free up time for academics to engage in research related activities. Ellen indicated that an integrated reporting and RE application system could also assist with the alleviation of an administrative burden currently placed on academics. She further mentioned that the personal conflict present in departmental RERC could be avoided if a dedicated department could be responsible for the review of RE applications.

Methodological field notes:

When I invited Ellen to participate in the study, she immediately agreed to an interview. I knew Ellen professionally, which might have played a role in her decision to participate in the study. To mitigate this possibility, I emphasised that participation should be voluntary and that she can withdraw from participation at any stage, without being concerned of any consequences. The semi-structured individual interview took place in my, at ODL institution where the research was conducted. After explaining the purpose of the study and obtaining voluntary informed consent I placed the digital voice recorder on the table between us to ensure that both our voices was clearly audible on the recorder.

During the interview she occasionally she asked me to repeat a question and to clarify some of the questions. One or two occasions she responded to a question asked and then interrupted

herself to request me to repeat that question. I got the impression that she wanted to make sure she responded "correctly". To this end I again reassured her that she was making a valuable contribution to the study. No technical difficulties were experienced. All the topics of the interview were thoroughly discussed and explored. There were no interruptions during the interview. Ellen did not complete the naïve sketch beforehand, but did send it to me a few days after the interview.

Personal field notes:

I perceived Ellen as friendly and inviting. Given the fact that I knew Ellen in a professional capacity prior to the interview supported my confidence to set a comfortable tone to enquire about the different aspects of the research phenomenon. I did not stumble over words or rush the interview. What I found difficult was to reassure Ellen that the answers she offered were valuable and not "wrong" in any way. Although I reassured her that the purpose of the interview was to obtain a better understanding of her lived experience, she seemed unsure of the "suitable answer" at times. After the interview Ellen also stated that it was a stressful experience for her. I again explained to her that she was making a valuable contribution to the study and that I appreciated her participation. Ellen struck me as a reliable and diligent employee and researcher and this might have contributed to her determination to offer "good" or "valuable" responses or answers. She is committed and hardworking in her employment position within the university.

Fieldnotes during and after the semi-structured individual interview(s) with Henry:

Field notes of interview 8

Interview 1

Interview date:	Starting time of interview:	Ending time of interview:
16 November 2018	07h45	08h36

Interview 2

Interview date:	Starting time of interview:	Ending time of interview:
30 November 2018	08h11	09h12

Henry chose not to complete the naïve sketch and suggested to have a second interview for further deliberations. The fieldnotes I made of the interviews with Henry were kept together and are concurrently reflected below.

People present during interviews:

Researcher

Participant number 8 (Pseudonym: Henry)

Observational field notes:

I observed Henry's nonverbal behaviour during both interviews and my impression was that he was relaxed and engaged in exploring the research phenomenon. Prior to start of the first interview he made sure that he had a very clear understanding of the focus of the study. It was clear that Henry was well prepared. During the interviews he made use of hand gestures to explain himself. The tone of his voice also altered depending on the matter discussed. I found that Henry was at ease during both interviews and considered each of my questions carefully before answering. Henry provided lengthy responses and rich descriptions of his understanding of the research phenomenon. He maintained eye contact during both interviews. Henry was enthusiastic and engaged during the first and second interview.

Theoretical field notes:

When I asked Henry about his understanding of engagement of researchers in RE he explained that for him it is the process or approach that the researcher follows of ensuring that a study or research project is adhering to proper ethical guidelines and that the results would be valid and

defendable. He mentioned that RE includes the application process, but it is more than that, it is a holistic approach to a research study.

Henry indicated that REC and the RE clearance process is perceived as being forced on researchers. He explained that the role of the REC is perceived as an obligation placed on researchers which only creates extra work. He thinks this approach creates negative engagement in RE. Henry shared that there are two distinct approaches which can be followed in terms of RE. The one approach would be compliance-based, whilst the alternative approach would be a values perspective. He said in order for researchers to be engaged in RE, a values approach to ethics should be followed. He also mentioned that the university currently have a compliance-based approach towards RE which is negative for the engagement of researchers. He said that the RE policy are interpreted as inflexible and forced, which means discretion and sound judgement disappears. He also explained that the individuals who implemented the current RE application process decided on the process to be followed and there was no room for negotiation. Furthermore, there were no change management initiatives within the university for better exposure of the RE processes and procedures. Henry mentioned that he understands the importance of RE and that he need not be convinced, but that he can almost experience empathy for frustrated researchers with the RE clearance process. He said that the expectations are very high and the clearance process is rigid.

When I asked Henry if HR can play a role to support the engagement of researchers in RE he explained that in order for researchers to be engaged in RE the organisation must have an ethical culture. A holistic approach needs to be followed to support engagement in RE. He said that any unethical behaviour within organisation will have a negative influence on engagement experienced. Harmony is thus needed between the ethics of organisation (a culture of ethics) and the benchmarks for RE.

Methodological field notes:

I have met Henry on a previous occasion, but have not had any formal dealings with him. I invited him to be part of the study and without any hesitation, he agreed to be involved. I was able to arrange a date and time without any difficulties. I realised that he had a very demanding schedule and the interview was arranged for early in the morning, prior to the start of business. His readiness to meet, in spite of a demanding schedule in his personal time confirmed his willingness to engage in the study.

In spite of the fact that Henry was clearly interested in the research phenomenon, he informed me beforehand that he had only one hour available for the interview. I was reminded that the profile of suitable participants was very specific and that these employees had very demanding schedules. I was also confronted with the idea that employees with such profiles are probably accustomed to being invited for participation in research studies and that they might feel irritated with the "trivial" yet time consuming protocol procedures such as creating rapport or reconfirming voluntary informed consent. My perception was that these employees are willing to help developing researchers, by participating in research studies and ultimately to see the developing researcher achieve success. Nevertheless, they have to manage their own stringent time demands and have impatience for "wasting time".

Both interviews were conducted at my office at the main campus of [REDACTED]. The digital voice recorder was placed on the table between us to ensure that our voices were clearly audible. The second interview was more conversational in nature where we simply shared ideas and discussed the focus of the research. At the beginning of the second interview we were deep in conversation in our mother tongue (Afrikaans) and only later realised that it would be more suitable to have the discussion in English.

Henry chose not to complete the naïve sketch and preferred to permit a second interview for further deliberations. To this end, a second interview was conducted. No technical difficulties were experienced in either of the interviews.

Personal field notes:

During the two interviews, Henry came across as very knowledgeable and I thought he demonstrated evidence of highly conceptual thinking skills. He spoke with authority and without hesitation. It was noticeable that he had years of experience within the academic environment. I considered Henry to be a highly skilled and intelligent person. Upon leaving the interview, I was very positive about the rich descriptions provided by him and pleased that he was willing to be part of the research study. I perceived Henry as someone with a strategic mind set, passionate about his work within the university.

ANNEXURE I: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT WITH TRANSCRIBER

TRANSCRIPTION CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, Nikki Solomon, on behalf of Nikann Solutions, hereby declare that I understand and agree to the following conditions with regards to the transcription of the audio voice recordings.

1. I understand that the audio voice recordings are received for the purpose of transcribing records of interviews held with the participants for the following research project:

A Human Resource Management practitioner framework to support academics' engagement in research ethics

2. I acknowledge that the research study is conducted by Ms Marié Uys with the purpose to complete her PhD degree, within the Department of Human Resource Management at

3. I understand that the identity of the participants and any individuals/ organisations/ institutions discussed as well as the content of the interviews are confidential and may not be revealed.

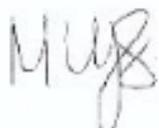
4. I undertake to treat all audio voice recordings as confidential content to which only I will have access. I will keep the audio voice recordings and any copied material securely.

5. I will return all copies back to the researcher on completion of the transcription.

Full Name of Transcriber: Nikki Solomon

Signature of Transcriber:  Date: 2017/10/24

Full Name of Primary Researcher: Marié Uys

Signature of Primary Researcher:  Date: 23 October 2017

ANNEXURE J: CONFIDENTIALITY AND QUALITY ASSURANCE AGREEMENT WITH INDEPENDENT CO-CODER

CO-CODER CONFIDENTIALITY AND QUALITY ASSURANCE AGREEMENT

This is to certify that I, Prof J E Maritz, the independent co-coder of the research project titled "Human Resource Management practitioner framework to support academic researchers' engagement in research ethics" agree to analyse the qualitative data of the abovementioned research study.

I acknowledge that the research study is conducted by Ms Marié Uys with the purpose to complete her PhD degree, within the Department of Human Resource Management at [REDACTED]

I understand that any information (written, verbal or any other form) obtained during the performance of my duties must remain confidential and in line with the [REDACTED] Policy on Research Ethics.

I understand that the identity of the participants and any individuals/ organisations/ institutions discussed as well as the content of the transcriptions are confidential and may not be revealed.

I understand that any unauthorised release or carelessness in the handling of these transcriptions is considered a breach of the duty to uphold confidentiality.

I undertake to treat all transcribed material as confidential content to which only I will have access. I will keep the transcribed material in a secure location.

I further understand that prior to the finalisation of my responsibilities, I need to have a consensus discussion with the main researcher to ensure that consensus is reached on main themes identified during the analysis of the data.

Full Name of Co-coder: __Jeanette E Maritz

J. Maritz

Signature of Co-coder:

Date: 18 March 2018

Full Name of Primary Researcher: Marié Uys

Signature of Primary Researcher: *M Uys*

Date: 18 /03/2018

ANNEXURE K: LETTER FROM LANGUAGE AND TECHNICAL EDITOR

Between  lines editing

Leatitia Romero
Professional Copy Editor, Translator and Proofreader
(BA HONS)

Cell: 083 236 4536
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www.betweenthelinesediting.co.za

22 February 2021

To whom it may concern:

I hereby confirm that I have edited the thesis entitled: "A HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTITIONER FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT THE ENGAGEMENT OF ACADEMICS IN RESEARCH ETHICS". Any amendments introduced by the author hereafter are not covered by this confirmation. The author ultimately decided whether to accept or decline any recommendations made by the editor, and it remains the author's responsibility at all times to confirm the accuracy and originality of the completed work.



Leatitia Romero

Affiliations

PEG: Professional Editors Group (ROM001)
EASA: English Academy of South Africa
SATI: South African Translators' Institute (1003002)
SfEP: Society for Editors and Proofreaders (15687)
REASA: Research Ethics Committee Association of Southern Africa (104)

ANNEXURE L: TURNITIN REPORT (DIGITAL RECEIPT)



Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

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Assignment title: Revision 3
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File size: 1.5M
Page count: 418
Word count: 146,562
Character count: 860,146
Submission date: 23-Feb-2021 09:24AM (UTC+0200)
Submission ID: 1516003972

