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KWAZULU-NATAL**

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Examining the impact of hybrid working practices on employees and organisational culture

By

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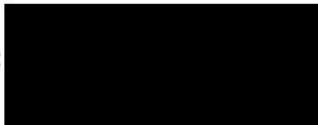
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I would like to thank my Lord and Saviour for carrying me through this season of my life, I never would have made it without your mercy and grace upon me during the most trying season of my life.

To my friends and family, thank you for being my anchors and for believing in me throughout this journey, your votes of confidence and prayers kept me going.

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Abstract

The impact of hybrid working practices on employees and organisational culture had become a pressing concern for organisations in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research aimed to examine the implications of hybrid working on employee behaviour and organisational culture, particularly within the context of a South African university's Professional Services. The study employed a quantitative research design with a pragmatic worldview, focusing on understanding how employees had adjusted to the new work model and quantifying the impact on productivity, job satisfaction, engagement, and leadership practices. The literature review delved into organisational culture theories, such as Schein's model, to better define and comprehend the components that shape an organisation's culture. Additionally, the study drew on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to explore how hybrid working may satisfy different employee needs and influence motivation levels. Previous research showed that hybrid working had both positive and negative impacts on organisational culture, with increased flexibility and improved work-life balance as potential positives, while reduced face-to-face interaction and communication challenges hindered culture cohesion. The research methodology involved pragmatism looking at a sample of 118 employees in the university's Professional Services who had experienced hybrid working. Data was collected through questionnaires administered via school notices to gauge the correlation between hybrid work structure and organisational culture. The outcome of the research showed that hybrid working certainly does have an impact on organisational culture. While this is a complex topic in that, it is dependent on an organisation and its readiness for hybrid work set ups, that is what determines the impact on culture. Factors affecting hybrid work were identified and were very much in line with the secondary research. As new work structures continue to emerge, this study highlights the importance of understanding the implications of hybrid working on employee well-being and organisational culture from a South African perspective.

Keywords: Employee satisfaction, Hybrid working, Organisational culture, Work-life balance

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List of Acronyms

COVID-19 – Coronavirus disease 2019

FREQ – Frequency

JD-R Model - Job Demands-Resources Model

SPSS - Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

UKZN – University of KwaZulu Natal

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Chapter one

Introduction and background to the study

1.1. Introduction

In its Top Trends to Watch in 2022 newsletter, LinkedIn reported that one in six jobs offered remote working in 2022, compared to 2020 where it was one in 67 (*Hybrid Work's Impact on Leaders, Employees, and Workplace Culture*, n.d.). It is no secret that the emergence of hybrid working, particularly during the COVID-19 era up to post-Covid times, has taken the world by storm and has certainly exposed the working class to a new and more convenient way of working that is far more appealing than being in the office daily. This research will examine the impact of hybrid working practices on employees and organisational culture.

1.1.1. Background to the study

As lockdown levels decreased and people started to ease back into normalcy, organisations decided to introduce hybrid working models to help workers adjust to the change that came with returning to the office. In listening to the preferences of workers, organisations found that workers did not want to go back to the office fully after realising that working remotely was possible. Whilst remote working is attractive and allows for a great deal of flexibility for workers, it also threatens the culture of an organisation (Harvard Business Review, 2022). Platforms for virtual meetings such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom Cloud Meetings, Skype, etcetera went from being used infrequently in the working world to being used daily. Working from home came with many pros and cons. The immediate benefits for employees were the time saved from not having to commute daily; money saved from not spending money on transport or fuel and lunch every day; and spending more time with family. Some of the cons for workers were not having sufficient space at home to set up a work space; no data plans in place to constantly be connected during work hours; the inability to focus on work at home with the rest of the family around; and issues with working remotely due to a lack of tech savviness; downtime due to load-shedding; and just a general sense of feeling out of touch with fellow colleagues. For organisations, the immediate pros were incurring fewer monthly costs on utilities due to less workers in the office, and the immediate negatives were running teams remotely; keeping team spirit alive virtually; unused office space; additional costs for the provision of equipment to work from home, as well as data allowances (Chung et al., 2021). An MIT study showed that workers with strong face-to-face relational ties communicated 60% more when they worked virtually, while workers with weak relational ties communicated 30%

less (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021). The study also revealed that being able to see each other in person allowed for better idea sharing and stimulated innovation (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021). Tharp (2009) suggests that the company culture for some organisations is considered the “glue” that holds an organisation together and for others, the “compass” that provides directions. From the above definitions, one can deduce that culture is a critical component in an organisation and cannot be neglected. It is an element that informs the type of employees that a business hires to help carry out the overall mission and vision of the company.

Flexible work prior to the 2019 pandemic was a strategy adopted by organisations to help employees cope with the stress of work and home life and lead more balanced lives. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, remote working became compulsory as a means to adhere to partial or full lockdown regulations that were put in place (Atiku & Ganiyu, 2022).

This study was conducted at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), an institution that promotes a culture that encourages excellent performance and social cohesion (HR Strategy, 2019). The university’s staff are divided into academic staff, which are the lecturers involved in teaching; and support staff, also known as professional staff, who operate in administration services across the schools within the different colleges. The academic staff have a work structure that is very flexible. They need to cover 40 hours of work per week. However, they are not required to be on campus to perform all their job functions. Support staff have a more structured working arrangement where they are required to report for duty daily. However, they are allowed flexi- time subject to an arrangement with their line manager, and this is an arrangement that can be withdrawn at any point if abused (HR Rewards Services, 2023).

1.2. Focus of the study

The focus of this study was to gain clarity on whether employees who have experienced a hybrid work set-up are more productive, happier in their jobs and have a work-life balance. The study also sought to understand whether flexible working affected corporate culture in a positive or negative way. For instance, hybrid working could diminish the corporate culture by reducing the interaction between employees (i.e., less team engagement and collaboration, as well as low productivity due to job intensification). On the other hand, hybrid working could improve employee job satisfaction as it provides a work and home-life balance, and gives employees autonomy over their work, which can contribute to higher productivity levels and lead to overall employee wellbeing, as happy employees contribute to a better work culture and ethos. The study looked at topics such as engagement in relation to the university and support

staff. Collaboration and communication within teams and across departments were also examined. The perceptions of employees on autonomy and trust within the organisation was investigated, along with feelings on the impact of hybrid working on employee productivity and managing personal and work life. It was important to understand the factors that affected hybrid working as this would lead to the second research objective which examined the impact of hybrid working on organisational culture. Although the university is made up of academic and support staff, this study focussed on support staff (HR Rewards Services, 2023).

1.3. Problem statement

Hybrid working is not a new phenomenon; however, it is a concept that grew and became very necessary during hard lockdown in many countries. (StatsSA, 2022) reported that there were more people in the first quarter of 2022 working from home than in the quarter 4 of 2021. Most people who are able to work from home either fall into the professional or managerial category (StatsSA, 2022). This research seeks to add to the body of knowledge on this topic by looking at remote working from a South African context and understanding the complexities and strain this bears on company culture. This study seeks to shed light on the impact that a hybrid work structure can have on employee well-being, performance, job satisfaction as well as how these factors affect organisational culture.

1.4. Purpose of the study

The aim of this research is to understand how hybrid working has affected employees since its inception during COVID-19 and its continued prevalence post COVID-19.

The questions that this research project will endeavour to answer are going to assist in demonstrating the factors that influence hybrid work and how hybrid work affects organisational performance.

1.4.1. Research question and hypothesis

This study will use one research question and one hypothesis to address the objectives.

- Research question

What are the factors affecting hybrid working?

A hypothesis has been developed to answer the research objective two.

- *Hypothesis*

H1: Hybrid working has an impact on organisational culture.

Dependant variable: organisational culture

Independent variable: Hybrid working

1.4.2. Research objectives

The study is based on the following research objectives:

1. To determine the factors that affect hybrid working; and,
2. To evaluate the impact of hybrid work on organisational culture

1.5. Research limitations

The inability to obtain substantial secondary data from prior studies was one of the study's drawbacks, as it could potentially lessen the depth of the insights. The researcher's capacity to conduct research on schedule was impacted by delays in obtaining ethical approval. Not enough funds were available to conduct the research in a bigger pool. There were inadequate and unreliable resources for gathering staff data. Staff did not respond to the questionnaire timeously.

1.6. Managerial implications

Upon completion of this study, if a relationship is discovered between flexible working and organisational culture, it would be beneficial for management to become acquainted with this research as a stepping stone in collecting further data on a larger scale in order to paint a better picture of the findings from this research and decide as a collective the way forward in light of the positive or negative feedback received. As previously defined, organisational culture is the foundation upon which a company and its people are built. Therefore, it cannot be allowed to deteriorate.

1.7. Outline of chapters in dissertation

The following is a brief overview of the chapters:

Chapter 1: Gives an outline of the study considering the background to the study, research aim and research objectives.

Chapter 2: Provides an overview of pertinent literature on flexible work schedules, employment satisfaction, and productivity.

Chapter 3: The research approach that is pertinent to this study is discussed. The population, study location, sampling size, and research strategy are the main topics of this.

Chapter 4: Reviews the survey results and provides an analysis, presentation, and discussion of them.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations are discussed.

1.8. Conclusion

New work structures with the emergence of virtual boardrooms and workspaces are practices that are here to stay. More research into this topic can contribute a great deal in helping not only other academics, but practitioners in the field of managing human capital, which is why it is necessary to continue a dialogue on hybrid working to foster the exploration of this topic in the academic research space, more especially from a South African perspective. The following chapter reviews literature on research that has been done in the past on hybrid working or telecommuting in relation to the employees and the organisation.

Chapter two

Literature review

2.1. Introduction

This literature review explores organisational culture by looking at theories such as Schein's model of organisational culture in order to determine the factors affecting organisational culture. This will help in trying to resolve whether flexible working and organisational culture are related in any way.

The aim and purpose of this research is to understand how hybrid working has affected employee well-being since its emergence during the COVID-19 era and its continued prevalence post covid. The study will endeavour to achieve this through determining the factors that affect hybrid working, as well as by unpacking how this practice affects organisational culture. In this literature, telecommuting and hybrid working will be used interchangeably.

2.2. Hybrid working

A hybrid working model is a system whereby workers are not constrained to working in the office and are instead unconstrained, meaning that they can work from the office and/or at home or any other environment outside or away from the office (Patel & Hoffer, 2022). As organisations continue to implement hybrid working arrangements, it is important to understand the impact of this shift on organisational culture. Smith-Jackson and Lagan-Fox (2008) believe that telecommuting on consecutive days can lead to social isolation as employees have less in-person interactions with clients, co-workers, and managers. This is why employers prefer to limit the number of consecutive days an employee telecommutes. Blount and Gloet (2017) findings imply that telecommuting is probably more beneficial to people than detrimental. However, they do highlight how intensely telecommuting can impair relationships between co-workers.

2.3. Perspectives on hybrid working

Allen et al. (2015) defines telecommuting as a working method that permits individuals to work full- or part-time outside of the office, typically from home, client locations or while traveling. Employees are still able to finish tasks and communicate with co-workers when working remotely. When work is completed off-site and employees connect to the office through telecommunications technology, it is also recognized as a type of alternative (or flexible) work arrangement. Full-time telecommuters engage with supervisors and co-workers virtually or not

at all because they complete all their work from a location other than their employers' offices (Smith-Jackson, & Lagan-Fox, 2008). In contrast, part-time telecommuters do some of their work outside of their employers' offices, but not all of it, and they engage with supervisors and co-workers on an infrequent but scheduled basis. The Centre for Work and Family's study found that employees who telecommute no more than two to three days per week are in the best situation. The extent to which telecommuting is encouraged or used varies from firm to employer. Smith-Jackson and Lagan-Fox (2008) assert that a variety of elements can affect how telecommuting arrangements are made in each setting or organisation. It is vital to remember that programs for telecommuting might be full- or part-time, formal or informal, and either initiated by the company or the employee. As mentioned in Chapter One, one of the objectives of this study is to determine the factors that affect hybrid working, hence this chapter will review various research on the effects of telecommuting.

According to Allen et al. (2015) research has discovered both positive and negative associations with hybrid working, despite conventional management wisdom to the contrary. The authors of this study propose an inverted U-shaped, curvilinear relationship between the degree of telecommuting and job satisfaction to explain these contradictory findings. In other words, this research has identified additional factors that affect telecommuting.

Their results reveal a curvilinear relationship between the degree of telecommuting and job happiness, with satisfaction appearing to plateau at higher levels of telecommuting. The results of this study were attained from a sample of 321 employees at professional level. Additionally, task interdependence and job discretion attenuated this relationship, indicating that certain job characteristics have a significant, conditioned impact. Although more than 20 million Americans work from home, according to Allen et al. (2015), researchers in management have been sluggish to investigate this increasingly common work arrangement. Working from home and communicating using computer-based technology, results in telecommuters spending a portion of their time away from the traditional office (Allen et al.,2015).

Overall, Allen et al. (2015) identified job happiness or satisfaction, task dependence and job discretion as factors that affect hybrid working. It seems that hybrid working initially leads to increased job satisfactions. however, the more the employee telecommutes and gets used to the flexibility, the derived satisfaction reaches a point where it levels out. The relationship between job satisfaction and telecommuting is also seemingly weakened by factors such as task dependence and job discretion.

As previously mentioned, LinkedIn reported that one in six jobs offered remote working in 2022, compared to 2020 where it was one in 67 (*Hybrid Work's Impact on Leaders, Employees, and Workplace Culture*, n.d.). A study conducted in 2022 by Future Forum Pulse also indicated the poor employee experience ratings received from employees who were office bound compared to those who were flexible. Furthermore, full-time office workers reported on factors such as work-life balance to be 2 times worse than flexible workers, a steep decline in environmental satisfaction, as well as 1.5 times worse in terms of work-related stress and anxiety (*Hybrid Work's Impact on Leaders, Employees, and Workplace Culture*, n.d.)

The overarching themes that arise in the literature from an employee viewpoint in relation to factors affecting hybrid working are job happiness, work-life balance, task dependence and employee engagement. There are still some blurred lines when it comes to the general sentiments around the effects of hybrid working on employee performance, simply because every organisation is different and their readiness for flexible working is different. Therefore, the experiences of employees, whilst similar, are also not the same.

2.4. Implications for employee well-being and performance

Golden and Fromen (2011) are in support of the view that telecommuting is linked to better contextual and task performance. Their study dispels concerns that telecommuting imposes collective suffering by pointing out that, in some cases, it can improve the social atmosphere of the workplace. Importantly, widely sampled work arrangements show that the negative consequences of potential telecommuters have not materialized.

Over the course of the research, Blount and Gloet (2017) posit that one recurring theme in assessments of telecommuting research has been the inability to draw conclusive determinations regarding even the most fundamental effects. A definite benefit of telecommuting is the minor but positive influence that it has on stress, perceived self-sufficiency, work-life balance, employee satisfaction and performance. Telecommuting also had no obvious negative consequences on the calibre of professional connections or projected career prospects, contrary to predictions in both academic and practitioner literature. Higher intensity telecommuting does have a drawback, though, in that it does appear to impair relationships between co-workers but not those with supervisors (Blount, & Gloet, 2017)

The research and theory addressed here indicate that these impacts can be effectively handled by sensible human resources policies, even though some of their intricacies have not yet been fully examined. Individual happiness is predicted by the psychological experience of

flexibility, which is held by those who believe they oversee the times, places and how they work, as well as the decision of where to draw the line between work and family (Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006). This is evidence from the study. Greater job control over one's schedule and location of employment, and a boundary management strategy that placed a priority on separating one's personal and professional domains were shown to be the two characteristics that were the most accurate markers of an individual's well-being. According to Kossek, Lautsch, and Eaton (2006), the study should make a distinction between accounts of formal flexibility use, informal flexibility practice, and the psychological importance of flexibility. Additionally, the authors showed that descriptive metrics of flexibility policy use and level of flexibility exercised do not consistently predict improved work-family outcomes. Psychological job control was linked to less work-family conflict as opposed to formal policy use.

Despite concerns that this would result in "shirking from home", more and more employees are now routinely working from home (WFH), according to Bloom et al. (2014). According to the research provided, a WFH experiment was conducted at Ctrip, a 16 000-person Chinese call centre for the travel sector. For a nine-month period, the individuals who elect to work from home (WFH) were arbitrarily assigned to work in the office or from home. Working from home has been shown to boost productivity by 13%, with 9% of that improvement coming from working longer shifts (resulting in fewer breaks and sick days) and the remaining 4% coming from affiliates making more calls per minute because of a more enjoyable and comfortable work environment. Performance-based promotions became less common, while at-home workers' job satisfaction increased, and their attrition rate declined by half. Once the experiment was determined to be successful, Ctrip made the WFH option available to the entire company, enabling the test participants to move back and forth between their residences and places of employment. It is interesting to note that over 50% of them were changed, leading to gains from WFH that almost doubled to 22%. This demonstrates how learning and selection effects can assist the use of cutting-edge management systems like WFH (Bloom et al., 2014). Hybrid working is not a new phenomenon. However, it is a concept that grew and became very necessary post hard lockdown. StatsSA (2022) reported that there were more people in the first quarter of 2022 working from home than in quarter 4 of 2021. Most people who can work from home either fall into the professional or managerial category (StatsSA, 2022).

The intensification of labour is the unexpected consequence of adopting flexible working habits, as explored in the essay by Kelliher and Anderson (2009). In line with earlier studies

and based on a study of professionals, it gives evidence showing that flexible workers have higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment than their non-flexible counterparts (Kelliher, & Anderson, 2009). However, the authors also point out indications of rising workloads for people who work fewer hours and for remote workers. These intensifications are separated into three different processes, namely imposed intensification, enabled intensification, and intensification brought about by exchange or reciprocation (Kelliher, & Anderson, 2009). Moreover, these authors also point out indications of rising workloads for people who work fewer hours, and for remote workers. The authors separate this intensification into three different processes: imposed intensification, enabled intensification, and intensification brought about by exchange or reciprocation (Kelliher, & Anderson, 2009). The authors contend that the seemingly counter-intuitive association between high job satisfaction, organizational commitment and work intensification can be explained by people exchanging freedom for effort. The research contends that if given the choice to work flexibly, employees will exert greater effort to help their employer, in accordance with the Social Exchange hypothesis.

From the section above, one can deduce that the degree of intensity in telecommuting will naturally lead to a different overall experience of job flexibility per individual or firm. This can either aid in providing improved employee well-being and job performance or bring about strain and stress due to increased workload, leading to a decrease in work-life balance, which was previously identified as one of the benefits of flexible working.

2.5. Organisational culture

Organisational culture can be defined in many ways, depending on the company and field. However, while it is defined differently, it is generally the same concept across organisations. Schein's model of organisational culture is one of the oldest yet most relevant models that better defines organisational culture even today. The theory looks at organisational culture from 3 different vantage points, namely artifacts, values, as well as underlying assumptions, otherwise known as the levels of culture (Schein, 2010). *Artifacts* are basically the feelings and observations one makes as they enter a culture. One can attempt to make sense of what they have noted by asking someone from the inside what it means. Supposing one were to simplify this even further, one could say that these feelings would normally be experienced by someone who has recently joined the business, perhaps in their first few days of work. *Values* are what keeps the vision alive, they are moral principles, standards, sets of norms and goals that govern a business (Schein, 2010). Simply put, these attributes are considered during interviews to

ensure that the candidate chosen can align with the values of the company. The chosen candidate would normally be formally introduced to a company's values in the induction stage.

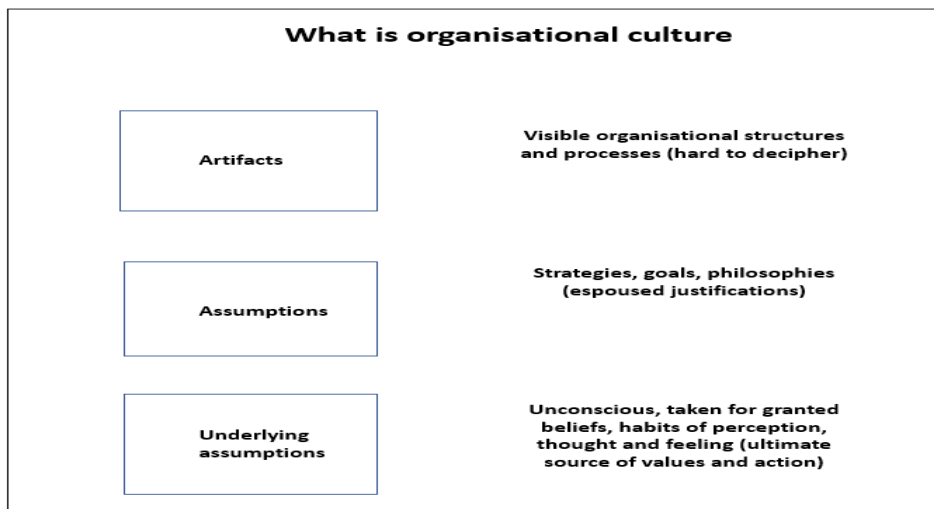


Figure 2. 1 Schein's model of Organisational Culture

Source: Schein (2010; p23)

Finally, *underlying assumptions* are a product of the organisation's shared values over time. These assumptions are a transformation of values into culture, they are often difficult to see, and only often known and understood by people of that organisation (Schein, 2010). Underlying assumptions come into fruition through the continuous practice of moral principles, standards, norms, etcetera. For instance, the way individuals relate to one another, work with one another, see and represent the company all stems from underlying assumptions. The literature views Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2007) to understand what type of need flexible working satisfies and how this satisfaction can affect corporate culture.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs can be applied as follows: the needs at the bottom of the pyramid need to be met before an individual can focus on the needs higher up in the model (McLeod, 2007). Being employed and earning a salary helps take care of basic needs such as physiological and safety needs, as it is assumed that one can afford food, shelter, water and sanitation. Having a family, friends and good co-worker relationships takes care of the next level of needs, which are belonging and esteem. McLeod (2007) states that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs can be further broken down into deficiency needs and growth needs, which both relate to motivation. Deficiency needs have a negative relationship with motivation, i.e. the less food one has, the hungrier they get and the more food one has, the fuller they become, thus the less they want the food. Dissimilarly, growth needs have a positive relationship with motivation

wherein the more one achieves set targets at work, the more motivated one is to continue working and achieving.

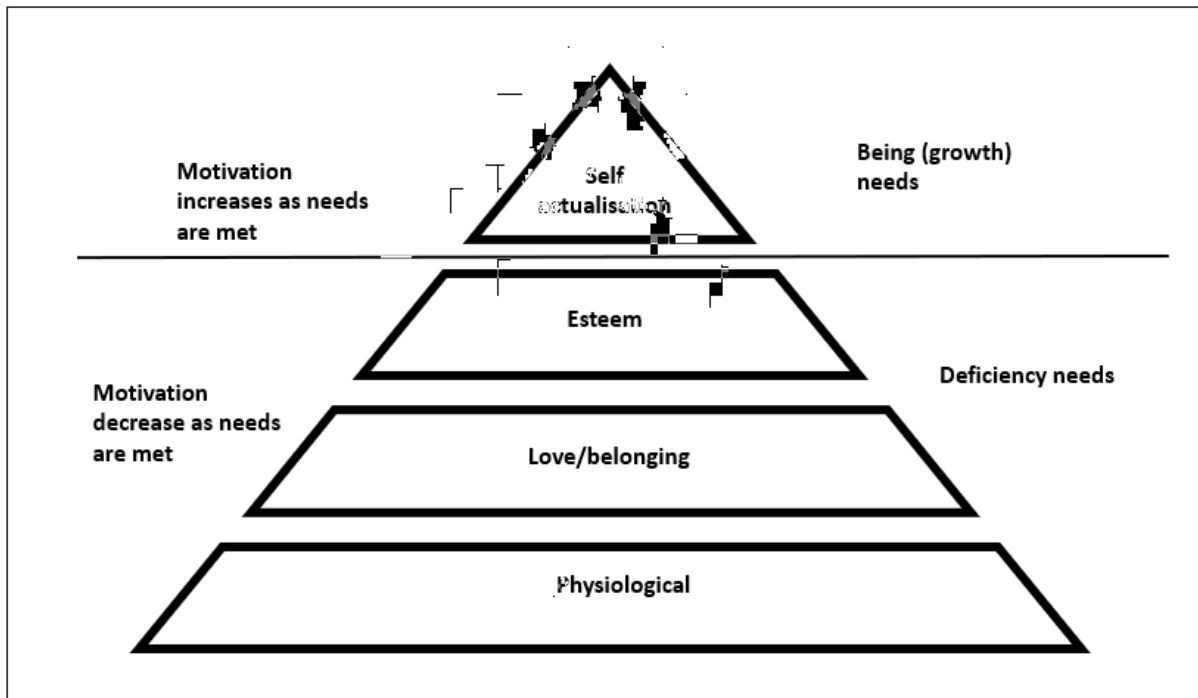


Figure 2. 2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Source: McLeod (2007; p2)

The research will be built around the theoretical framework of the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R Model) designed by Bakker and Demerouti in 2007 (van Steenbergen, van der Ven, Peeters, & Taris, 2018). The JD-R Model is a well-known theoretical framework that explores the interaction between job demands and job resources and their impact on employee well-being and performance. In this study, job demands can be characterised by employee performance, collaboration and communication. Job resources can be characterised by flexibility, autonomy and organisational support, which can lead to outcomes such as enhanced employee performance and job satisfaction. In 2015, Ter Hoeven and Van Zoonen wrote another paper outlining how this model can highlight specific issues in the workplace related to employee well-being. It is specifically chosen as a theoretical framework for this study as it allows one to categorise the different factors in the workplace that influence culture, and the model gives an outcome at the end. This framework will allow for an analysis of these factors in the context of UKZN professional services staff, which will in turn shed light on employee well-being since COVID-19.

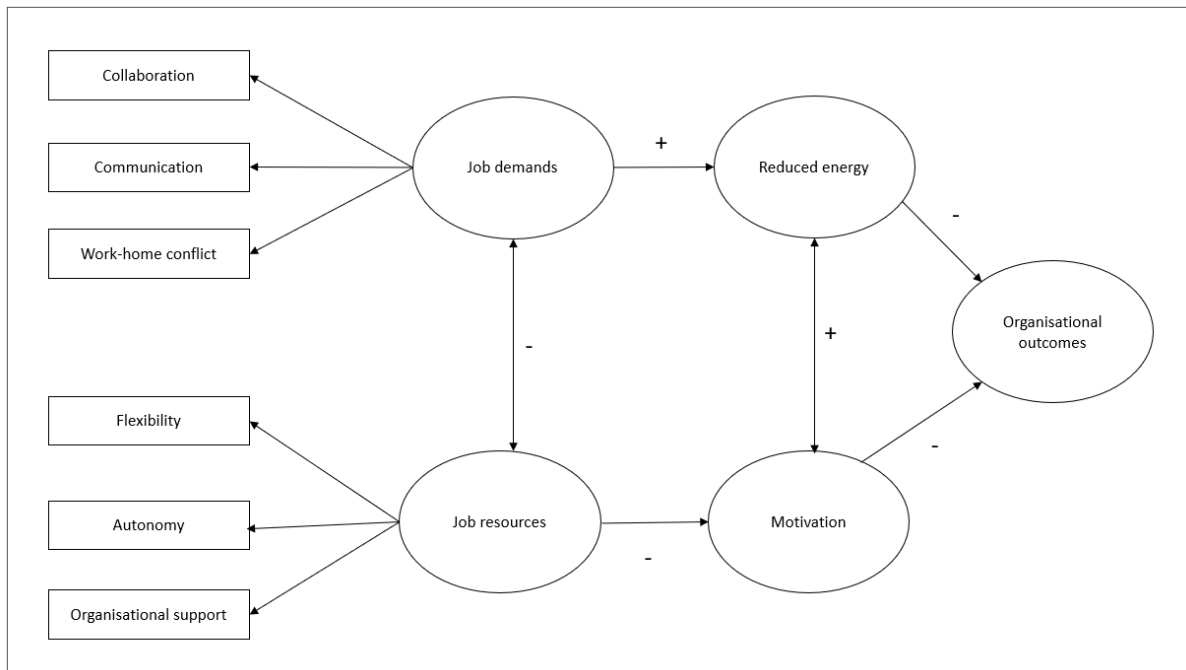


Figure 2.3 Job Demand-Resources model (JD-R model)

Source: Bakker & Demerouti (2007; p320)

2.5.1. Benefits and challenges of hybrid work arrangements

Hybrid is a work phenomenon that is currently becoming increasingly common. The construct has benefits as well as challenges. For instance, while working from home allows one to spend more time at home and around the family, this can also cause work-home conflict as the lines between work and family time become blurred. Below are a few benefits and challenges identified in different studies.

2.5.1.1. The immediate positive impact on organisational culture

Employees who use hybrid working arrangements enjoy greater flexibility and autonomy as they can manage their workload with more freedom and flexibility, which has a good effect on business culture. A positive company culture marked by greater employee engagement, satisfaction and commitment can be facilitated by giving workers flexibility to choose where they prefer to fulfil their daily tasks from since they feel more trusted, empowered and driven (Pittino et al., 2018).

A better work-life balance can be achieved by cutting down on travel time and giving staff members more freedom to balance their personal and professional obligations. Hybrid working can enhance personal and work life by creating a balance between the two. By encouraging a

good work-life balance, lowering burnout and improving general well-being, this can have a positive effect on company culture and in turn boost job satisfaction, motivation and loyalty (Chung et al., 2021).

Diverse perspectives and innovation: employers using hybrid working arrangements can recruit talent from around the world, resulting in a more welcoming company culture. Increased diversity of viewpoints, ideas and innovation may arise from this, which may help to foster an organizational culture that emphasizes diversity, creativity and ongoing learning (Schein, 2010).

2.5.1.2. The negative impact on organisational culture

Diminished in-person social interaction and cooperation: Employee in-person social interaction and cooperation may be restricted by hybrid working, which could have a negative impact on organizational culture. Building the relationships, trust, and teamwork that are the cornerstones of company culture requires collaboration and social involvement. Decreased cooperation and social involvement can lead to poor communication, a lack of cohesion, and a weakened sense of feeling included all of which can be harmful to the culture of the organization (Golden, 2020).

Increasing communication hurdles: Hybrid working can have a negative impact on organizational culture. These obstacles might arise from difficulties coordinating and aligning tasks, misinterpreting information, and a lack of visibility in hybrid working environments. A positive work environment that fosters transparency, confidence, and comprehension requires efficient communication. Miscommunication, misalignment, and the deterioration of organizational culture can result from ineffective communication in a diverse work environment (Neeley, 2021).

Working in a hybrid set up may lead to unanticipated consequences and possible injustices, such as unequal access to opportunities, resources, and professional progression, which can negatively affect workplace culture. Organisational culture may be negatively impacted by perceptions of favouritism, unfairness and diminished trust amongst employees because of unequal access to resources and opportunities (Battilana et al., 2020).

While remote working is great and allows for a great deal of flexibility for workers, it also threatens the culture of an organisation. Organisational culture, which encompasses shared values, beliefs, norms and practices within an organisation, plays a crucial role in shaping

employee behaviour, performance and overall organisational performance. An MIT study showed that workers with strong relational ties face-to-face, communicated 60% more when they worked virtually; while workers with weak relational ties communicated 30% less (Patel & Hoffer, 2022). The study also revealed that being able to see each other in person allowed for better idea sharing and stimulated innovation (Patel & Hoffer, 2022)

2.6. Conclusion

In summary, the above literature took the subject of hybrid working and divided it into two parts. The first reviewed the impact of hybrid working on individuals or employees. The second part analysing the impact of hybrid working on organisations. This approach allowed for various themes to arise. In the first part of the literature, work-life balance, job satisfaction, employee well-being, task dependence, workload, etc., are all themes that the study was able to delve into. It is evident that these factors come up differently for everyone based on how hybrid working has been adopted in their organisation. Similarly, the second part of the studies review employee performance, engagement, organisational support and collaboration as factors that stood out as determinants of the impact of hybrid working on organisational culture. The preparedness of an organisation in its adoption, technological systems and human resource policies all play a role in the positive or negative effect that flexible working practices can have on the culture of an organisation. The overall sentiment is that flexible working is a complex subject influenced by a number of factors that lead to its success or detriment. The following chapter will discuss the research methodology chosen for this study.

Chapter three

Research methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the research questions and objectives of the study. It will also review the research methodology and design, as this will help shed light on how data for this study is collected. This research highlights the philosophy that was chosen to support this study, as well as the strategy. Using the JD-R Model, this research will analyse how the factors that affect hybrid working in turn influence organisational culture and performance.

In trying to find answers, the research drew a sample from the South African market at the University of KwaZulu-Natal by looking at staff in Professional Services. It is necessary to embark on this study as a means to bulk up the body of knowledge where this topic is concerned, specifically from a South African context. The literature reviewed thus far is international literature where the entire phenomenon of flexible working is something that has been in existence for some time. In relation to South Africa, this phenomenon is something that became prevalent during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The aim and purpose of this research is to understand how hybrid working has affected employee well-being and organisational culture at the University of KwaZulu-Natal since its inception during COVID-19 and its continued prevalence post COVID-19. The questions that this research project will endeavour to answer are going to assist in demonstrating the factors that influence hybrid work and how hybrid work affects organisational culture. This will also help add weight to the body of knowledge, especially where South Africa is concerned.

The respondents who participated in the study gave responses which will assist in answering the research question and the hypothesis, namely:

- Research question

What are the factors affecting hybrid working?

A hypothesis has been developed to address research objective two.

- Hypothesis

H1: Hybrid working has an impact on organisational culture.

Dependant variable: organisational culture

Independent variable: Hybrid working

Research objectives

- To determine the factors affecting hybrid working; and
- To investigate the impact of hybrid work on organisational culture.

3.2. Research design

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), a research design can be described as the blueprint to collecting data; measuring the data collected; and analysing or evaluating the data gathered to resolve a research problem. There are two main broad categories for research types, namely qualitative and quantitative research. This study uses a quantitative approach to assess the research theory, which seeks to identify a set of characteristics that affect hybrid working and their influence on organisational culture. This can also be called a descriptive approach. Therefore, the research has been built upon a non-probability sampling technique.

3.3. Research paradigm

Pragmatism is one of the four worldviews under the research discipline (Creswell, 2014). This paradigm was chosen because it supports the kind of research which identifies a problem or subject in the real world (hybrid working) and the consequences (positive or negative) that this new-age way of working might have on corporate culture.

The research was built around the theoretical framework of the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R Model) by Bakker and Demerouti (2007). The JD-R Model is a well-known theoretical framework that explores the interaction between job demands and job resources and their impact on employee well-being and performance. In this study, job demands can be characterised by employee performance, collaboration and communication. Furthermore, job resources can be characterised by flexibility, autonomy and organisational support, which can lead to outcomes such as enhance employee performance and job satisfaction.

3.4. Study site

The study was conducted using a questionnaire administered to the staff at UKZN campuses. This research targeted staff who fall under Professional Services, specifically those who have experienced a hybrid work set-up during and after the pandemic.

3.5. Target population

The target population was 1021 professional services staff members, including all individuals amongst professional services staff who had experienced hybrid working either during the COVID-19 era or after the pandemic.

3.6. Sampling strategy

The study was conducted by way of Simple Random Sampling, looking at a sample of 118 employees in Professional Services at UKZN who have experienced hybrid working. The formula used was:

$$n' = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{z^2 \times \hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{\varepsilon^2 N}}$$

z is the z score = 1.75

ε is the margin of error = 0.5

N is the population size = 1021

ĥ is the population proportion = 0.5

The answer was 118, This means 118 or more measurements/surveys are needed to have a confidence level of 75% that the real value is within ±5% of the measured/surveyed value (Sample Size Calculator, n.d.). Saunders et al. (2009) states that when choosing a sample for analysis, it should meaningfully and justifiably represent the population drawn from it in order to address our research issue and achieve our goals.

We tried to gain an understanding by looking at how these working systems had impacted workers. The sample size of 118 employees was drawn from a target population of 1021 professional service workers at UKZN recorded in 2023 which combined all 19 schools across the five campuses. Govender (2017) did a similar study at Eskom to see if flexible working had an impact on job satisfaction and performance. He also used a questionnaire to collect the data and his study concluded that flexible work arrangements resulted in a more balanced work and home life. Another benefit of using a survey questionnaire is that the data collected can be used to suggest reasons for relationships between certain variables.

The sample included all employees male and female of all age groups working in Professional Services. The respondents remained anonymous. These insights assisted in painting a picture of the consistency or lack thereof in the corporate cult of the business because of hybrid working.

3.7. Data collection

The questionnaire was distributed via University Notices on the 24th of August 2023. However, only 53 responses were received by 15 September 2023. Due to the low response rate online, the rest of the questionnaires were administered on campus, door-to-door from the 10th to the 19th of October 2023. Altogether 118 questionnaires were administered, and 118 respondents returned the questionnaires. This represents a 100% response rate. According to Smart Survey (2023), a response rate of above 50% is considered high. All 100% of the returned questionnaires were valid.

3.8. Research instrument

Primary data was collected via a questionnaire as this is a quantitative study. The questionnaire used a Likert Scale to measure the opinions of respondents. This questionnaire was administered via School Notices on the university platform. Saunders et al. (2009) state that a survey or questionnaire is usually used for a deductive research strategy as this approach seeks to answer questions. They further mention that surveys are commonly used in studies that are exploratory and descriptive and are often conducive to gathering information from a large population at an affordable rate. This is relevant to this study as the researcher is aiming to confirm specific theories at a large university but looking at a specific sample and will analyse the results using descriptive and inferential statistics.

The chosen research tool (a questionnaire) for this quantitative study sought to understand how people have adjusted to the new way of working, as well as to quantify how diverse groups of people have adapted to the hybrid work model. The idea was to understand, through the questionnaires, how hybrid working had impacted employee productivity, employee satisfaction and engagement; how this has impacted leadership; and how leadership has tried to maintain the corporate culture even in virtual boardrooms.

3.9. Pre-Testing

The questionnaire was pre-tested on the target audience prior to being administered to the sample in order to allow for any improvements and refinements that the research collection tool needed prior to being put to use. Hence, a pilot test for this study was done prior to the collection of data, and the test was administered from 1 August to 4 August 2023. The respondents took an average of 4 minutes to complete it and their feedback was incorporated to improve the questionnaire.

3.10. Data validity and reliability

Below are further reasons to substantiate the use of a single data collection tool in relation to validity and reliability.

One can keep a focused and organized research approach by choosing just one method for gathering data. This enables the researcher to focus on a certain strategy and maximize their efforts to collect extensive data using that method. It aids in keeping the research design, analysis and interpretation consistent (Creswell, 2014).

Time and resources can be saved by collecting data using a single technique. Learning and applying a variety of data collection methods can be time-consuming, especially if one has to teach research assistants or arrange for the use of multiple methods at once (Saunders et al., 2009). Using a single technique can streamline the process, lessen logistical issues, and allocate resources more effectively.

Focusing on a single method of data collection allows one to explore the chosen methodology in greater detail. The researcher can invest more time and energy into becoming knowledgeable about the nuances and complexity of that particular methodology. This type of study can yield more comprehensive, in-depth understandings from the data, raising the standard of one's conclusions (Creswell, 2014).

When a single technique is employed for data collection, integration and synthesis of the collected data are made easier. Consequently, a more coherent analysis and interpretation of the findings can be carried out. This makes it possible to analyse participant responses, use consistent analytical procedures, and identify recurrent themes or patterns.

Focusing on a single data collection strategy allows one to become an expert in that approach, according to Saunders et al. (2009). This information can raise the calibre of one's research by guaranteeing proper execution, reducing errors, and boosting the validity and reliability of one's data.

When researchers stick to one technique for gathering data, they have more control over the research process (Saunders et al., 2009). One can closely monitor and oversee data collection to guarantee conformity to the research protocol, ethical considerations, and quality criteria. Maintaining the validity and rigor of one's study is aided by this control.

For this study to be carried out at UKZN in accordance with ethical guidelines, ethical clearance has to be obtained. The results will be run through the Statistical Package for the Social

Sciences (SPSS) program for more dependable reporting in order to guarantee the accuracy of the feedback. Finally, supervisors will have access to the data, which will be saved on MS Teams. Following five years, the data will be destroyed in compliance with the UKZN Research and Ethics Policy.

3.11. Data analysis

A popular statistical software program, (SPSS), has several capabilities for data administration, descriptive statistics and sophisticated statistical analysis (IBM, 2023). The results were interpreted, and conclusions were drawn from the research results. The outcomes helped ascertain if there was any type of correlation between hybrid work structure and organisational culture. The results assisted in formulating recommendations where job demands, and job resources are concerned and would add to the body of knowledge on this topic in the academic space.

3.12. Ethical considerations

This research does not involve risk, and there is no compensation for participating in this study. This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: HSSREC/00005711/2023). A Gate Keeper's Permission Letter was obtained from the office of the Registrar at UKZN for this study to proceed. The study was administered via an online questionnaire. Respondents were made aware when they completed the consent form within the questionnaire that this study is not compulsory and participation was only to be undertaken voluntarily. Respondent anonymity was maintained throughout the study.

3.13. Conclusion

This chapter described the research methodology adopted in this study. In conclusion, this study was conducted via a questionnaire as this was a deductive and exploratory study. From the questionnaire, descriptive and inferential results were analysed to build the story that would speak to the research objectives. The following chapter will present and unpack the results of the research.

Chapter four

Presentation, analysis, and discussion of results

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the results of this study, as well as the interpretation and discussion of the findings. The results will also be triangulated with the literature review. The data in this section was sorted and analysed using SPSS version 29.0.1.0 and Microsoft Excel.

The returned questionnaires were evaluated, and the results of the research are depicted graphically, followed by a discussion pointing to the body of research where the impact of hybrid working is examined in relation to employees and organisational culture.

Research objectives:

1. To determine the factors affecting hybrid working; and
2. To examine the impact of hybrid working on organisational culture.

4.2. The reliability test

The instrument consisted of 16 items with a Cronbach Alpha reliability score of 0.780. According to Daud et al. (2018), a reliability score between 0.6 – 0.8 is considered moderate but acceptable.

Sections	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient	Number of Items	Comment
One	0.780	16	Reliable

4.3 Demographic information of respondents

This study was specific in terms of the respondents targeted. The respondents were chosen based on 3 factors: namely that they worked at UKZN; were under professional services; and had experienced hybrid working. The respondents were both male and female; there was no specific age group; and all races group were included. It is assumed that the respondents carry at least an undergraduate qualification. The study was not specific about what job position or level the respondents needed to have, and the prerequisite was being a UKZN employee. This study was very inclusive in that sense.

4.4. Analysis of questionnaires returned

A sample of 118 respondents was randomly chosen for the study. The sample included staff members from professional services at UKZN from the 19 schools on the 5 campuses. The

members chosen were those who had experienced hybrid working since the Covid-19 period. The questionnaire was administered through the University Notice system using a link, but only 53 responses were returned after a month. The remaining 65 questionnaires were handed out physically altogether, 118 responses were returned which represents a 100% response rate. According to Fincham and Jack (2008), researchers should target a response rate of above 60% for survey research to avoid response rate bias.

4.5. Presentation, analysis, and discussion of results

This section represents the results of each item in the questionnaire in relation to the set research objectives. The data was described in terms of skewness because it is not at intervals and ratios. Each graph was drawn using two variables: frequency (FREQ) and the level of agreement as per the Likert scale. The first nine questions of the research instrument were designed to gather information to answer the first research question, which was on the factors that affect hybrid working.

Question 1: I am satisfied with a hybrid work set-up

The graph below shows participants' perceptions of their satisfaction with a hybrid work set-up.

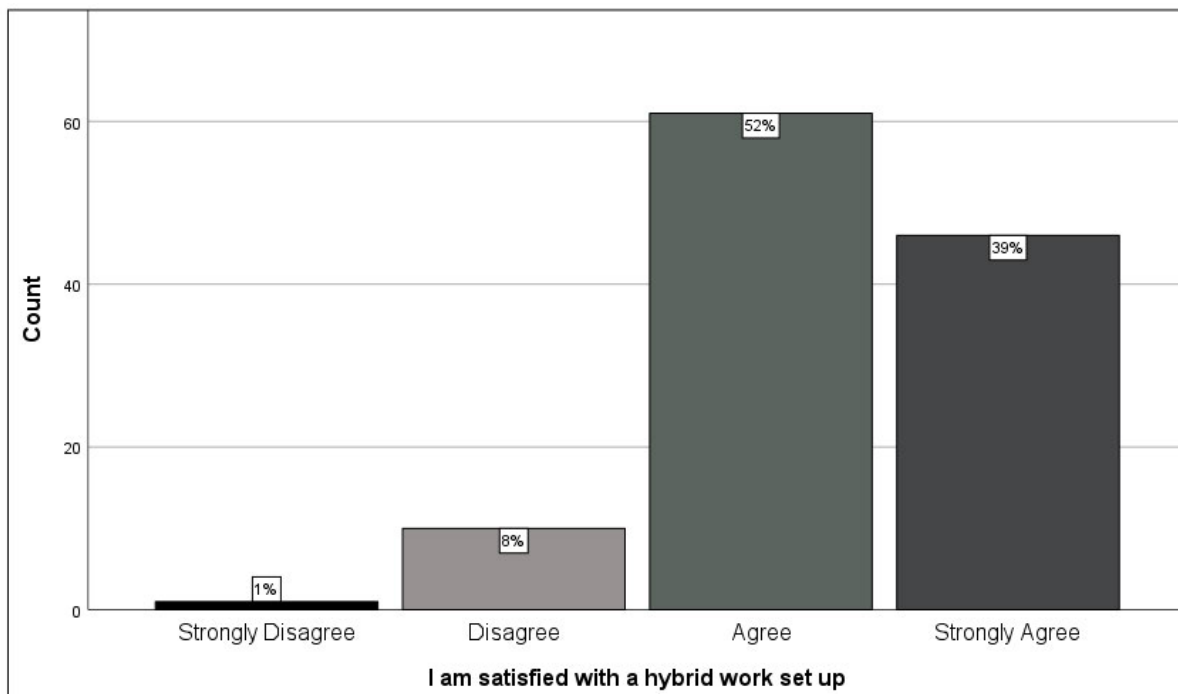


Figure 4. 1 Employee satisfaction with a hybrid work arrangement

Figure 4.1 displays that fifty-two percent agreed that they were satisfied with a hybrid work set-up, while 39% strongly agreed, 8% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed with the statement.

One can conclude that the consensus of the employees is that they are satisfied with a hybrid work arrangement.

Question 2: It is highly important to me to be flexible.

The graph below shows the perceptions of respondents concerning the importance of being flexible.

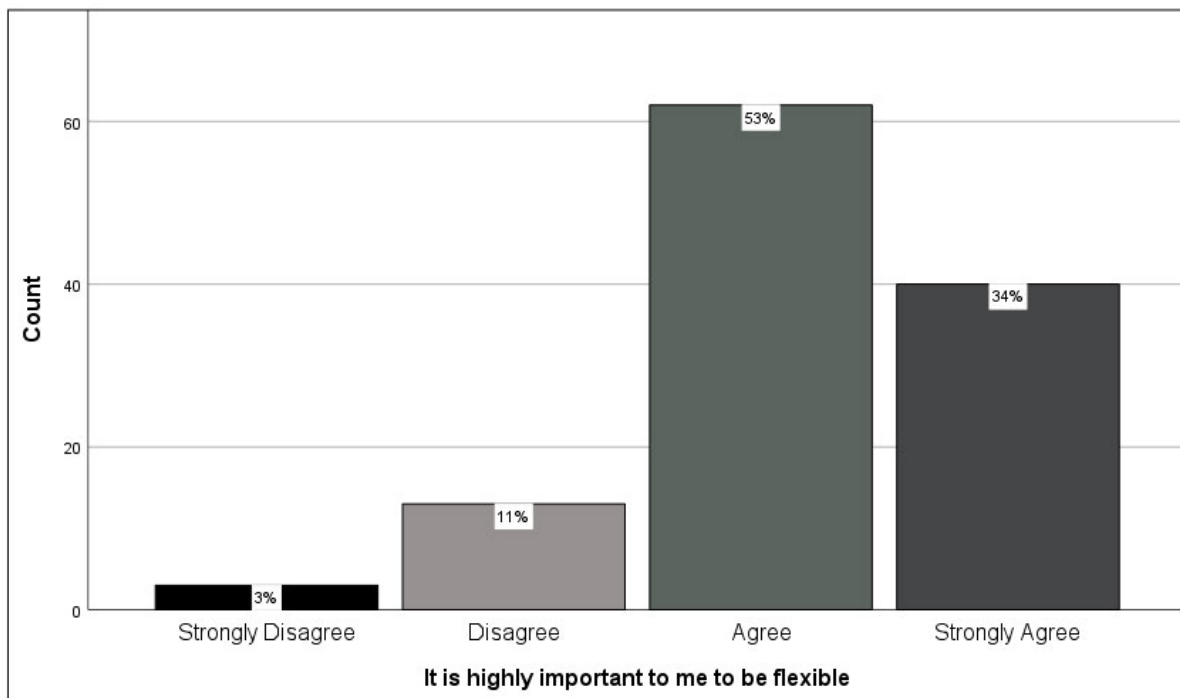


Figure 4. 2 Employee thoughts on importance of being flexible

Figure 4.2 shows that fifty three percent of respondents agreed with the statement that hybrid working is important to them. A further 34% of respondents strongly agreed, while 11% disagreed that being flexible is important and 3% strongly disagreed. The response to this item was skewed more towards agreeing that it is highly important to be flexible. Being flexible is important for many reasons such as those highlighted in Chapter 2 which are an improved work-life balance, reduced stress, higher productivity, and greater job satisfaction (Blount and Gloet, 2017).

Question 3: I have sufficient resources and technological tools for hybrid working.

The graph below displays participants' thoughts on having sufficient resources and technological tools to work in a hybrid environment.

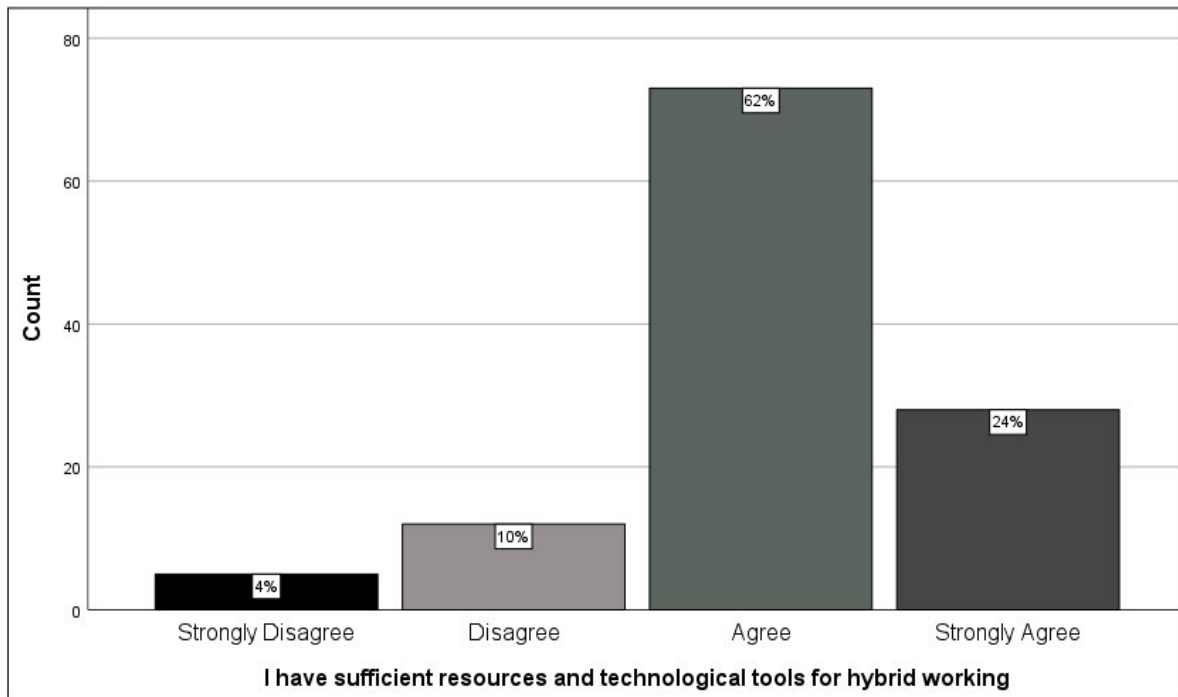


Figure 4. 3 Employee opinions on sufficiency of resources and technological tools for hybrid working

According to figure 4.3 sixty two percent agreed that they had enough resources and technical tools for hybrid working. 24% strongly agreed, while 14% disagreed with the statement. This means that 86% of respondents believe that they have enough resources and tools to perform their duties in a hybrid arrangement. The right tools are important for one to perform their duties remotely as everything is left to technology. One of the disadvantages highlighted in Chapter 2 in relation to hybrid working was the disparities in access to resources (Battilana et al., 2020). While the respondents were not asked to elaborate on this statement based on past research one can assume that the 14% who disagreed with this statement disagreed for reasons such as disparities in access to resources.

Question 4: I am able to manage personal responsibilities with a lot more ease when working remotely versus in the office.

The graph below shows participants' perceptions of whether they can manage personal responsibilities better when working remotely compared to working from the office.

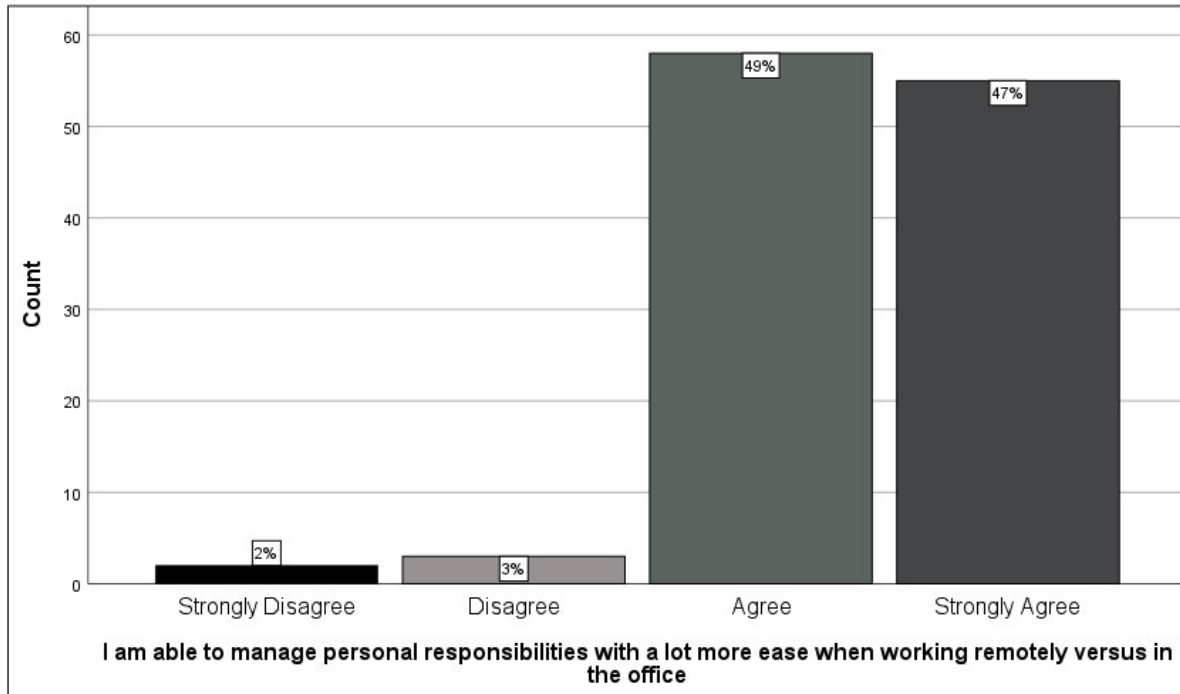


Figure 4. 4 Employee opinions on their ability to manage home and work life when working remotely

Figure 4.4 clearly shows that 95% of employees agree with the statement while 5% disagreed. One can deduce that working remotely made it easier for the respondents to manage their personal responsibilities better. It was previously discussed that hybrid working allows employees to spend more time with their families and less time is spent travelling which improves employee well-being (Pittino et al., 2018).

Question 5: Flexible working has improved my work-life balance.

The graph below shows respondents' perceptions of whether hybrid working has improved their work-life balance.

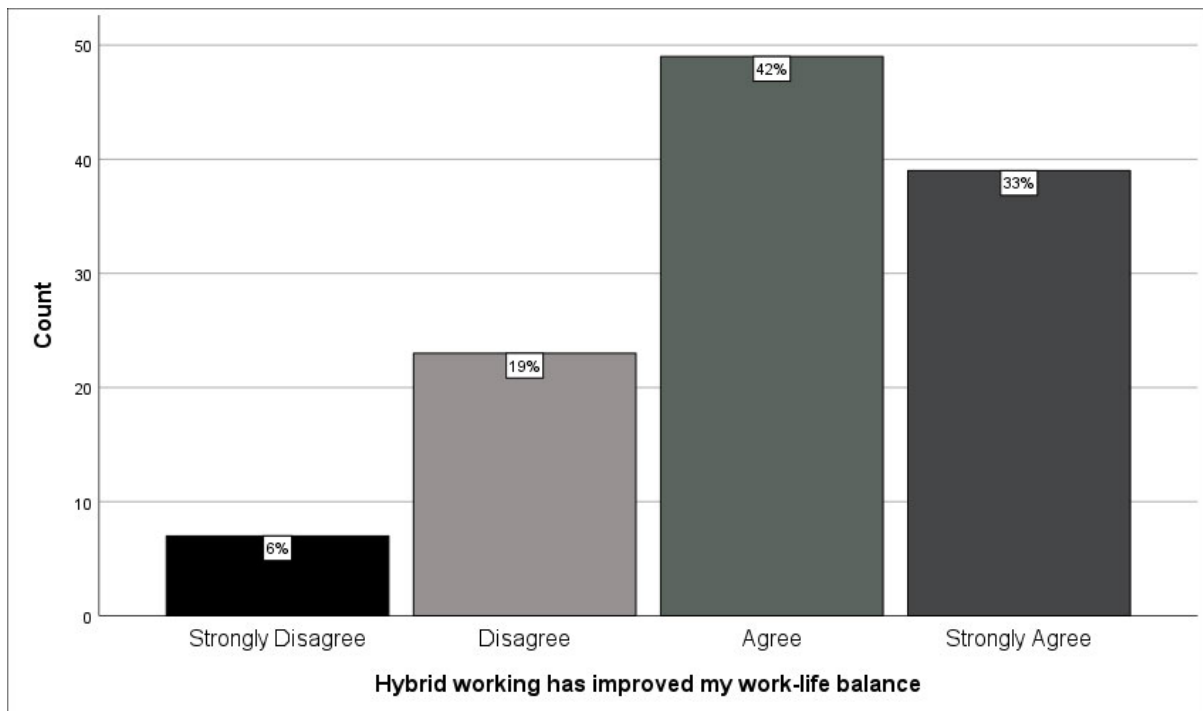


Figure 4. 5 Employee thoughts of how hybrid working has improved their work-life balance

Figure 4.5 displays that 75% of respondents agreed, while 25% disagreed. Which means a quarter of the respondents disagreed that hybrid working improved their work-life balance, whereas most of the respondents believed that they had achieved a better work-life balance through hybrid working. Work-life balance was one of the themes that were highlighted in relation to telecommuting and the results of this item are consistent with the literature review. Cutting down on travel and giving employees more freedom with their time and personal obligations can aid in a good work-life balance (Chung et al., 2021).

Question 6: My communication and collaboration with my colleagues when working remotely is effective.

The graph below shows respondents' thoughts on the effectiveness of their communication and collaboration with colleagues when working remotely.

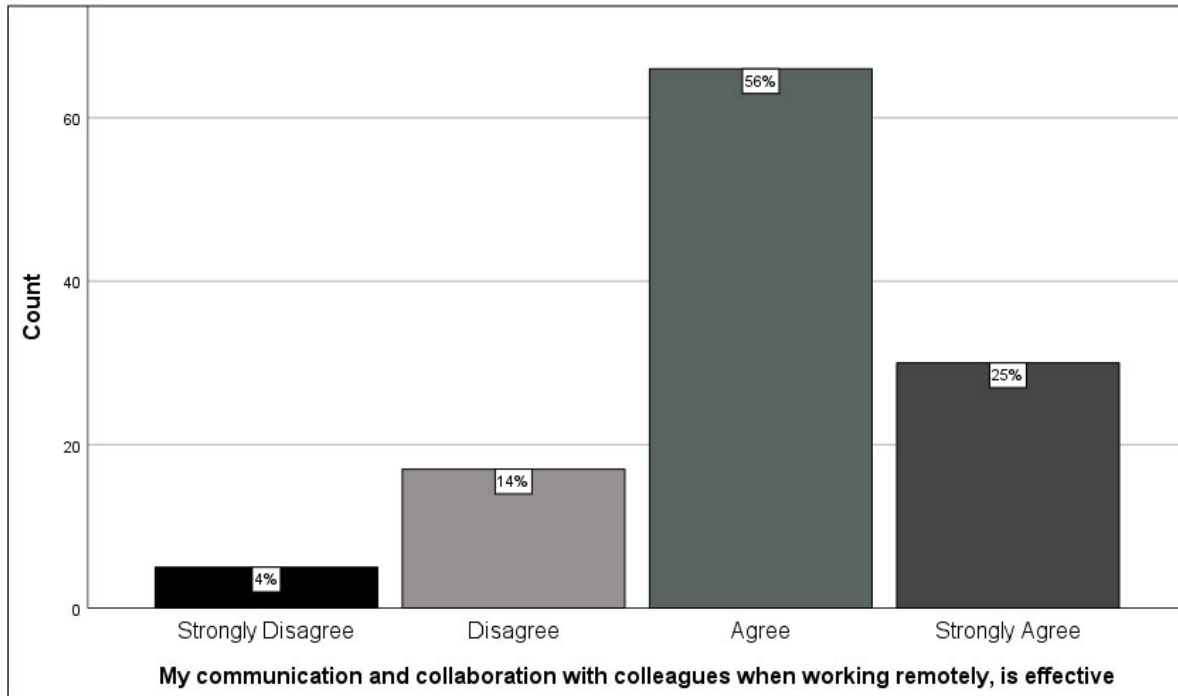


Figure 4. 6 Employees feelings on effective of collaboration and communication when working remotely

Figure 4.6 shows that 56% of respondents agreed with the statement, with 25% strongly agreeing, while 18% disagreed with the statement. According to these results, it is a general sentiment that communication and collaboration when working remotely can remain effective. Under figure 4.3, the popular opinion was that employees felt they had sufficient resources to perform their jobs remotely, therefore, it is no surprise that for this statement, majority of the employees agree that their communication and collaboration when working remotely is effective. Golden (2020) states that collaboration and engagement are crucial for creating a good bond and trust within teams and that reduced social engagement may cause communication breakdowns within a team. The majority of UKZN professional services feel that they are communicating and collaborating effectively. This means that the online communication platforms available are working effectively for the teams in such a way that the majority find the communication effective.

Question 7: MS Teams is a very useful tool for staying connected and collaborating with colleagues.

The graph below displays respondents' perceptions on Microsoft Teams being a useful tool for staying connected and collaborating with colleagues.

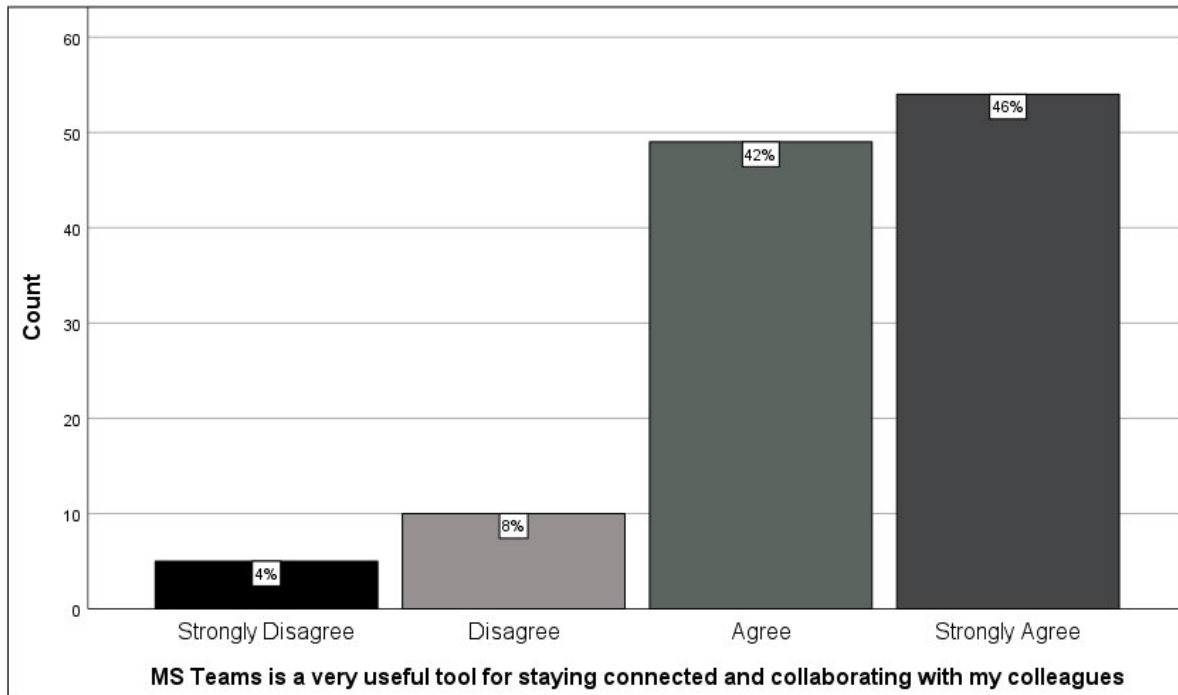


Figure 4. 7 Employee feedback on MS Teams being a useful tool for staying connected and collaborating with colleagues

Figure 4.7 shows that, eighty eight percent of the participants agreed with the statement and 12 percent disagreed that Microsoft Teams is very useful. The number of respondents who disagreed with the statement is more or less the same as the number of participants who disagreed that they have sufficient resources and tools to perform their duties remotely. There seems to be a small portion of respondents who are not in agreement that MS Teams is a useful tool to stay connected with colleagues. This could be because of preferring other cloud meeting platforms or difficulty using MS Teams. One of the disadvantages of hybrid working previously highlighted was: Increased communication challenges due to difficulty in coordinating and aligning tasks, misinterpretations of communications, and lack of visibility. This could also be another reason why 12% of respondents disagreed with this statement (Neeley, 2021).

Question 8: *My productivity is higher when I am working remotely versus being office-based.*
 The graph below shows respondents' perceptions of whether they are more productive when working remotely compared to when they are office based.

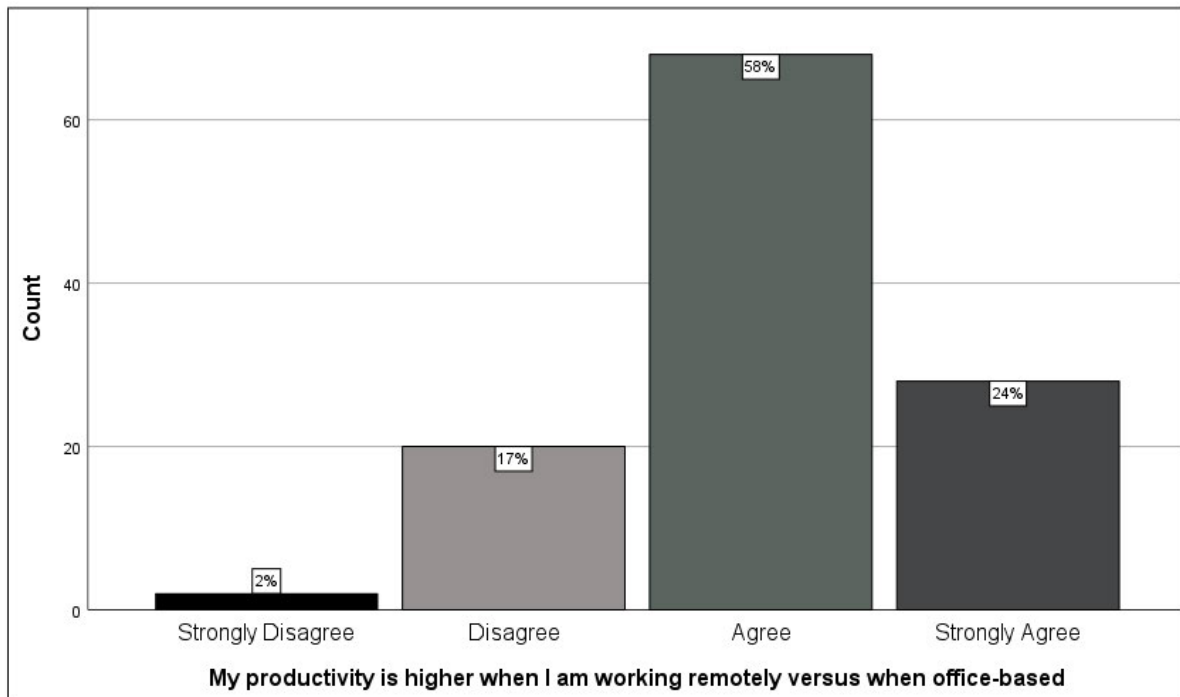


Figure 4. 8 Employee feedback on their productivity being higher when working remotely versus the office

Figure 4.8 shows that majority of the respondents (86%) agreed that they experience higher levels of productivity when working remotely whereas the rest of the respondents did not agree with this. There is a perceived self-sufficiency that comes with being in control of your work environment and your tasks that gives one a sense of calm and the ability to work as their best self, when the pressure of being in the office and commuting is removed (Blount & Gloet, 2017). The 19% of employees who disagree with this statement could represent the type of employee who values in person interaction with colleagues and prefers the office as this easily allows them to keep a clear line between work life and home life (Patel & Hoffer, 2022).

Question 9: My organisation has provided me with satisfactory support in facilitating hybrid working.

The graph below shows respondents' thoughts on the support given by the university to help employees facilitate hybrid working.

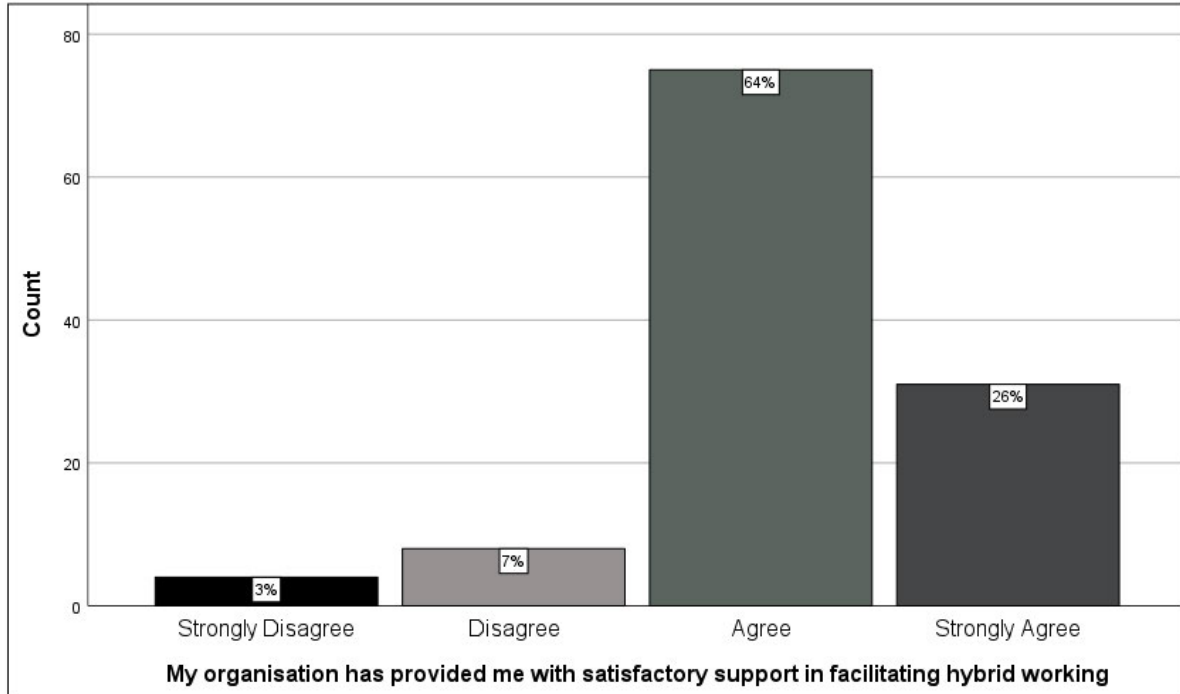


Figure 4. 9 Employee feedback that the organisation has provided support in facilitating hybrid work

Figure 4.9 displays that 90% of respondents agree that UKZN has provided a decent amount of support in making the hybrid arrangement work, which is very much in line with the HR strategy mentioned in Chapter One, that support staff are able to have flexible work arrangements that they set up with their line managers. However, 10% of the respondents disagreed with this statement.

The above analysis has identified the factors that affect hybrid working. In summary, the factors that came up in this study as factors that affect hybrid working at UKZN under the support services are flexibility, which gives employees a sense of control over their day, tasks, and place of work. Being flexible also allowed employees to balance their personal and work life better, which essentially improves employee well-being. Sufficient resources to perform work functions remotely is also a factor that largely affects the success of a hybrid working arrangement (Pittino et al., 2018). Majority of UKZN employees felt that they had sufficient support from the organisation to facilitate hybrid working as well as useful technological tools and resources to stay connected with colleagues. Moreover, communication, engagement, collaboration which speak to how employees engage and relate to one another considering

hybrid working emerged from the results. In this study, these factors are unpacked in relation to UKZN professional services feelings and perceptions of them. The general sentiment in relation to communication, technological infrastructure and organisational support was positive which supports the hypothesis for objective one.

The second part of the research is to answer the second research question which is the impact of hybrid working on organisational culture. The research question will be answered by way of descriptive and inferential statistics.

The second part of the research aims to address the second research objective using a hypothesis, which will examine the impact of hybrid working on organisational culture. The results will be discussed by means of descriptive and inferential statistics.

Question 10:

I would prefer to work in a hybrid work set-up even in future.

The graph below displays the respondents' preferences on having a hybrid work set-up in future.

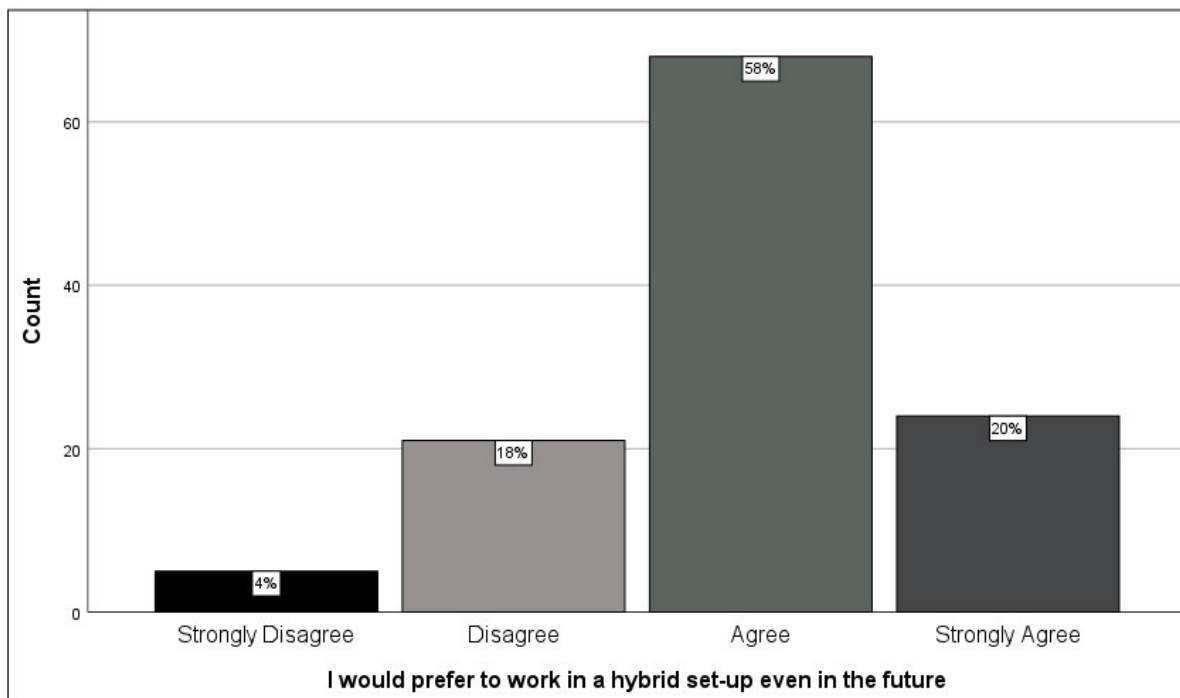


Figure 4. 10 Employee feelings on having a hybrid work set-up in future

Figure 4.10 shows that 78% agree with the statement, while 22% disagree that a hybrid work arrangement is something that they would prefer in the future. A majority of the employees agreed with this statement because they seem to have had a good experience with hybrid working, based on the previous results.

Question 11: There is sufficient communication and collaboration within my organisation.

The graph below displays respondents' feelings that there is sufficient communication and collaboration with their organisation.

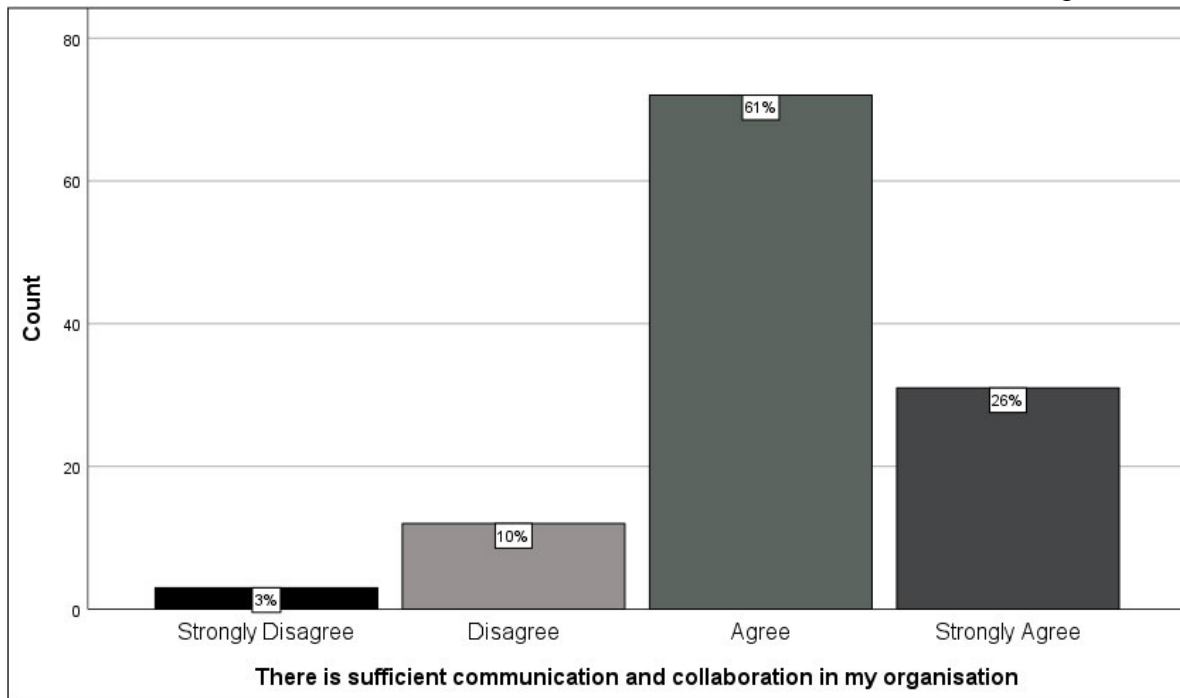


Figure 4. 11 Employee thoughts on communication and collaboration in their organisation

Figure 4.11 shows that most respondents agreed with the statement that there is sufficient communication and collaboration in their organisation. Collaboration and communication happen when a group of people come together to work towards a common goal. The majority of employees agreed that there is enough of this type of engagement in the organisation.

Question 12: *My engagement with my organisation is high.*

The graph below shows respondents' opinions on their level of engagement with their organisation.

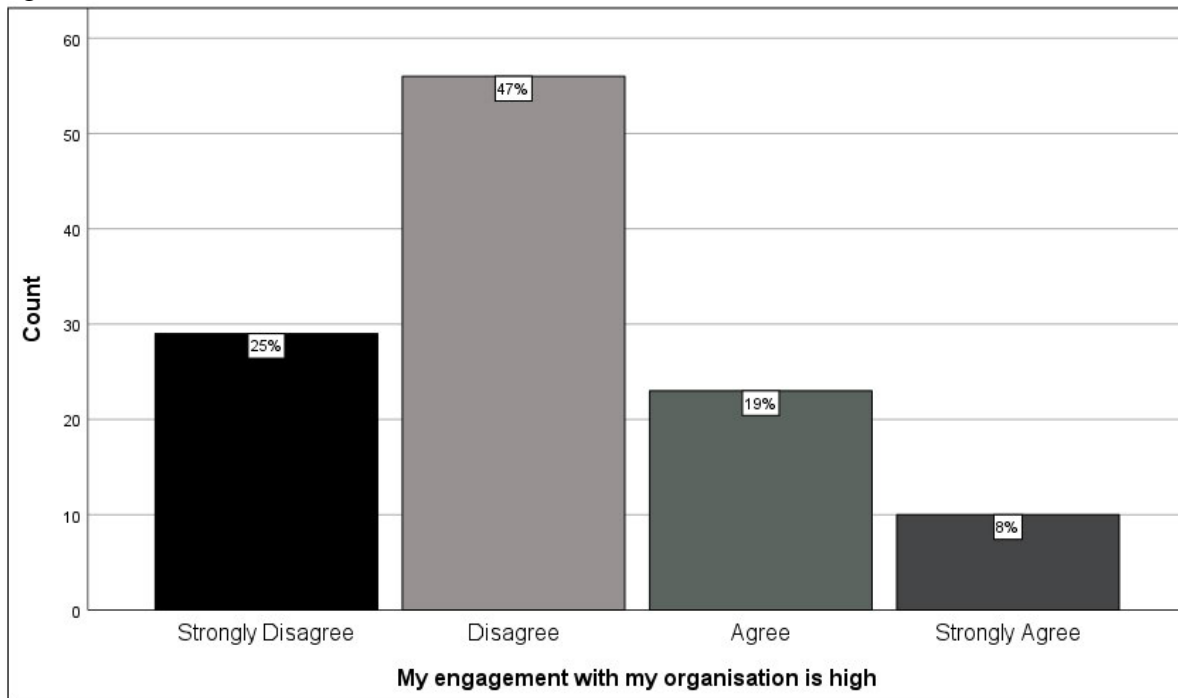


Figure 4. 12 Employee feedback on their engagement with their organisation

Figure 4.12 shows that 72% of the respondents believe that their engagement with their organisation is not high, while 27% feel that they have high engagement with their organisation. One would need to define high engagement in order to interpret the responses to this statement. According to Quantum Workplace (2021) a highly engaged employee has favourable opinions about their workplace, they feel connected to their teams, love their job and they advocate for the company to friends and family. Business Leadership (2023) defined high employee engagement as the ability of an employee to piece together what he or she does with an organisation's success. UKZN professional services disagreed with this statement, which means the majority cannot find the link between their jobs and how this leads to the organisation's success. One can also assume based on the above definition that UKZN employees do not feel plugged in to their teams, do not love their jobs and are not brand advocates of the University. According to the literature, reduced social engagement and teamwork may cause communication breakdowns, a lack of cohesiveness, and a diminished sense of belonging, all of which could have a detrimental effect on company culture (Golden, 2020).

Considering the positive response to item 11, it is surprising that item 12 received a more negatively skewed response to the question, all in all one, can conclude that in item 11, the

statement was about the organisation and item 12 was more personal. Therefore, although communication and collaboration may be high in the organisation, employees do not necessary feel that they are personally highly engaged with the organisation because of this.

Question 13: There is a lot of trust among staff in the organisation.

The graph below displays the participants' thoughts on whether there is a lot of trust in the organisation.

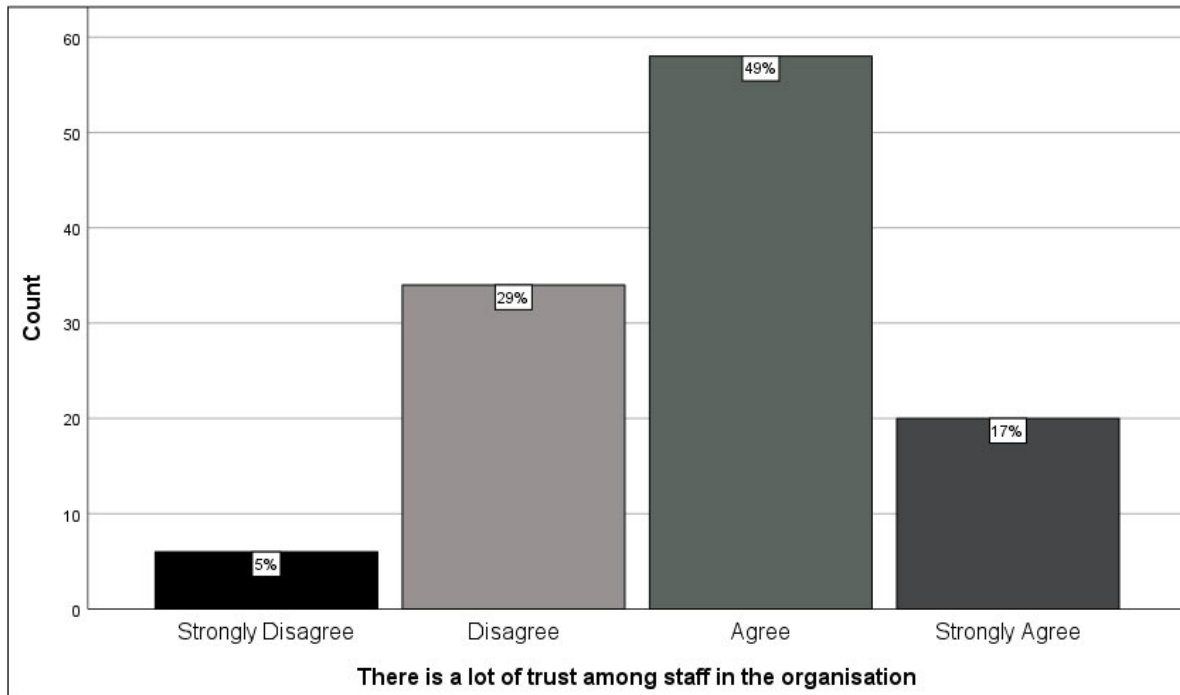


Figure 4. 13 Employee thoughts on trust in the organisation

Figure 4.13 shows that sixty-six percent of respondents agreed with the statement, whereas 34% disagreed that there is a lot of trust amongst staff at UKZN. More than a quarter of respondents disagreed with the statement. Trust was identified as one of the leading factors in fostering a healthy company culture (Golden, 2020).

Question 14: Hybrid working gives me autonomy in my work.

The graph below shows participants' perceptions that hybrid work gives them autonomy.

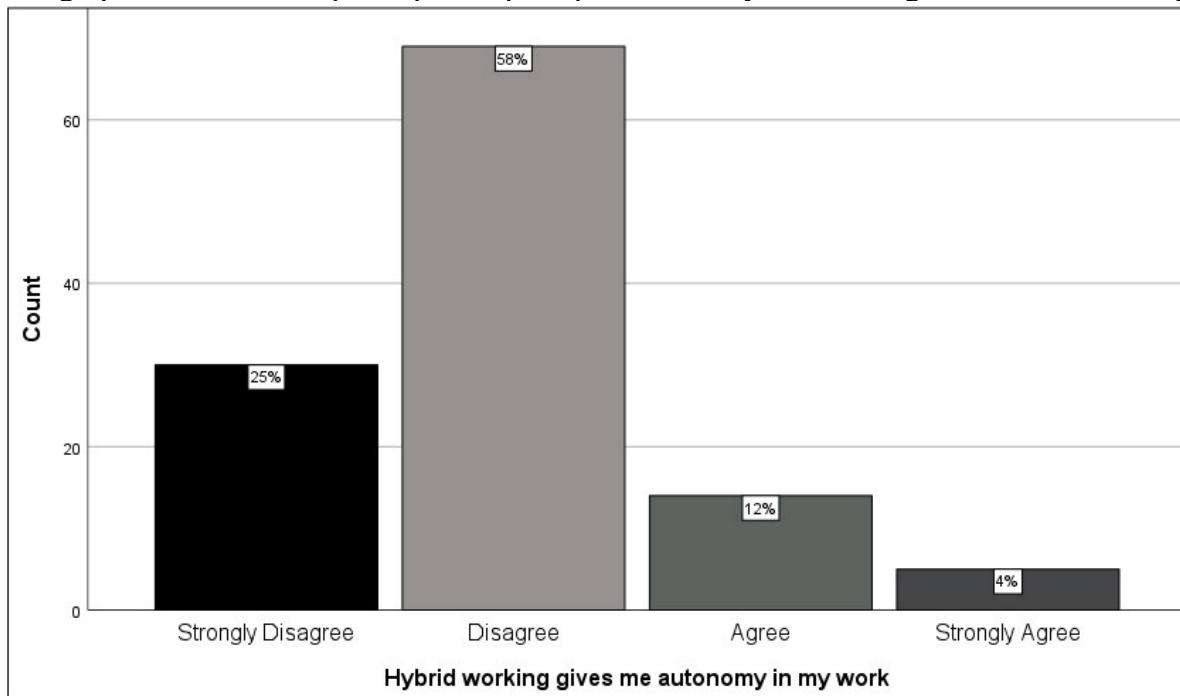


Figure 4. 14 Employee thoughts on hybrid work giving them autonomy

Figure 4.14 depicts that majority of respondents disagree with the statement that hybrid work gives them autonomy and 16% agree that a hybrid arrangement gives them autonomy. The above results somewhat make sense in light of the previous item, where 34% of employees did not agree that there is a lot of trust in the organisation. Trust and autonomy are related, you cannot have one without the other. This all comes down to relationships between employees and supervisors, as this is how hybrid working arrangements were carved up post covid at UKZN (HR reward services, 2023). Ikwuakor (2023) also stated that trust is the foundation of autonomy and that companies that afford their employees autonomy stand to gain engaged, passionate and highly motivated employees.

Question 15: Hybrid working has increased the teamwork and collaboration across departments.

The graph below shows respondents' perceptions of whether hybrid working has increased teamwork and collaboration across departments.

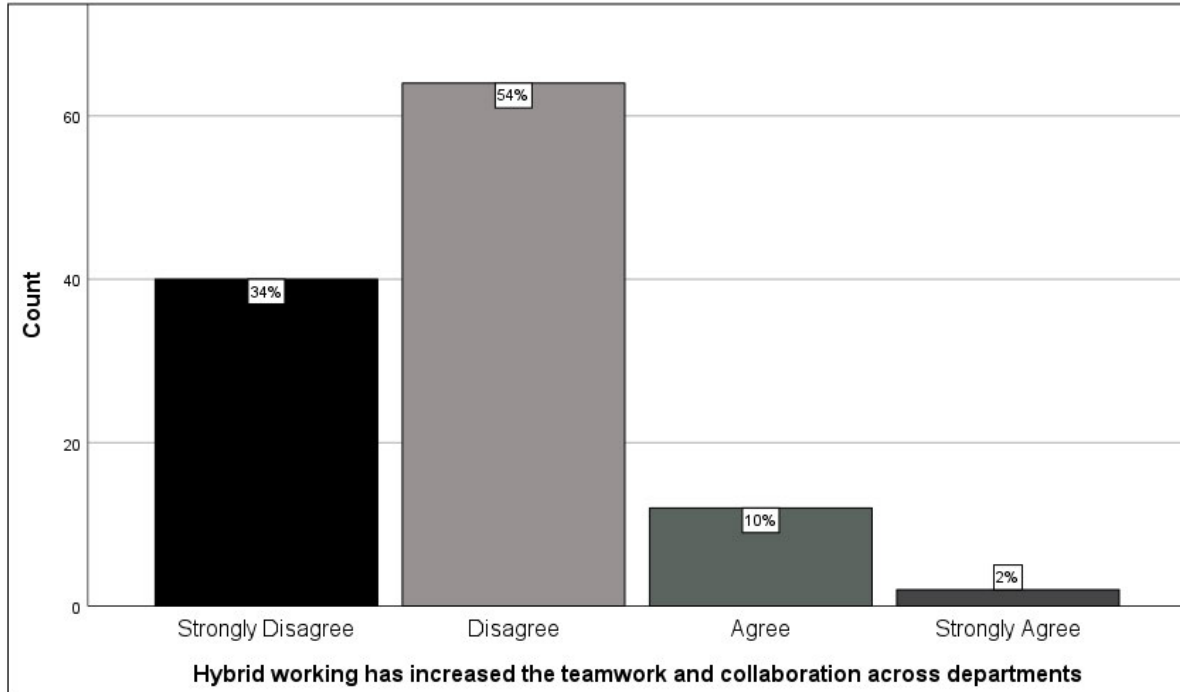


Figure 4. 15 Employee feedback on whether hybrid working has increased collaboration across departments

Figure 4.15 shows that eighty eight percent of respondents disagree that hybrid working has increased teamwork and collaboration across departments. While 12% agreed with this statement. The literature did highlight that one of the disadvantages of hybrid working is that it reduces interaction amongst colleagues (Golden, 2020).

Question 16: *I can effectively manage my team in a hybrid work arrangement.*

The graph below shows respondents' feelings on how effectively they manage their teams in a hybrid work arrangement.

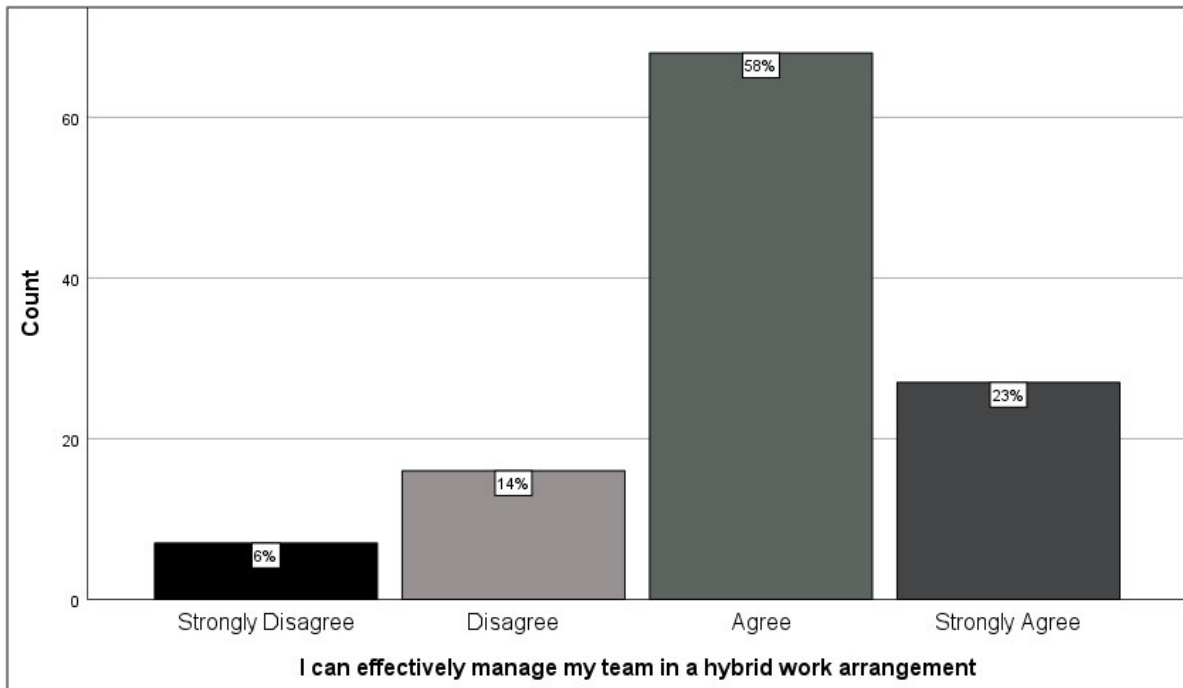


Figure 4. 16 Employee views on their effectiveness in managing their team with a hybrid work arrangement in place

Figure 4.16 shows that 80% of respondents agree that they can manage their teams effectively in a hybrid work arrangement. However, 20% disagree with this statement. The level of telecommuting has a direct impact on managers and teams. As Smith-Jackson and Lagan-Fox (2008) previously mentioned, telecommuting on consecutive days can lead to social isolation as employees have less in-person interactions with clients, co-workers and managers. This is why employers prefer to limit the number of consecutive days that an employee telecommutes.

Hypothesis results

Research objective 2: To investigate the impact of hybrid working on organisational culture.

H1: Hybrid working has an impact on organisational culture.

Table 4. 1 Regression analysis for organisational culture and hybrid work

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.430 ^a	.185	.178	.47088	
a. Predictors: (Constant), HybridWork					

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5,848	1	5,848	26,374	<,001 ^b
	Residual	25,721	116	.222		
	Total	31,568	117			
a. Dependent Variable: OrgCulture						
b. Predictors: (Constant), HybridWork						

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1,775	.236		7,508	<,001
	HybridWork	.383	.075	.430	5,136	<,001
a. Dependent Variable: OrgCulture						

Source: Own data

The dependant variable (Organisational culture) was regressed on the predicting variable of hybrid working. The independent variable significantly predicts an impact on organisational culture, F statistic (1, 116) = 26.374, $p < .001$. Moreover, the r squared value of $R = .185$ indicates that the model explains 18.5% of the variance in organisational culture

Additionally, coefficients were assessed to ascertain the effect of the criterion variable (Organisational culture). H1 evaluates whether hybrid working has an impact on organisational culture. The results revealed that hybrid working has a significantly positive impact on organisational culture ($B = .383$, $t = 5.136$, $p = .001$). This can be interpreted to say that hybrid working positively increases, organisational culture positively increases or improves (Correlation and Linear Regression, n.d.). The results of the instrument for the most part portray hybrid working as a factor that has had a good impact on UKZN Professional services employees and when employees are happy, this is believed to contribute to a good work culture. As previously mentioned, research by Pittino et al. (2018) states that the true mark of a positive company culture where employees are engaged, committed and satisfied is one where

flexibility is given. Similarly, Kelliher and Anderson (2009) also support the notion that flexible employees have higher levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

It is interesting to note that the results of this study are somewhat consistent with the literature in a sense that factors affecting hybrid working are the same regardless of country. Similarly, the impact that hybrid working has on company culture was consistent in the study and the literature. It is very interesting to come to this realisation considering factors such as South Africa being a third world country and the studies carried out in the literature coming from research done in first world countries. The needs of the employee in relation to hybrid working remained the same, the socio-economic differences did not have an impact on the results of the study having been carried out in a less developed country.

4.6. Conclusion

It was important to understand the factors that affected hybrid working as they interlink with the characteristics of organisational culture, which can be identified using Schein's Model for Organisational Culture, under the artifacts pillar. According to Schein (2010), artifacts are the visible elements of a firm, namely the architecture, technology, office layout, etc. One can safely place hybrid working in this pillar as a factor that contributes to organisational culture. The following chapter will conclude and make recommendations for the study.

Chapter five

Conclusion and recommendations

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the conclusions derived from the results of this study on the impact of hybrid working practices on employees and organisational culture are detailed. The conclusions were based on the purpose, research question and hypothesis as well as results of the study. The implications of these results and the recommendations will also be explained. Recommendations were based on the conclusions and purpose of the study.

5.2. Overview of the study

This study was conducted using a questionnaire as this was a deductive and exploratory study. From the questionnaire, descriptive and statistical results were analysed from 118 respondents to build the story that would speak to the research objectives. The study was conducted at UKZN, and the respondents were selected randomly but were targeted based on whether they are part of the support services staff at the university.

The data were collected through Google Forms and analysed using SPSS and Excel. The trends identified were linked to the literature. All ethical considerations were observed. The results of the research described below are based on the perspectives of the 118 UKZN Professional services employees who were part of the study. There were two research objectives, the first one being.

5.3. Resolving the research problem

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the concept of hybrid working is a construct that emerged and had to be adopted overnight by employers. It was reported that the number of people working from home in 2022 had increased in comparison to 2021 (StatsSA, 2022). BusinessTech (2023) mentions the upward trajectory of employees who value having control over their time and where they work. The research aimed to identify the impact of hybrid working on organisational culture. The research shows that hybrid working does have an impact on organisational culture and the results of the hypothesis were in support of the notion that there is a relationship between hybrid work and organisational culture.

The JD-R model is thus applied to unpack the outcome of the research results in relation to the research problem. The results show that when working remotely, employees are able to work collaboratively within their teams, communicate effectively and are able to manage their

personal and work lives a lot better, which in turn covers the job demands part of the model. In terms of job resources, the results show that hybrid working allows for flexibility and the respondents support the notion that the university gave them adequate support in helping them set up their hybrid work arrangements by providing the necessary tools to conduct work remotely. However, respondents did not agree with the statement that hybrid working gave them autonomy. Therefore, while job demands are all being sufficiently catered for, job resources are not entirely in full supply. This can thus affect the performance of employees negatively. Although the extent to which a lack in autonomy cannot be measured, at a glance one is able to see that there is an imbalance between jobs demands vs job resources, which can affect organisational outcomes such as employee performance, well-being and consequently, the organisational culture. The identified research problem is resolved.

5.4. Outcomes of the research

Research question: What are the factors that affect hybrid working?

Research objective one: To determine the factors that affect hybrid working.

In this study, the above research question was answered, the research objective was achieved and below is the justification:

The factors identified in the literature as factors which can have an impact on hybrid workings conditions were identified in the feedback from our respondents.

Flexibility was described as something that gave respondents more flexibility and a sense of control over their time. This contributes to a balanced work-life because employees believed that they are able to manage their work and personal lives much better.

Resources were enough to fulfil employee duties when working remotely. Having sufficient resources is crucial if one wants to do hybrid working right, as it works in favour of the employee as well as the employer.

Support was something the employees agreed they had enough of from the university in facilitating hybrid working. Support can be having a manager that allows one to work from home on certain days, and support can also look like having a team to assist one with technical issues that tend to arise when using the tools and resources to stay connected to colleagues.

Communication was agreed to be sufficient between respondents and their teams, which is very good because communication allows for a team to remain in sync.

Collaboration was believed to be sufficient within the respondents' teams, which makes sense because of the positive response to the earlier theme of communication.

Productivity was also something that the majority of employees felt was higher when they worked remotely, this can be attributed to having more control over one's day and how one starts and ends it.

The above factors are the characteristics identified when the respondents completed their questionnaires and can be classified as factors that affect hybrid working, which links perfectly to the second research objective, namely:

H1: Hybrid working has an impact on organisational culture.

Research objective two: To investigate the impact of hybrid work on organisational culture.

Furthermore, the study answered the hypothesis, achieved the second research objective and below is the justification:

A majority of the respondents agreed that they would be happy with a hybrid work arrangement in future. This suggests that they had a good overall experience with hybrid working. However, there were many employees who disagreed that hybrid working gave them autonomy in their work. Interestingly, 66% of respondents agreed that there is enough trust in the organisation which is contradictory to the statement on autonomy because a lack of autonomy can result from a lack of trust.

Most employees believed that they did not engage much with the university inasmuch as the university engaged with them. Engagement was also defined in order to unpack it better and the results showed that based on the definition of an engaged employee, UKZN professional services staff were not engaged in the sense that they did not have an understanding of their contribution to the university in light of the institution's objectives. There is a disconnect and lack of understanding that was picked up by the researcher. It was very interesting and unexpected to find that although hybrid working has not affected communication and collaboration within teams, it certainly has not promoted the same communication and collaboration across departments. This is expected because, as mentioned in the literature, the extent to which collaboration takes place during telecommuting depends on the intensity of the relationship amongst colleagues. Colleagues of the same team are likely to have a more intense relationship than colleagues across departments.

The statistical analysis hypothesis was that hybrid working has an impact on organisational culture. Furthermore, the coefficients were assessed to determine the effects between the variables, and the consensus was that as hybrid working improves positively, organisational culture increases positively.

5.5. Limitations of the research study

The study was limited in that it did not have a focus on the demographics of the respondents. Therefore, limiting the study only to Professional staff at the university has possibly provided a one-sided perspective because the university also has academic staff who were affected by hybrid working immensely as they had to conduct lectures from home. Their dependence on equipment such as technological resources was much higher than Professional staff as they had hundreds of students relying on those lectures to continue during COVID-19. The responses were collected using University Notices, as well as door-to-door data collection. For remote students, door to door data collection is not feasible, and because the response rate on University Notices is slow and low, it makes it almost compulsory to use other means to collect the data.

5.6. Recommendations for future research

In light of the limitations identified and the results of the study, the following are recommended as future research subjects:

- How hybrid working affects academic staff, considering online learning;
- How hybrid working affects employees at different levels, namely lower, middle and top levels.
- Using Factor analysis to determine the factors that affect hybrid working

5.7. Recommendation for the organisation

- *Lack of Autonomy*: working from home made it clear for the majority of the respondents that they did not have autonomy in their work. The university could establish ways of working that allow employees to feel trusted.
- *Lack of engagement*: employees pointed out how much they feel disengaged from their organisation as they cannot seem to piece together how their contributions to the organisation impact the organisation. The university should consider workshop and team building projects that foster unity and inclusion across schools and campus and

the goals and mission of the university should be communicated extensively so employees become more familiar and take ownership of the mission.

- *Work-life balance*: the emergence of hybrid working has opened a new world for employees where they are now aware of how easy it is to complete tasks from home in the comfort of their own home. However, this may make it difficult for employees to reconcile the meaningfulness of being at the office. Going back to work may prove difficult and highly inconvenient as employees would need to let go of the ease of managing their personal lives a lot easier, especially on days where they were not in the office. The university should continue to provide flexible working arrangements for staff to help employees have a sense of work-life balance.
- *Policy development and implications*: The university should develop policies and procedures that support flexible working as a means to improve the work culture building trust and fostering accountability with employees. Standardisation of this practice into rules and policies will help employees to understand the parameters of this practice and ensure it is not abused.

5.8. Conclusion

In accordance with the research conducted, as well as studies prior to this research, one can deduce that hybrid working is a concept of the present and future, and employees need to gear up for the new-age way of working. Employers need to be able build a company's culture in virtual boardrooms and see this as a challenge that, if executed well, can work in favour of a business, and cultivate a culture that is not reliant on face-to-face interaction. However, employees need to work with their organisations to make the dream work because although remote working is convenient for the employee, in-person contact and engagement comes with many benefits, and it is something that should not be despised. The research has clearly outlined the importance of striking a good balance when employing a hybrid work structure. There needs to be a level of trust from the employer, as well as accountability from the employee for this kind of work structure to be successful.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance



26 June 2023

Thembe Precious Ngubelanga (213512043)
Grad School Of Bus & Leadership
Westville Campus

Dear TP Ngubelanga,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005711/2023

Project title: Examining the impact of hybrid working practices on employees and organisational culture

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 07 June 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 26 June 2024.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 2: Gatekeeper's Permission Letter



22 May 2023

Thembisa Ngubelanga (SN 213512043)
Graduate School of Business and Leadership
College of Law and Management Studies
Westville Campus UKZN
Email: 213512043@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Dear Thembisa

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), towards your postgraduate degree, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"Examining the impact of hybrid working practices on employees and organisational culture."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample as follows:

- With a request for responses on the website. The questionnaire must be placed on the notice system <http://notices.ukzn.ac.za>. A copy of this letter (Gatekeeper's approval) must be simultaneously sent to (govenderlog@ukzn.ac.za) or (ramkissoob@ukzn.ac.za).

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using the 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

Dr KE CLELAND: REGISTRAR

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 7971 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL
For research with human participants

INFORMED CONSENT RESOURCE TEMPLATE

Note to researchers: Notwithstanding the need for scientific and legal accuracy, every effort should be made to produce a consent document that is as linguistically clear and simple as possible, without omitting important details as outlined below. Certified translated versions will be required once the original version is approved.

There are specific circumstances where witnessed verbal consent might be acceptable, and circumstances where individual informed consent may be waived by HSSREC.

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 16 April 2023

Greetings to the University of KwaZulu-Natal Westville Campus,

My name is Thembisa Ngubelanga from UKZN currently studying towards a Master of Business Administration Degree at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, reachable on: 213512043@stu.ukzn.ac.za [REDACTED]

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research examining the impact of hybrid working practices on organisational culture. The aim and purpose of this research is to understand how hybrid working has affected employees since its emergence during the covid era and its continued prevalence post covid. The study is expected to enroll 100 staff members in professional services in all 19 schools in the institution. It will involve the following procedures: completion of a questionnaire. The duration of your participation if you choose to enroll and remain in the study is expected to be 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The study may involve the following: sharing your personal experience of the changing work environment as a result of a pandemic and how going back into the office has affected the way you work and perceive your work environment. The study will also help in adding to the academic body of knowledge where hybrid working is concerned from a South African context.

This research does not involve risk, and there is no compensation for participating in this research.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number HSSREC/00005711/2023).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at (Thembisa Ngubelanga [REDACTED] 213512043@stu.ukzn.ac.za) or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Please note that participation is completely voluntary; no one is forced to partake in the survey. A participant may withdraw at any point in the study and there will be no penalty.

This study is, voluntary and respondents will not be expected to pay to participate. The study does not come with any benefits or incentives.

In an effort to keep all data confidential, the participants will remain anonymous throughout the study as a standard procedure. The data will form part of a dissertation as a prerequisite in order to fulfil the requirements of an MBA degree.

CONSENT (Edit as required)

I (Name) have been informed about the study entitled, Examining the impact of hybrid working practices on employees and organisational culture by Thembisa Ngubelanga.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at 213512043@stu.ukzn.ac.za / [REDACTED]

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix 4: Online Questionnaire

MBA Study: Examining the impact of hybrid working practices on employees and organisational culture



Dear UKZN Professional Services Staff members,

My name is Thembisa Ngubelanga, I am currently an MBA student at the Graduate School of Business & Leadership.

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research on the impact of hybrid working practices on employees and organisational culture.

Your participation in this study will involve completing a questionnaire for data collection purposes. This will take approximately 4 minutes to complete.

To access the questionnaire kindly follow the link: <https://forms.gle/rrNCL4Gwwd8p1PHU8>

Ethical clearance for this study has been granted by UKZN as per the Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005711/2023. This study is being supervised by Prof Ana Martins at the Graduate School of Business & Leadership.

Kindly find attached gatekeepers permission letter and ethical clearance letter for this study.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Thembisa Ngubelanga

Supervisor: Prof A. Martins

Attachments

[Gatekeepers permission Online. Ngubelanga+TP+213512043+HSS](#)

Complete the below questions by rating your experience out of 4 where 1 = Strongly disagree and 4 = Strongly agree

Rate your overall experience of hybrid working in the statements below by ticking the appropriate box.	Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	Agree			
	1	2	3	4

1. I am satisfied with a hybrid work set up				
2. It is highly important to me to be flexible				
3. I have sufficient resources and technological tool for hybrid working				
4. I am able to manage personal responsibilities with a lot more ease when working remotely versus in the office				
5. Hybrid working has improved my work-life balance				
6. My communication and collaboration with colleagues when working remotely, is effective				
7. MS Teams is a very useful tool for staying connected and collaborating with my colleagues				
8. My productivity is higher when I am working remotely versus when office-based				
9. My organisation has provided me with satisfactory support in facilitating hybrid working				
10. I would prefer to work in a hybrid set-up even in the future				

11. There is sufficient communication and collaboration in my organisation				
12. My engagement with my organisation is high				
13. There is a lot of trust among staff in the organisation				
14. Hybrid working gives me autonomy in my work				
15. Hybrid working has increased the teamwork and collaboration across departments				
16. I can effectively manage my team in a hybrid work arrangement				

Appendix 5: Letter From Professional Language Editor

EDITING LETTER

896 Clare Road
Clare Estate
Durban
4091
28 December 2023


To: Whom it may concern

Editing of Master's Thesis: Thembisa Ngubelanga

This letter serves as confirmation that the aforementioned thesis has been language edited. The requisite grammatical conventions have been met. Relevant suggestions have been made.

Any queries may be directed to the author of this letter.

Regards



MP MATHEWS

Lecturer and Language Editor

