



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**The relationship between wellness and support staff performance
at the University of KwaZulu-Natal**

By

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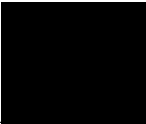
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Abstract

This study explores how various dimensions of well-being influence the performance of support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). This well-being amongst organisation's staff can have a significant effect on the functioning of that business as well as the output and perception of the business or institution. It is for this very reason that the study undertaken navigated how a business or institution can consider its staff and its personnel's state of mind when it comes to their overall well-being. The research was guided by five objectives that examined physical, mental, psychological, and social well-being, as well as the effectiveness of institutional well-being programmes. As such, the study looked to scrutinise the relationship between support staff employed within UKZN and their well-being, and in turn how this may have an impact on their work performance.

The study applied a qualitative research approach, using a structured face-to-face interview schedule comprising twelve participants who were selected from three support divisions within the institution, namely the Human Resources department, the Finance department and lastly the Information and Communication Services department. From the sample of twelve participants, all twelve participants agreed to participate in the interview schedule. The findings revealed that overall well-being significantly affects job performance, with mental and psychological factors being most influential. Clearly, from the findings recorded in the qualitative data, it was evident that the support staff placed a huge emphasis on their overall well-being and how this affected their work performance as a result. A key criticism was the fact that the institution is not doing enough to either promote the initiatives on offer as well as advertise all the wellness offerings that are available to staff. The study recommends that UKZN enhance its wellness initiatives and provide greater managerial support to sustain staff well-being. However, the qualitative design and small sample size limit the generalisation of findings to broader populations.

Keywords: Employee well-being, Support staff performance, Higher education institutions, psychological resilience, University of KwaZulu-Natal

List of tables

Table 3. 1: Interview Schedule	32
Table 3. 2: Sample Size per Department	35
Table 4. 1: Participant ID and Department	41
Table 4. 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Participants	42
Table 4. 3: Overview of the key themes and sub-themes identified from participant interviews	43

List of figures

Figure 2. 1: Different types of well-being	11
Figure 2. 2: Independent variable (IV) and dependent variable (DV) of job stress and employee performance.....	18
Figure 2. 3: HRM and employee well-being	22
Figure 2. 4: Diagram illustrating Fredrickson’s Broaden-and-Build theory.....	26
Figure 2. 5: Visual representation of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, illustrating the five key levels that motivate human behaviour.....	27
Figure 4. 1: NVivo 12 map showing Theme 1 and related sub-themes on physical health and job performance	45
Figure 4. 2: NVivo map showing Theme 2 and sub-themes on managing mental strain in support roles.....	48
Figure 4. 3: Visual map of Theme 3 and its sub-themes on psychological well-being from NVivo analysis.....	51
Figure 4. 4: Theme 4 and its sub-themes mapped through NVivo coding.	54
Figure 4. 5: Visual outline of Theme 5 and related sub-themes from NVivo analysis.....	57
Figure 4. 6: Word cloud highlighting frequently used terms from support staff interview responses	60

List of acronyms and abbreviations

DV :	Dependent Variables
ID :	Independent Variables
WHI :	Work-home Interferences
WHO :	World Health Organisation
UKZN:	University of KwaZulu-Natal

Table of contents

Declaration.....	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract.....	iv
List of tables.....	v
List of figures.....	vi
List of acronyms and abbreviations	vii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2. Background to the study	2
1.3. Problem statement.....	3
1.4. Research objectives.....	4
1.5. Research questions.....	5
1.6. Significance of the study.....	5
1.7 Limitations of the study	6
1.8 Definitions.....	6
1.9. Structure of the dissertation	7
1.10. Conclusion	7
Chapter Two: Literature review	9
2.1 Introduction.....	9
2.2 Different types of well-being	10
2.2.1 Physical well-being.....	11
2.2.2 Mental well-being	12
2.2.3 Psychological well-being.....	14
2.2.4 Social well-being	14
2.3 Well-being factors that affect employee performance.....	16
2.3.1 Subjective well-being and employee performance	16
2.3.2 Burnout and employee performance	16
2.3.3 Stress and employee performance	17
2.3.4 Work-life balance and employee performance	18
2.3.5 Physical health and employee performance.....	19
2.4 The Importance of support staff performance	19
2.5 Measures of performance.....	20
2.6 HRM Practices and employee performance	21
2.7 Theoretical framework.....	24

2.7.1 Herzberg's Two Factor theory (1959)	25
2.7.2 Broaden and build theory (1998)	25
2.7.3 Maslow's hierarchy of needs	27
2.8. Conclusion	29
Chapter Three: Research methodology	30
3.1 Introduction.....	30
3.3 The guiding research paradigm.....	30
3.3.1 Research strategy	31
3.3.2 In-depth interviews as the main data collection instrument.....	31
3.3.3 Instrument of measurements: the interview schedule	31
3.4 Study setting.....	33
3.5 Study population	33
3.6 Sampling strategy.....	34
3.7 Sample size	34
3.8 Data collection	35
3.9 Ensuring data trustworthiness	36
3.9.1 Credibility	36
3.9.2 Confirmability.....	36
3.9.3 Dependability.....	37
3.10 Data Analysis procedures	37
3.11 Ethical considerations	38
3.12 Limitations of the study	39
3.13 Conclusion	39
Chapter Four: Presentation of findings and discussion	40
4.1 Introduction.....	40
4.2 Participant profile.....	40
4.2.1 Socio-demographic characteristics.....	41
4.3 Summary of themes	42
4.3.1 Theme 1: The role of physical health practices in sustaining daily job performance	44
4.3.2 Theme 2: Managing mental strain in high-demand support roles	47
4.3.3 Theme 3: Psychological resilience and its influence on workplace motivation	50
4.3.4 Theme 4: Workplace belonging and peer support as drivers of performance	53
4.3.5 Theme 5: Perceived value and accessibility of institutional wellness programs	56
4.4 Word cloud overview of participant responses.....	59

4.5 Conclusion	60
Chapter Five: Conclusion and recommendations.....	61
5.1 Introduction.....	61
5.2 Summary of key findings.....	61
5.3 Limitations of the study	62
5.4 Recommendations for UKZN	63
5.5 Implications of the study.....	64
5.6 Conclusion	65
References.....	66
Appendices.....	75
Appendix A: Ethical clearance report.....	75
Appendix B: Information and consent.....	76
Appendix C: Gatekeeper's letter.....	79
Appendix D: Interview schedule	80
Appendix E: Turnitin report.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In Higher Education institutions, the thirst for knowledge and the intent to pursue that knowledge at places of learning has become a significant contributing factor for many young aspiring students and otherwise disadvantaged individuals from all walks of life and from a diverse background. As a young democracy and free nation, South Africa is still trying to find itself on the world stage. However, there exists a growing interest by people from all walks of life and all ages in South Africa to study and increase their knowledge of various subjects, and various learning opportunities that were previously not available to many South Africans while operating under the Apartheid system. After Apartheid, individuals, students and adults alike are starting to pursue formal education as a way to empower themselves and improve their lives and the lives of their families and friends.

This is where a university education comes in, and it is here that one needs to examine more critically as to how exactly the functioning of higher education institutions afford learners, both young and old, the opportunities to realise their dreams of completing a university degree and a formal qualification that they can use worldwide. The journey to obtaining a university education is more than just completing the necessary courses at universities and attending lectures and tutorials, and all additional classes a student needs to attend to achieve the much sought-after dream. To facilitate this teaching and learning, one must look to the lecturers or academic staff as they assume the roles of leaders to students whom they are leading to achieve their qualification.

Understanding the importance that support staff have at higher education institutions and what their roles and functions are to support the bigger picture is important. The well-being of these support staff, and specifically the output that one expects from them in terms of their tasks to support an institution, needs to be reflected upon further.

The research begins by establishing the historical background and presenting the key research problem. The theoretical framework for the study is based on the Broaden and Build Theory, which will act as a basis for the literature. The literature review will provide an extensive exploration of employees' well-being and work performance, with particular regard to how employee well-being and work performance affect support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

The methodology chapter explains the study's data collection methods and how these methods were incorporated in the context of the study, and then the data analysis methods that are used to interpret the data. In this chapter, the limitations in the research were identified. The next chapter will present the findings of the study and provide discussion on the main findings.

1.2. Background to the study

Support staff are integral to the operational efficacy of higher education institutions such as UKZN. However, their contributions are frequently under-recognised. Their roles encompass the maintenance and management of physical infrastructure critical to student learning, and the facilitation of academic functions by supporting teaching and research staff. Kinman and Wray (2020) aver that historically, academic output metrics and faculty development priorities have overshadowed support staff welfare, resulting in a deficit of attention toward non-academic staff's well-being. This oversight persists, notwithstanding emerging empirical evidence indicating that compromised well-being amongst support staff correlates with reduced job performance, elevated absenteeism and diminished morale (Graham and Vanbergen, 2019).

Dodge et al. (2012) conceptualise well-being as a multifaceted and dynamic construct, determined by the equilibrium between an individual's psychological, emotional and physical resources and the environmental demands encountered. When job demands surpass the available resources, support staff well-being may decline, thus adversely impacting their functional capacity and work efficacy. Consequently, this study aims to systematically examine the influence of well-being on the performance metrics of university support staff, emphasising its critical yet overlooked role in institutional success.

Although much attention in higher education has been devoted to the predicament of students and academic staff, little is written concerning the well-being of support staff. Yet these employees are the backbone of operational control in the institutions, for they provide necessary organisation for the efficient administration of academic and administrative functions (Douglas, 2025). It is essential, therefore, to examine their well-being as an essential factor in promoting full institutional performance.

The support infrastructure at UKZN, particularly within the domains of finance, human resources and information technology, is recognised for its high efficiency and effectiveness at the national level, significantly contributing to academic excellence. While the primary institutional objectives focus on advancing research, pedagogy and student learning outcomes, support staff function as vital enablers of these goals. Previous studies have shown that

occupational well-being is increasingly jeopardised by elevated workloads, psychological stressors, burnout syndrome and fatigue, which adversely affect their productivity and performance (Bakker and Derks, 2010; Baranik and Eby, 2016). However, there remains a limited understanding of how these dimensions of well-being affect support staff specifically within South African higher education institutions. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap in knowledge through a qualitative approach on how wellness initiatives and wellness programs affect the performance of support staff at UKZN.

1.3. Problem statement

Recent research by Rahman et al. (2024) and Wang (2024) indicates that support staff in higher education institutions are faced with greater workloads, psychological distress and role ambiguity, which can result in lower work engagement and institutional performance. In view of their key operational roles, it will be essential to investigate how well being affects their performance.

The influence of employee well-being on individual health outcomes and occupational environments has gained significance within contemporary organisational research. The adoption of an "always-on" work paradigm characterised by continuous accessibility expectations has been correlated with elevated stress levels, burnout prevalence and diminished job performance metrics across diverse sectors, including higher education institutions (Derks and Bakker, 2014; Mazmanian, Orlikowski and Yates, 2013). Digital information overload has substantially eroded the delineation between professional and personal domains, thereby increasing employees' vulnerability to both psychological and physiological health issues, according to van Zoonen et al. (2021).

Kinman and Wray (2020) observe that the well-being of university employees, particularly support staff, has received limited scholarly investigation and institutional focus. Within the higher education context, existing research and policy discussions predominantly emphasise the well-being, workload and occupational pressures of academic staff, often neglecting the distinctive challenges encountered by non-academic and support staff. (Kinman and Wray, 2022; Rahman *et al.*, 2024) Support staff are integral to the operational and administrative functions of academic institutions. However, their experiences related to occupational stress, recognition deficits and organisational marginalisation remain insufficiently examined (Graham and Vanbergen, 2019). This neglect results in a substantive knowledge deficit concerning how workplace environments and institutional policies influence support staff's

mental health, job satisfaction and performance metrics. This research aims to fill this gap by systematically analysing the influence of workplace well-being on support staff within university settings through qualitative interviews that explore their lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges. The study further advocates for the development of comprehensive, inclusive well-being frameworks that address all employee categories.

The widespread occurrence of high levels of stress and burnout, as observed by Barkhuizen and Rothman (2008) was not solely identified in academic staff only, but also support staff associated with higher education institutions. The onset of stress can lead to other illnesses such as smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, all of which affect the physical health of individuals and lead to issues such as heart disease, strokes, etc. The knock-on effect is that these unhealthy stressors then result in support staff turnover increasing or showing in higher levels of absenteeism.

This research study aims to benefit higher education institutions by identifying programs and key focus areas to promote the well-being of support staff. Through the systematic analysis of common stressors and institutional challenges, the study will develop evidence-based recommendations tailored to different campus environments. These insights are intended to inform the strategic implementation of wellness initiatives, improve staff retention, and enhance the overall effectiveness of the institution.

1.4. Research objectives

- i. To determine how physical well-being influences the job performance of support staff at UKZN.
- ii. To determine how mental well-being affects the performance of support staff at UKZN.
- iii. To explore how psychological well-being influences support staff performance at UKZN.
- iv. To determine how social well-being affects the performance of support staff at UKZN; and
- v. To evaluate how well-being initiatives are perceived to contribute to enhancing the performance of support staff at UKZN.

1.5. Research questions

- i. In what ways does physical well-being influence the performance of support staff within UKZN?
- ii. How does mental well-being affect the performance of support staff within UKZN?
- iii. How does psychological well-being influence support staff performance at UKZN?
- iv. How does social well-being shape support staff performance within UKZN?
- v. To what extent do well-being programmes enhance support staff performance within UKZN?

1.6. Significance of the study

This study aims to supplement the existing body of knowledge that explains the associations between work motivation and well-being versus employee performance at UKZN. The outcome of this research is to provide a better understanding of how support staff in tertiary institutions can ensure the well-being of their staff to achieve greater success in their staff performance in the organisation.

The findings from this research will enable South African tertiary institutions to enhance data-driven decision-making regarding the critical role of support staff well-being and its direct influence on support staff performance metrics. Recognising the contribution of well-being to organisational productivity and efficiency is vital as it underpins overall institutional effectiveness and aligns with broader socio-economic development objectives. This study specifically evaluates the scope, implementation and efficacy of existing well-being programs at UKZN. According to Nene (2020), UKZN has made significant progress in promoting dimensions of well-being, including intellectual, social and personal development, through the initiatives implemented by the Employee Wellness Unit. Currently, these initiatives primarily emphasise disease-specific interventions, with particular focus on HIV/AIDS awareness. There is an imperative to design and scale holistic support mechanisms that comprehensively address physical, mental, psychological and social health domains, particularly for support staff

cohorts. This research aims to identify these gaps and inform the development of a more inclusive and multidimensional wellness framework within the university context.

1.7 Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study are summarised as follows:

- The scope of the researcher was restricted to single study site owing to budgetary limitations and the absence of funding necessary to extend the research to additional higher education institutions within South Africa.
- The researcher encountered challenges in co-ordinating participant appointments due to their limited availability and busy schedules.
- Participants exhibited hesitancy to engage in the study due to concerns about victimisation and intimidation.
- The researcher employed a qualitative approach, whereas incorporating a mixed-methods design may have enhanced the robustness of the findings.

1.8 Definitions

The following definitions of key concepts are presented to clarify understanding and ensure shared meanings of the terminology used throughout the study.

- **University:** The Oxford Dictionary (2009) describes a university as a higher education institution or institution of higher education which provides higher education and formal learning and gives degrees on the successful completion of its formal, prescribed learning programs.
- **Well-being:** The World Health Organization (WHO), as noted by Dodge et al. (2012) describes well-being in terms of not only a state of physical health, but also the experience of an individual regarding their position in life, in context, and the cultural value systems in which that individual lives.
- **Employee Performance:** This refers to the execution and completion of assigned duties in a specified amount of time, where the results indicate the level of success, as noted by Jerome (2013).

1.9. Structure of the dissertation

Chapter one: Introduction and overview of the study

The first chapter of the research presents a background of the study, the problem statement, research questions and objectives, key definitions and the significance of the study and limitations encountered during the process.

Chapter two: Literature review

This chapter provides a detailed literature review of the body of literature directly related to the well-being and performance of support staff in universities. This chapter engages with previous research, critically analysing the themes from earlier work and introducing the Broaden and Build Theory as the theoretical underpinning that guided the study. This chapter also identified the gap in research that the dissertation addressed.

Chapter three: Research methodology

In chapter three, the chapter establishes the philosophical paradigm which underpins the study and provides details on the research design used, which was a qualitative research design. The chapter lays out the sampling strategy, how the participants were recruited, details the data collection methods, specifically structured interviews, sets out the tools used to analyse the data and discusses trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Chapter four: Presentation of results and discussion

Chapter four reports the results of the qualitative data analysis, and presents the findings thematically with quotes from participants, and subsequently an analysis to make connections with the research objectives of the study.

Chapter five: Conclusions and recommendations

The final chapter summarises the key findings from the data analysis included in chapter four above, draws conclusions from the data and presents practical recommendations for institutions and recommendations for future research into how they can make improvements to the well-being of their support staff in higher education environments.

1.10. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research objectives, the research questions, the research methodology and design, as well as the expected theoretical and practical value of the study.

The next chapter will review extant literature on the study being undertaken and how support staff performance is affected by the well-being of support staff.

Chapter Two: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter systematically reviews relevant literature and theoretical frameworks pertinent to the research topic. A conceptual framework will be developed after the analysis of these theoretical foundations. Considering the political and socio-economic transitions South Africa has experienced for the past three decades since the advent of democratic governance in 1994, demographic shifts have broadened access to tertiary education for individuals from diverse backgrounds. As a result, higher education institutions are increasingly expected to optimise their staffing strategies by recruiting and retaining well-qualified support staff to enhance service delivery and align with institutional strategic goals. This shift reflects growing national expectations for universities to play a central role in driving economic development, social transformation and the production of work-ready graduates equipped with 21st-century competencies (CHE, 2021; Cloete and Moja, 2020; DHET, 2022). These evolving demands reinforce the importance of institutional performance, inclusive practices and the development of human capital within South Africa's Higher Education sector.

Ensuring that employees are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated within their workplace is essential for optimal performance and alignment with the university's overarching mission. Motivation is broadly defined as an individual's willingness and drive to engage in specific behaviours aimed at achieving goals (Van den Broeck et al., 2021). The propensity to apply oneself maximally encompasses both internal drives and external influences, shaped by personal expectations and perceived outcomes. Intrinsic motivation refers to engagement that is driven by internal satisfaction, enjoyment or a sense of personal accomplishment derived from the task itself (Ryan and Deci, 2020). In contrast, extrinsic motivation stems from the pursuit of external rewards such as monetary incentives, public recognition or career advancement opportunities, which influence behaviour toward goal attainment (Gagné et al., 2022). Understanding and balancing these motivational factors is key to enhancing employee well-being and institutional productivity, particularly within the Higher Education sector.

Gallup (2020) defines employee engagement as the degree of cognitive and emotional commitment that individuals exhibit toward their work tasks. The organisation further asserts that engaged employees display increased productivity, reduced turnover and stronger alignment with organisational goal factors essential for achieving operational excellence.

Motivated employees are therefore more likely to demonstrate high engagement, directly influencing organisational success.

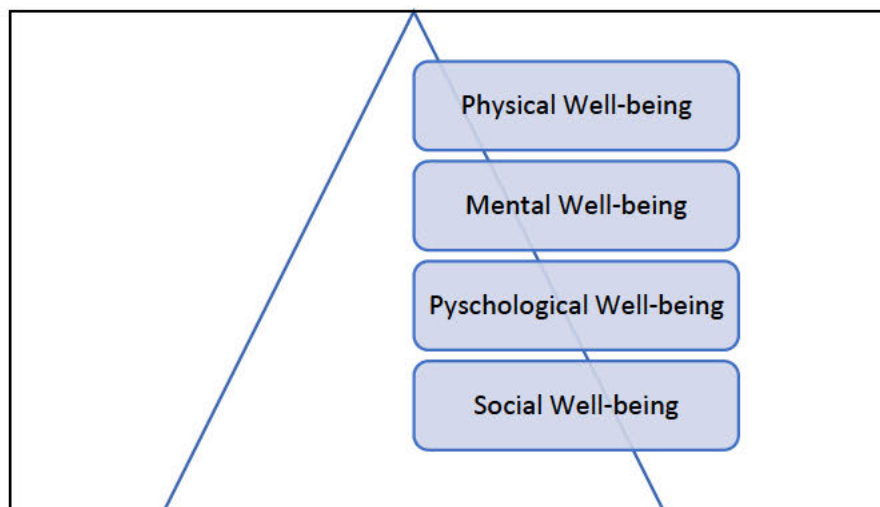
De La Fabian and Stecher's (2020) conceptualisation of happiness remains pertinent in current scholarly discourse, characterising it as an affective resource that individuals deploy to facilitate outcomes consistent with their personal values and objectives. Their framework substantiates the progressive shift in Psychology towards the examination of positive affect and its influence on workplace metrics. Recent research has intensified the focus on positive emotions and employee well-being, aiming to quantify their impact on performance indicators. Nonetheless, empirical investigations into positive psychology interventions within occupational settings remain relatively sparse, with many studies predominantly emphasising mental health maintenance and risk mitigation strategies rather than proactive affective development (Donaldson et al., 2021).

Positive Psychology, originally conceptualised by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), has evolved into a specialised domain centred on individual strengths, optimism and resilience constructs. Current scholarly efforts prioritise the advancement of Positive Organisational Behaviour (POB), a strengths-based paradigm promoting psychological capital comprising hope, self-efficacy, resilience and optimism (Luthans et al., 2021). This approach has demonstrated efficacy in enhancing both employee well-being and organisational performance, particularly within high-demand and complex operational contexts.

2.2 Different types of well-being

In this section, the different types of well-being, as illustrated in Figure 1, as well as their application in the workplace, are discussed. This includes physical, mental, psychological, and social well-being. Also included is a discussion about the well-being programs offered by the university.

Figure 2. 1: Different types of well-being



Source: Own

2.2.1 Physical well-being

In 1943, Maslow proposed a theory of human motivation by suggesting there is an inherent escalation of needs that individuals seek to satisfy along a hierarchy, from more basic physiological needs to higher-level needs (Neubauer and Martskvishili, 2017). At the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy are the needs for food, water, oxygen, rest, sleep, sexual activity, and other physical comforts as subsistence to living, according to McLeod (2007). In this context, physical health is typically identified as having an absence of disease or physical illness. Aligned with this idea, Bolier et al. (2013) state there has been a growing body of literature that recognises physical wellness is correlated with leading a healthy lifestyle and also that people who are in good physical health generally have a better immune system.

Being aware of one's body, along with a healthy weight, continues to be a major extension of employee wellness. Ryff (2014) indicates that those identified as overweight or obese, with a body mass index (BMI) at or over 30 were reported to have poorer well-being when compared to those with a body mass index in the normal range. Furthermore, those with a BMI of 35 or greater are more likely to face discrimination or social mistreatment and lower self-esteem. As Blake, Malik, and Suggs (2014) maintain, regular physical activity has a positive effect on both physical and psychological health, and can help prevent stroke, coronary artery disease, Type 2 diabetes, and other chronic illnesses.

Participation in physical activity is associated with a 20% to 30% reduction in all-cause mortality risk (Department of Health, 2004, as cited in Blake et al., 2014). Consequently, regular physical exercise is predominantly recognised for its efficacy in alleviating symptoms such as anxiety and depression, enhancing mood regulation, as well as facilitating the management of stress. Empirical evidence suggests that individuals engaging in physical activity exhibit significantly higher levels of psychological well-being across multiple domains compared to their sedentary counterparts (Ryff, 2014). An additional health-related concern amongst support staff pertains to sleep deprivation, which is frequently attributed to elevated stress levels and workload demands.

Insomnia has been employed as a predictive variable for both hedonic and eudemonic well-being, with empirical evidence indicating that individuals with optimal sleep patterns demonstrate higher levels of personal growth, more positive interpersonal relationships, and reduced stress and anxiety levels (Ryff, 2014).

Amponsah-Tawiah, Cox, Hollis, Jain and Leka (2014) conducted an epidemiological study on physical health amongst Ghanaian mine-workers, revealing that these individuals face elevated risks of exposure to various biological and psychological hazards resulting from chemical exposure. For instance, excessive noise levels in mining operations constitute a significant health risk, potentially impairing auditory function. According to Amponsah-Tawiah et al. (2014), the mining industry is also associated with common occupational accidents, including rock falls and mobile equipment incidents, which can lead to traumatic injuries, resulting in work absences of up to three days or fatalities.

2.2.2 Mental well-being

In this study, mental health is interpreted as a spectrum of neurophysiological and cognitive components that influence emotional, mood, thought, and behavioural experiences. As stated by Franke et al. (2017), there are both positive and negative components of mental health. The positive component of mental health refers to a state of psychological well-being, where an individual can cope with stress and adversity, while the negative component denotes the experience of psychological strain or the presence of mental health disorders (Francois and Schutte, 2014).

As noted by Franke et al. (2017), positive and negative mental health is influenced by a variety of biological, psychological, and social factors, including life experience, living circumstances, self-esteem, and nutrition. According to Chu (2017), mental well-being also involves cognitive capacity and the ability to function productively daily, healthily communicate with others, and mobilise and remain resilient in the face of challenges. According to Chu (2014), mental health was once seen simplistically as merely the lack of mental illness; however, recent research has demonstrated that people who do not have a specific diagnosis can struggle to function in their lives.

As stated by the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is more than simply the absence of mental illness; it is an individual's ability to understand their abilities and limitations, keep up a productive work life, and be generally able to manage daily life stresses (Borritz, Madsen, Rugulies and Tripathi, 2014). More recent research by WHO established that nearly half of the world is experiencing some form of mental health condition. The main symptoms of mental health conditions can consist of low mood related to depression, excessive worry related to generalised anxiety disorder and eating and social anxiety disorders. Batterham et al. (2015) found that these key symptoms can affect individuals' ability to obtain and maintain work or undertake upskilling efforts. Similarly, Borritz et al. (2014) noted that emotional distress, like depression, can be associated with poor emotional regulation and social isolation emotional distress.

According to Ahsan, Abdullah, Alam and Fie (2010), with the increase in higher educational institutions in Malaysia, the expectations of support staff have increased, creating more bureaucratic expectations. This pressure stems from increased competition among universities for national prestige, leading to an increased staff workload, resulting in lower levels of job satisfaction. Furthermore, staff members' mental well-being has been adversely affected, with many of them reporting increased stress and emotional strain (Ahsan et al., 2010). In support of this issue, Borritz et al. (2014) reported that the mental well-being of the support staff in a UK-based study declined progressively as work demands continued to rise. The issue is also compounded by the decline of traditional organisational resources used to buffer work stress, such as autonomy and the degree of role clarity faced by employees, which places additional pressure upon employees in terms of their mental health. Borritz et al. (2014) report that empirical studies have identified sub-optimal mental health conditions amongst university support staff. Investigations conducted in the United Kingdom and Australia have documented

elevated prevalence rates of depression and anxiety disorders within support staff cohorts relative to other occupational classifications (Ahsan et al., 2010).

2.2.3 Psychological well-being

According to Mendonca et al. (2022), psychological well-being refers to an individual's evaluation of their experiences and overall mental and emotional health, encompassing both affective and cognitive components. It is critical for effective individual and organisational performance as it fosters creativity, pro-social behaviour and resilience in the workplace. Bradburn (1969) was among the first to conceptualise psychological well-being, suggesting that it is shaped by an individual's ability to experience more positive affective states than negative ones.

Sifunda, Meyer and Maposa (2023) state that in university contexts, particularly within South Africa, psychological well-being is especially relevant due to elevated stress levels; high workloads, and ongoing institutional transformation affecting both staff and students. Research shows that university staff often face significant burnout and psychological distress stemming from rising occupational demands and limited institutional support (Mayer et al., 2021). Psychological well-being extends beyond physical health, incorporating subjective well-being factors such as hope, life satisfaction, happiness and a sense of purpose (LaMontagne et al., 2014). Interventions such as supportive leadership, accessible mental health services and work-life integration policies have been shown to significantly enhance psychological well-being in organisational settings. Furthermore, both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies confirm that psychological well-being contributes to healthier interpersonal relationships, which in turn enhance team cohesion, employee engagement and overall workplace performance (Bolier et al., 2013).

2.2.4 Social well-being

Dodge, Daly, Huyton and Sanders (2022) refer to social well-being as the quality of an individual's interactions, relationships and sense of belonging within their community or workplace. It reflects how individuals perceive their social lives in terms of support, connectedness and mutual respect. Social well-being is built on key constructs such as social integration (a sense of belonging to a community or group), social support (having reliable people to turn to), social contribution (feeling that one's work or role benefits others), and social trust (confidence in the fairness and integrity of others) (Huppert, 2020).

Knight (2023) asserts that in organisational contexts, high levels of social well-being are linked to increased employee engagement, stronger team collaboration, lower turnover and enhanced psychological safety. Recent studies emphasise that fostering inclusive workplace cultures, open communication, and supportive peer networks is essential for maintaining social well-being, especially in hybrid and remote work environments (Tan and Lim, 2021). Employees with high social well-being tend to be more resilient, motivated and committed to their organisational goals.

Fundamentally, the social well-being of interpersonal attachment is considered essential amongst human beings. As per Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, social needs are met through feelings of acceptance, emotional connection, and companionship obtained from one's peers, family members, friends, or romantic partners (Kiruja and Mukuru, 2013). Elements of love and belonging could exist in family relationships, workplace connections, friendship, and intimate relationships. Social needs are universal and exist in nature and across cultures. If there was a lack of social needs and these relationships were not met adequately, one could be susceptible to psychological discomfort, such as loneliness, social exclusion, anxiety, or depression (Geo and Taormina, 2013). This highlights the critical importance of nurturing social well-being both in personal and professional environments to promote mental health and overall performance.

In summary, the interplay between the four aspects of well-being, physical, mental, psychological and social, together shapes the performance and job satisfaction of support staff at UKZ. This indicates that when staff are healthy physically, sound mentally, motivated psychologically and connected socially, they show better levels of engagement, adaptability and productivity. In turn, if any one of these dimensions is weak, the impact will be felt in some other way on the advances made in the other dimensions. This can produce stressful situations, absenteeism, and a drop in quality of work, among other factors. Therefore, recognising these interactions helps come up with well-defined and tried well-being initiatives in the long run, which will improve performance and lead to better organisational effectiveness.

2.3 Well-being factors that affect employee performance

Employee well-being is a pivotal factor affecting performance metrics, subjective well-being, burnout, stress, work-life balance and physical health. Elevated levels of well-being correlate with enhanced motivation, increased engagement and higher productivity, thereby fostering favourable organisational outcomes. This section examines the primary well-being determinants that influence employee performance within organisational settings.

2.3.1 Subjective well-being and employee performance

Bryson et al. (2014) demonstrate a positive link between subjective well-being and job performance in at least three important ways of which a person's well-being positively affects his or her work outcomes. First, the physiological effect, where these higher levels of subjective well-being led to cardiovascular health, improve immunity and endocrine functioning, and lead to a quicker recovery from any illnesses. Furthermore, LaMontagne et al. (2014) indicated that subjective well-being can be shown to have a secondary impact on physical health, in that people with a greater sense of well-being are more likely to engage in behaviours that enhance health. Significantly, Bryson et al. (2014) observed that individuals whose behaviours increase in the workplace tend to have greater energy and enthusiasm. A positive increase in employee health is also seen by lower involuntary absenteeism and lower voluntary absenteeism due to illness. In addition, the literature suggests that subjective well-being is positively correlated with cognitive functioning, creativity, and problem-solving ability at work.

2.3.2 Burnout and employee performance

Barak and Lizano (2015) point out that low job-related well-being, particularly burnout, can negatively influence employee performance by disengaging from job satisfaction, which is one of the greatest contributors to workplace performance. It often means emotional exhaustion and a lack of personal energy, ultimately leading to disengagement. It can also result in withdrawal behaviours, as when an employee with burnout socially isolates at the workplace and limits their access to peer support and learning through collaborations. The indicators for well-being in the workplace would be subjective well-being, employee engagement, social capital, psychological capital, and mental resilience (Barak and Lizano, 2015).

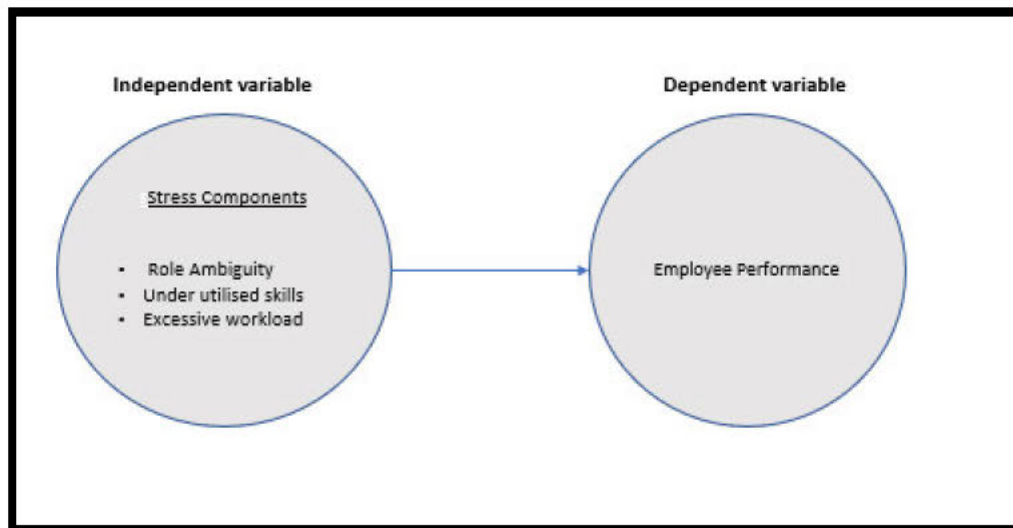
2.3.3 Stress and employee performance

Stress is widely considered to be a central factor influencing employee performance in the workplace. Typically, it was found by Besse, Laliberte, Latimer and Poremski (2017) that stress refers to a situation perceived as threatening or overwhelming. Stress arises according to Lazarus and Folkman (19984, cited in Blackwell 2017) when there is an imbalance between a person and their environment, depending on demand, when demands are appraised as exceeding their resources to cope. Parker and Ragsdale (2015) make a distinction between distress and eustress, with distress resulting in adverse psychological responses that can negatively impact one's emotional well-being and work outcomes.

Workplace stress may incorporate both quantitative and qualitative factors (Tenibiaje, 2013, cited in Olukayode, 2017). Quantitative factors pertain to all aspects relating to the amount of work there is for the employee, such as how many hours the worker has to complete one or multiple tasks associated with the job, or the intensity of the task. Qualitative factors relate to the nature of the work itself and include how little control the individual has over how the task is done, how little communication there is within the task or the organisation, how little social support there is from co-workers or supervisors or managers, or how poor the internal flow of information is getting from the organisation to the frontline relative to its chain of command (Olukayode, 2017).

Chandwani and Gupta (2015) describe the organisation and stress as emanating from external and internal sources and affirm that stress is typically evident from one or more external aspects. These include time, pressure, workload, and also issues stemming from top-down demands, which involve peers, principals, and interpersonal issues, as well as limitations regarding opportunities for career development and job security. The external sources described look at management structure, organisational climate and levels of employee participation decision decision-making, are all stressors for the organisation. Internal stressors emerged from specific human characteristics age, education level, gender, and individual personality (Chandwani and Gupta, 2015). Figure 2 illustrates how specific stress components, namely role ambiguity, underutilised skills, and excessive workload, serve as independent variables influencing the dependent variable, employee performance.

Figure 2. 2: Independent variable (IV) and dependent variable (DV) of job stress and employee performance



Source: Adapted from Olkayode (2017)

A study by Besse et al. (2017) showed prolonged exposure to workplace stress is strongly associated with reduced job performance, depressive symptoms, cognitive disruptions, and medical problems. This same study found that workplace stress contributes to psychosocial risk experiences that can lead to mental health challenges of varying degrees, workplace interpersonal issues, loss of drive, focused distractions, and other physical stress-related complications.

2.3.4 Work-life balance and employee performance

Work-life balance is a critical determinant of employee performance, facilitating the effective management of professional duties alongside personal and familial obligations. Empirical evidence indicates that employees maintaining an optimal work-life equilibrium report elevated job satisfaction, diminished stress levels and enhanced productivity (Ali et al., 2022). Organisational interventions such as flexible scheduling, telecommuting arrangements and comprehensive employee wellness programs have been associated with increased employee engagement and retention metrics (Kelliher, Richardson and Boiarintseva, 2019). Additionally, findings suggest that perceived organisational support in balancing work and personal responsibilities correlates positively with employee motivation and performance, thereby

producing favourable organisational outcomes (Soomro, Breiteneker and Shah, 2022). Consequently, the incorporation of structured work-life balance strategies is imperative for sustaining high employee performance within evolving contemporary work contexts.

2.3.5 Physical health and employee performance

According to Pronk (2021), physical health exerts a significant impact on employee performance metrics as individuals in optimal physical condition demonstrate increased energy levels, enhanced cognitive focus and elevated productivity outputs. Such employees exhibit reduced absenteeism rates, improved concentration capacities and heightened resilience to occupational stressors, thereby contributing to overall job performance augmentation. Organisations implementing health promotion interventions comprising wellness programs, incentive-based fitness initiatives, ergonomic workspace designs, and comprehensive health screening protocols foster an environment conducive to physical and professional development. Jex and Britt (2019) elucidate that physical well-being bears a direct correlation with cognitive capacity and endurance, both of which are integral to maintaining sustained high-performance levels. Additionally, employees with robust physical health are more likely to engage in constructive work behaviours, including collaborative efforts, innovative activities and proactive problem-solving, thereby positioning physical health as a strategic organisational asset.

Aparna and Sahney (2024) highlight that administrative staff within higher education institutions encounter occupational stressors such as excessive workload, talent marginalisation, verbal abuse and restricted access to critical information. Addressing these issues necessitates an in-depth understanding of and strategic emphasis on the performance support mechanisms for administrative staff within the institutional ecosystem.

2.4 The Importance of support staff performance

As argued by Erasmus (2020), administrative staff play a significant role in the implementation of institutional priorities and the fulfilment of external and internal imperatives that are characteristic of universities. Indeed, on behalf of the university, administrative staff are responsible with academic staff for constructing the reputation and brand credibility of their organisations by applying competent, high-quality client service (Barkhuizen, Schutte and Smit, 2015). This role is also associated with the university's goal of transforming health services. This goal relates to training professionals and coaching a large number of multi-

disciplinary education components in a single organisation to achieve the university's objectives. The administrative staff's job role is an important one because they coordinate responsibilities across different functional and disciplinary sections of the university. In this regard, Mitchell (2023) recommends that the administrative staff's training needs and their individual talent be focused on in a more deliberate way by the university.

In addition to their operational roles, support staff are increasingly recognised as strategic partners in driving institutional excellence and transformation. Their contribution extends beyond administrative duties to include fostering a supportive environment that enhances the efficiency of academic functions and student services. Support staff are often the first point of contact for students and external stakeholders, and their ability to provide timely, accurate and courteous service influences the overall institutional reputation and student satisfaction. Moreover, the evolving demands in higher education, such as digital transformation, inclusive practices and quality assurance, require that support staff be adaptable, well-trained and empowered to take the initiative. Investing in their continuous professional development, well-being and performance management systems not only boosts

2.5 Measures of performance

Performance within organisational settings is defined as an employee's capacity to execute assigned tasks successfully within designated timeframes (Upadhyaya, 2014). Employee performance measurement is primarily operationalised through Performance Appraisal (PA) systems, typically administered by the Human Resources (HR) function in conjunction with line management. A Performance Appraisal constitutes a systematic and standardised evaluation of an employee's behaviours and outcomes relative to established performance criteria (Fapohunda, 2015). This formal assessment process facilitates the ongoing monitoring of employee contributions whilst aligning individual outputs with organisational objectives.

Effective performance measurement utilises specific performance indicators, including task completion rates, accuracy, deadline compliance, quality of service, communication efficacy and problem-solving abilities. In the context of university support staff, additional performance metrics encompass responsiveness to stakeholder requests, records management efficiency and proficiency in administrative systems and digital technologies. Stakeholder feedback from students, academic staff and supervisors is integrated into the evaluation framework to ensure a comprehensive appraisal of employee performance.

The application of assessment tools such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), 360-degree feedback mechanisms, self-assessments and peer evaluations enables the quantification and qualitative analysis of performance metrics. Continuous monitoring coupled with feedback processes allows for the identification of performance gaps, recognition of exemplary performers, and the formulation of targeted training and development strategies. A well-structured performance measurement system fosters transparency, promotes accountability and underpins strategic HR initiatives, including promotions, succession planning and incentive-based remuneration.

The performance of support staff within university environments is systematically evaluated using a combination of qualitative and quantitative metrics that quantify their contributions towards institutional objectives and service quality. Key performance indicators include operational efficiency and precision in administrative functions; responsiveness to student and staff demands; communication clarity and effectiveness; and adherence to institutional policies and procedures (Ngcamu and Chidakwa, 2021). Furthermore, metrics such as service quality standards, timeliness of task completion, interdepartmental collaboration and proficiency in utilizing digital information systems and tools are integral to assessing performance in contemporary academic contexts (Erasmus, 2020). Performance assessment methodologies encompass routine performance appraisals, stakeholder feedback mechanisms and measurements of service delivery turnaround times. These evaluative criteria facilitate accountability, pinpoint areas requiring targeted training, and support the ongoing enhancement of administrative processes vital to institutional success.

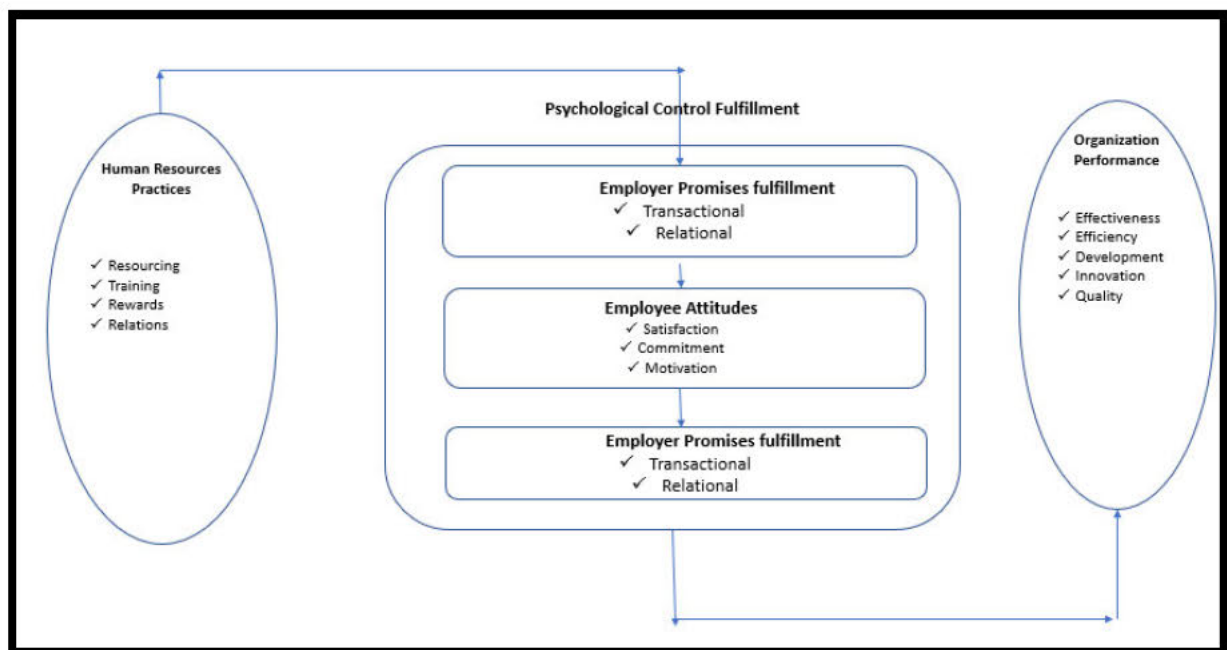
2.6 HRM Practices and employee performance

Human Resource Management (HRM) involves planning, organising, directing, and controlling the people in an organisation. According to Watson (2010), HRM focuses on the employment relationship and the contract between the employee and employer. HRM prioritises investments in employees' well-being, job satisfaction and overall occupational experience. This focus is evidenced through organisational policies that foster work-life integration, optimise task design, and uphold principles of equality and diversity. The implementation of these initiatives aims to cultivate organisational environments characterised by supportiveness, employee valuation and motivation.

Consequently, HR practitioners are instrumental in ensuring equitable treatment, promoting inclusivity and aligning individual competencies and objectives with overarching organisational strategies (Watson, 2010). Effective HR methodologies such as continuous professional development, robust performance appraisal systems and employee engagement programs have been empirically linked to enhanced commitment and productivity levels (Khan, Nawaz and Ramay, 2010). Furthermore, strategic HRM approaches emphasising transparent communication, recognition schemes, and career advancement pathways contribute to increased job satisfaction and decreased turnover intentions (Boxall and Purcell, 2016).

Adopting comprehensive HR practices enables organisations to exert a positive impact on its employee performance metrics. Employees who perceive organisational support, fairness and developmental opportunities display elevated motivation, innovation and resilience, thereby fostering improved organisational outcomes. Consequently, HRM functions as a critical intermediary, aligning employee welfare initiatives with sustainable performance enhancement objectives.

Figure 2. 3: HRM and employee well-being



Source: Adapted from Watson (2010)

Figure 3 above shows the integral relationship between Human Resource Management practices and employee well-being within the workplace. This model highlights how HRM functions, such as recruitment, training, performance management, and employee support, directly influence the physical, psychological and social well-being of staff. More so, in the context of this research on support staff at UKZN, the figure underscores the crucial role that HRM plays in fostering a work environment that promotes wellness. By implementing effective HRM strategies focused on well-being, universities can enhance support staff performance, reduce absenteeism and improve job satisfaction. This alignment between HRM and well-being is pivotal for sustaining institutional efficiency and achieving organisational goals.

Employee well-being within organisational settings denotes the comprehensive quality of life and experiential aspects encountered by employees during role execution. The association between organisational performance metrics and employee well-being is characterised by complexity and multifactorial influences. For instance, austerity measures such as workforce reductions may yield immediate fiscal benefits but frequently result in increased workload intensity and psychological stress amongst remaining staff, thereby negatively impacting their well-being and subsequent organisational performance (Mäkikangas et al., 2021). In addition, organisations with sound financial stability possess greater capacity to allocate resources toward employee well-being initiatives, thereby fostering a healthier, more engaged and productive workforce (Albrecht et al., 2020).

Boxall and Purcell (2023) assert that employee well-being is fundamentally interconnected with human resource management (HRM) strategies and organisational performance metrics. HR practitioners acknowledge that “performance” encompasses multiple dimensions, including enhancements in organisational effectiveness as well as individual employee outcomes (Van De Voorde et al., 2019). The relationship between well-being and performance is primarily influenced by three critical dimensions, namely: (i) subjective work experiences such as job satisfaction and perceptions of fairness regarding compensation and promotional opportunities; (ii) physiological and psychological health indicators such as stress levels and mental health status; and (iii) social factors, including the quality of employee-supervisor interactions (Van Zyl and Rothmann, 2022).

Demerouti, de Bloom and Sonnentag (2022) articulate that human resource (HR) practices possess the capacity to both facilitate and impede employee performance, contingent upon their

implementation fidelity. For instance, flexible work arrangements typically correlate with increased employee well-being. However, the magnitude of these benefits is modulated by the degree of employee autonomy granted over scheduling. Additional HR management (HRM) interventions such as ongoing vocational training, impartial performance evaluation processes and equitable compensation schemes are empirically associated with elevated employee satisfaction levels and diminished workplace stressors (Deery and Jago, 2021; Kundu and Gahlawat, 2020). Brown (2000) identified that organisational communication, recognition initiatives and career development opportunities exert a positive influence on staff satisfaction, a conclusion that retains relevance and is corroborated by contemporary research emphasising employee engagement as a pivotal mediating variable in organisational performance outcomes (Shuck and Reio, 2022). Therefore, Figure 3 encapsulates the essential role of HRM in enhancing employee well-being, which in turn supports individual performance and drives overall organisational success.

Whilst the literature review covers a range of possible factors affecting employee well-being, only four dimensions of employee well-being, namely physical well-being, mental well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being, were determined to be the most relevant and were the focus of this study. Other employee well-being constructs, such as financial and occupational well-being, are also discussed as they contribute to a theoretical perspective but were not measured in the empirical phase of the research study. This selective focus ensured that the research objectives were not inconsistent with the results of the literature review and were appropriate to the aim of the study.

2.7 Theoretical framework

This study employs Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) and the Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 1998) to examine the relationship between employee wellness and support staff performance at UKZN. These theoretical frameworks collectively elucidate how the fulfilment of physiological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualisation needs; the presence of intrinsic motivators and hygiene factors; and the cultivation of positive affective states contribute to increased motivation, psychological well-being and enhanced job performance.

2.7.1 Herzberg's Two Factor theory (1959)

This theory tends to assume that staff well-being and displeasure arise from two distinct, identifiable areas. It is also known as hygiene and motivational factors. Khan and Iqbal (2013) define hygiene factors as items associated with the job, like remuneration status.

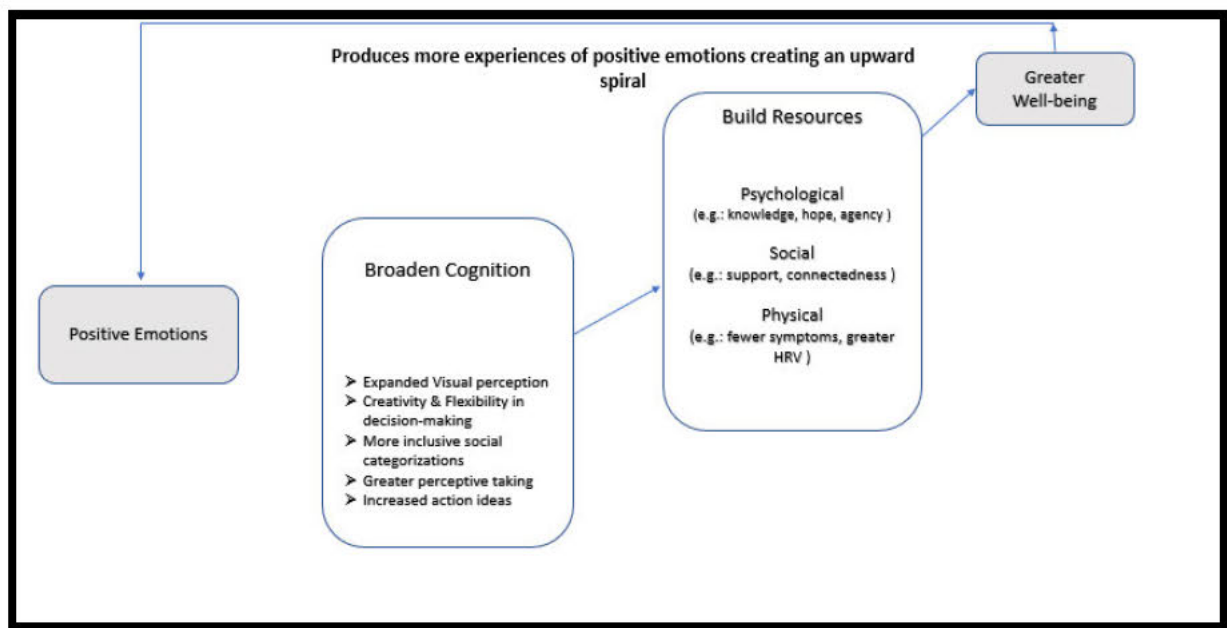
Alshmemri, Shahwan-Akl and Maude (2017) expand on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory by dividing workplace factors into two different areas. The first is called motivational factors and is associated with self-actualisation needs, and describes workplace features such as recognition, promotion, and opportunities for development, which are intrinsic components that directly contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction. Hygiene factors are the second group and are related to needs around avoiding dissatisfaction, such as organisational policy, pay, and relations with co-workers. However, hygiene factors are not motivational factors because they are not related to promoting satisfaction (Alshmemri et al., 2017).

There may be limitations in the use of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory for this study. As stated earlier, motivational factors are intrinsic as they relate to work, such as opportunities for growth, recognition, achievement, and the nature of the work itself and are closely connected to job satisfaction, but do not speak to employee well-being as a foundational catalyst for positive attitudes towards their work. Although the hygiene factors relate to external contributors of dissatisfaction, such as relationships with other colleagues and the work environment, this theory does not explain in any real way whether influencing these factors would have any implications for employee delivery. More specifically, Herzberg's approach does not resonate with the multi-faceted nature of well-being, inclusive of varied physical, mental, psychological and social dimensions, and thus has a limited view on the well-being-performance proposition outlined within the study.

2.7.2 Broaden and build theory (1998)

The main construct of positive psychology is focusing on a positive approach to human resources in the working environment (Luthans et al., 2007). Fredrickson's (1998) Broaden-and-Build Theory is a relationship to Positive Psychology. This theory is proposed by Barbara Fredrickson (1998), and connects to psychological capital, well-being and organisational citizenship behaviour.

Figure 2. 4: Diagram illustrating Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build theory



Source: Adapted from Fredrickson (1998)

The theory states that positive emotions, like love, interest and contentment, expand the individual momentary thought-action repertoire. The broadened thought-action framework enables the potential development of enduring physical, intellectual, social and psychological Fredrickson's (1998). Broaden-and-build Theory is also related to positive psychology. Those resources allow people to deal with adversity better and more positive emotional states (Nickerson, 2007).

The theory holds that positive emotions such as love, interest, and contentment expand a person's momentary thought-action repertoire. These broadened thought-action repertoires can encourage the development of enduring physical, intellectual, social, and psychological resources. These resources equip the individual to better combat adversity and cultivate additional positive emotional states (Nickerson, 2007). The Broaden-and-Build Theory suggests that when employees experience increased levels of positive emotion, they are more likely to give their best in both physical and cognitive domains (Conway, Tugade, Catalino and Fredrickson, 2013). Conway et al. (2013) also state that positive emotions not only relate to positive experiences and memories but may also add to the employees' level of subjective well-being. Nevertheless, there is still the matter of whether positive emotions actually provide

employees with physical and psychological well-being in the short-and long-term (Conway et al., 2013).

2.7.3 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs could be another speculative framework the researcher could potentially consider for this research. Herein, there are five levels of motivation: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualisation needs.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs assumes that one can only experience fulfilment of high-order needs when low-order needs are met. According to Taormina and Gao (2013), Maslow's theory demonstrates that it is imperative for a proponent's needs to be satisfied before the next level of need arises and the individual focuses on satisfying it. Grounded on the basic biological, psychological, physical and social needs of human beings, Maslow developed a five-dimensional theory that classifies the needs of individuals into different categories and ranks their achievement. These categories are demonstrated below in Figure 5.

Figure 2. 5: Visual representation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, illustrating the five key levels that motivate human behaviour



Source: Adapted from Neubauer and Martskvishisili (2017).

2.7.3.1 Physiological Needs

Physiological needs are the base of Maslow's hierarchy and encompass the most fundamental human survival needs. These include necessities such as food, water, air, shelter, rest and other bodily needs. In the workplace context, this translates to adequate salaries to afford necessities, reasonable working hours, breaks during shifts

and access to clean facilities. Meeting these needs is essential for individuals to function effectively and engage in higher-order needs.

2.7.3.2 Safety needs

Once physiological needs are satisfied, people seek safety and security. This includes both physical safety, such as protection from harm, a stable environment and safe working conditions; and psychological safety, which involves job security, clear policies and freedom from harassment or fear. In the workplace, ensuring employee safety through policies, health measures, and job stability is crucial for overall well-being and productivity (Neubauer and Martskvishili, 2017).

2.7.3.3 Love and belonging

Love and belonging, as defined by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, are communal needs gratified by a feeling of connection, fondness and love from co-workers, relatives, companions and loving relationships. In professional settings, this includes the need for positive work relationships, team cohesion, inclusion and a sense of being part of a supportive group. Fulfilling this need enhances collaboration, motivation and psychological well-being (Neubauer and Martskvishili, 2017).

2.7.3.4 Esteem needs

Esteem needs are associated with an individual's desire for recognition, respect and self-worth. These needs involve feelings of dignity, accomplishment and developing a positive reputation within one's personal and professional life. At work, this can be supported by acknowledging achievements, offering professional development, and empowering employees to take initiative and contribute meaningfully (Neubauer and Martskvishili, 2017).

2.7.3.5 Self-actualisation

Self-actualisation is the pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and represents the individual's propensity for personal development, achieving potential, and meaningful achievements. It reflects the pursuit of purpose, creativity and continuous personal development. In the workplace, opportunities for autonomy, innovation, career advancement and alignment between personal and organisational goals contribute significantly to this need (Neubauer and Martskvishili, 2017).

2.8. Conclusion

The review of this data has clearly identified the various types of well-being, namely mental, physical, social and psychological well-being. The literature review critically assessed essential elements presenting significant threats to support staff's well-being in organisational situations. It presented the different well-being programs across the different institutions, including UKZN. The review noted the considerable gap in the research literature in developing contexts, such as South Africa, especially where little attention has been paid to considering the different dimensions of employee well-being, particularly the support staff in organisational contexts. This chapter has examined three distinct theoretical frameworks: the Broaden and Build Theory, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory as well as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Chapter Three: Research methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the qualitative research methodology that was applied in the study. The chapter presents the research design, data collection methods as well as why qualitative research in particular was used. The study setting and population of interest are described, as well as sampling strategies for selecting participants for data generation.

3.2 Aim of the study

The main aim of this research is to explore how the different dimensions of well-being influence the perceptions and experiences of support staff regarding their work performance at UKZN.

The following research questions aimed to explore the well-being factors that influence the work performance of support staff at UKZN:

- i. In what ways does physical well-being influence the performance of support staff within UKZN?
- ii. How does mental well-being affect the performance of support staff within UKZN?
- iii. How does psychological well-being influence support staff performance at UKZN?
- iv. How does social well-being shape support staff performance within UKZN?
- v. To what extent do well-being programmes enhance support staff performance within UKZN?

3.3 The guiding research paradigm

The epistemological paradigm adopted for this investigation is interpretivism as the researcher aims to elucidate the potential relationships between variables through an exploration of participants' knowledge and experiential perspectives. Interpretivist paradigms posit that reality is co-constructed via subjective interpretations, which are influenced by individuals' backgrounds and lived experiences (Thanh and Thanh, 2015:24 as cited in Schwartz-Shea, 2011). Research within this paradigm involves analysing social phenomena by examining how

individuals interpret and construe their social environment (Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler, 2014:17). Nevertheless, interpretivism presents its own complexities, notably due to the variability in individual perceptions and interpretations of identical or similar facts and events (King and Horrocks, 2010:11).

3.3.1 Research strategy

A research approach is defined as a systematic plan of action that delineates the procedural framework guiding the execution of research to ensure methodological rigor and efficiency (Mohajan, 2017:59). Creswell and Creswell (2017) describe a research approach as an overarching conceptual structure that directs the selection of research methods, including data collection and analytical techniques. Ishtiaq (2019:40) categorises research approaches into three primary types: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. For this study, the selected research approach is qualitative, characterised by the collection of in-depth, contextual data through methods such as observations and interviews, as opposed to quantitative approaches that utilise structured instruments like questionnaires for numerical data acquisition (Creswell, 2015:174).

3.3.2 In-depth interviews as the main data collection instrument

When conducting interviews, the researcher probes the participant to gather data for the qualitative study. In-depth interviews provide valuable insight and a source of information to the researcher, and limit researchers' personal opinions, but still produce the relevant data for the research study.

However, data is often only useful for the study once it is transformed into text (Remenyi, 2012). Qualitative data is diverse, given that it can be obtained from a variety of sources (Remenyi, 2012). Bryman and Bell (2017) provide seven general sources of data for a qualitative study. These include the following: focus groups, surveys, qualitative interviews, direct observation, participant observation, language-based methodologies and content analysis. This study mainly relied on qualitative interviews as the instrument for gathering the data.

3.3.3 Instrument of measurements: the interview schedule

An interview schedule was created by the researcher based on insights gathered during the literature review and the theoretical framework, as shown in Table 3.1 below. The questions were designed in accordance with the research objectives.

Table 3. 1: Interview Schedule

Question Code	Question Focus Area	Total Questions	Source of Development
A	Personal and Demographic Data	4	Developed by the researcher
B	Aspects of Physical Well-being	3	Developed by the researcher
C	Elements of Mental Well-being	3	Developed by the researcher
D	Psychological Well-Being Factors	3	Developed by the researcher
E	Social Well-Being Aspects	3	Developed by the researcher
F	Well-being Programs	3	Developed by the researcher

- **Section A of the interview schedule**

This section aimed to extract biographical information about the participants.

- **Section B of the interview schedule**

This section aimed to extract information on the participants' physical well-being and how this relates to their staff performance at UKZN.

- **Section C of the interview schedule**

This section aimed to extract information on the participants' mental well-being and how this relates to their staff performance at UKZN.

- **Section D of the interview schedule**

This section of the schedule consisted of questions that aimed to elicit information from the participants on their psychological well-being and how this relates to their staff performance at UKZN.

- **Section E of the interview schedule**

This section of the schedule consisted of questions that aimed to elicit information from the participants on their social well-being and how this relates to their staff performance at UKZN.

- **Section F of the interview schedule**

This section of the schedule consisted of questions that were aimed to elicit information from the participants on their perspectives and experiences of the well-being programs at UKZN and how this relates to their staff performance.

3.4 Study setting

When exploring a study site, the researcher thought about a place that would give easy access to the sample size and that would provide valid and reliable results. The researcher resides in Durban, South Africa and is also an employee of UKZN. This is why the researcher selected this site as a reliable data collection site and intends to eventually facilitate some positive change in the organisation resulting from it.

3.5 Study population

As defined by Sekaran and Bougie (2013), a population is the whole group of individuals, items, or objects that are relevant to a particular research question. For this study, the population of interest is the workforce of UKZN, which has an excess of 7000 employees.

This workforce includes both academic and support staff. Consequently, the sample will be drawn from three key support units, excluding their managerial staff.

The support employees will be taken from the Finance department, Human Resources (HR) department and the Information and Communication Services (ICS) department. Managers did not form part of the study as they are seen as leaders in the organisation who make decisions and have these decisions disseminated down the ladder to the rest of the support staff. Therefore, all support staff from these three departments, excluding their managers, will have an equal chance of participating in the study. This study's results will be drawn from and, where appropriate, generalised to the wider staff population. The participants in this group, whose attributes were examined, are called primary units (Levy and Lemeshow, 2013). All participants were selected from this specified population.

Three support departments, HR, Finance and ICS were purposively selected as they cover a range of functional areas in the university's administration. These units must continually deal with both students and academics and therefore make a huge contribution to the efficiency of the institution in its service delivery and organisational performance. Departments such as Academic Administration and Research Support were not included because they more closely relate to the academic project and do not give a true representation of the general support services.

3.6 Sampling strategy

Sampling is a procedure whereby individuals are selected to represent the larger population (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010). Sampling can occur in two ways, namely, probability and non-probability. Non-probability sampling refers to designs where individuals in the population do not have an equal chance and do not have a known chance of being selected (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). Purposive sampling takes place when one selects individuals or a subset of individuals based on pre-defined criteria, as part of the research questions. Within the purposive sampling framework, there are many sampling techniques, including judgment and quota sampling. For this study, purposive judgement sampling was utilised as it allows the researcher to explicitly sample individuals who can provide the most relevant and meaningful data pertaining to the research questions (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013).

3.7 Sample size

Sample size represents a unit, part or section of the population, which was selected for study (Rahi, 2017). The sample of support staff participants was drawn from three administrative departments at the institution. These departments provide insight into how staff wellness has an impact on performance outcomes. The selected departments were Human Resources, Finance and the Information Communication Services at UKZN. The researcher purposefully recruited four participants from each department, which gives a total of 12 participants. This number is considered sufficient to reach data saturation in phenomenological research, where the focus is on gaining in-depth insights into lived experiences rather than generalisability (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Table 3. 2: Sample Size per Department

Department Name	Sample size
Human Resources department	4
Finance department	4
Information and Communication department	4

3.8 Data collection

The collection of data refers to the process employed by researchers for systematically obtaining relevant and accurate data to address their research goals (Blaxter, 2010). Data collection may utilise multiple forms of a process, such as literature review, observation, measurement, interviews and surveys. Sekaran and Bougie (2013) define interviews in two forms, structured and unstructured. Unstructured is informal with flexibility, as each conversation can develop without being forced by a question. Structured describes a series of questions already established to ensure all participants can be compared to study objectives (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013).

The data was primarily collected through face-to-face interviews in the university. However, in a few cases, participants who were engaged in remote work or unavailable in person, were interviewed online by way of Microsoft Teams. This ensured inclusiveness and convenience while continuing to maintain the qualitative depth of the data. The researcher was responsible for contacting participants and setting suitable times to conduct the interviews.

The researcher used a common set of questions with each participant, ensuring consistency across interviews. The researcher would, at times, encourage participants to consider their responses from the context of their perceptions of well-being and its impact on work performance. In this way, the researcher was able to collect information that was purposeful and relevant to the aim of the study. The researcher would also rephrase questions or ask clarifying questions in instances when participants appeared unsure or were having difficulties explaining their perceptions of certain aspects of well-being.

The interview protocol was based on the study's research questions and theoretical perspectives, including Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the Broaden and Build Theory, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Each item was systematically crafted to investigate dimensions

of employee well-being and their impact on occupational performance, as delineated in the conceptual model. The questions were structured to elicit in-depth responses regarding participants' lived experiences, perceptions and challenges pertaining to well-being within their particular occupational contexts.

3.9 Ensuring data trustworthiness

Quality control of the data will be established by the researcher using reliability, validity and truthfulness. Reliability and validity are the foundations of quantitative research, whereas truthfulness is the basis of qualitative research. In establishing quality control for the qualitative data, the researcher focused on these areas of quality control in qualitative research:

3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research, according to Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017), pertains to the trustworthiness and dependability of the findings and interpretative process. Credibility requires that researchers accurately portray participants' experiences, perspectives, and the contextual setting of the research. To enhance credibility, the researcher formulated interview questions to precisely capture participants' experiences across different domains of well-being and their impact on work performance. To ensure that the questions effectively elicited relevant and meaningful responses, a pilot study was carried out with two participants who fulfilled the study's inclusion criteria but were not part of the final sample. Feedback from the pilot indicated that, while most questions were well understood, some required rephrasing to enhance clarity and depth. For example, a broad question on "general well-being" was refined to specifically address emotional, mental and physical well-being in the workplace, enabling participants to provide more insightful responses. Additionally, the structure and sequence of the questions were adjusted to improve participant engagement.

3.9.2 Confirmability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) define confirmability in qualitative research as the extent to which findings and interpretations are rooted in the data, thus minimising researcher bias and subjective influence. Confirmability aims to establish objectivity by ensuring that conclusions are supported by the empirical evidence rather than the researcher's beliefs or preconceptions. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal to systematically document potential biases and facilitate self-awareness throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Transcribed

verbal data were retained verbatim to preserve authenticity and enable direct interpretation of participants' responses. An audit trail detailing coding procedures and thematic development was meticulously maintained to ensure analytical transparency. Furthermore, peer debriefing sessions with two academic experts were conducted to validate analytical consistency and reduce potential biases.

3.9.3 Dependability

Dependability within a qualitative research quality control study speaks towards the dependability established by the stability and consistency of the findings through time, as well as across researchers and circumstances. It is primarily concerned with establishing the reliability of the findings as well as their repeatability by others. To attain dependability within the research study, the researcher used the same interview protocol for all research study participants, tape-recorded all interviews, and transcribed all interviews accurately.

3.9.4 Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability is about how well the insights gained from a study can make sense in different situations beyond the one directly studied. Transferability is concerned with evaluating the extent to which the research results can be generalised and applied to similar contexts. This study provided evidence of transferability through a detailed description of the research context as well as participant demographics, which would allow future researchers to assess the degree to which findings could be applied to similar contexts.

3.10 Data Analysis procedures

Qualitative data, usually in the form of interviews, field notes and transcripts, can be lengthy and multifaceted to make sense of. Part of this difficulty is due to a lack of common and accepted processes and structured guidelines for examining and making sense of such data (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013).

Once the qualitative data collection was completed through audio interviews and open-ended questionnaires, the researcher engaged the services of a qualified statistician to code the MS Word transcriptions into NVivo version N15. From a qualitative research perspective, coding involves assigning labels, descriptive words or distinctive identifiers to specific segments of data (Creswell et al., 2016). Subsequently, the NVivo specialist employed the code/re-coding technique and conducted thematic analysis to identify and extract significant themes from the qualitative data, which will be elaborated upon in Chapter 4. The use of NVivo facilitated a

deeper understanding of the main themes and sub-themes identified within the data. According to Mouton (2001:108), data analysis involves organising the collected information into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships. Additionally, all audio interview transcriptions were produced by an experienced external transcriber to ensure objectivity, neutrality and the absence of researcher bias. Transcription involved creating a detailed and comprehensive written record of all spoken words, in accordance with established standards (Braun and Clarke, 2008:88).

3.11 Ethical considerations

Ethics in research refers to a framework derived from a set of moral principles and professional standards that help researchers make judgements about what is right and wrong in conducting research, while honouring and respecting participants, fairness, and integrity (Neuman and Robson, 2014). For the study, strict ethical protocols were followed according to the institutional and academic requirements of the UKZN. The first step involved acquiring a Gatekeeper's letter, which formally allowed the researcher access to work with the selected institution to collect the required data. After completing the Gatekeeper step, the second step involved submitting an online application to the University's Research and Ethics Committee. The application included a detailed description of the aim and objectives of the study, a description of how the study would be conducted, and how the participants would be engaged in the process.

The study addressed the following ethical issues:

- **Written consent**

The Ethics Committee based at the Research Office of UKZN provided written consent (HSSREC/00005918/2023).

- **Informed consent**

An informed consent form provided all information in regard to voluntary participation, voluntary withdrawal from the study, including all procedures for the research, and the anticipated benefits of and outcomes from the study, was included in each interview guide.

- **Anonymity**

The participants' names and identifying details were replaced with pseudonyms in the final dissertation.

- **Confidentiality**

- All materials gathered during the fieldwork were securely stored at the university for five years, after which they will be permanently destroyed.
- **Plagiarism**

All references to secondary data used in the study was referenced and cited accordingly.

3.12 Limitations of the study

The research study took place at the UKZN, a higher education provider which adopted, as a result of the influence of the coronavirus, a hybrid teaching and learning environment. Some lecturers and staff have returned to campus. Whilst the majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, a few were conducted through online means due to hybrid work schedules. The time allowed for replies from respondents online contributed to the longer turn-round of interviews, which was deemed a limitation to the study.

In addition, some questions may not have allowed staff to express their true feelings about their motivation or the way that they are truly feeling. The questions may also not be allowed for the depth that may be required in some staff circumstances to cover what the real issues are.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the research methodology that was used in this study, including the philosophical stance, data collection methods used, and ways of analysing the data to investigate and understand the connection between support staff well-being and work performance (work productivity) at UKZN. The research was conducted using an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative, phenomenological approach, primarily through the lens of the participant's lived experience.

Data were collected through structured, in-depth interviews, enabling the collection of rich, contextually grounded information. Methodological rigor was ensured through purposive sampling, adherence to ethical standards, and the implementation of multiple measures to establish credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability. Thematic analysis, supported by NVivo software, was used to systematically interpret the data. Overall, the methodological decisions outlined in this chapter are aligned with the study's objectives and provide a strong foundation for the analysis and discussion of the findings in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter Four: Presentation of findings and discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings from the interviews conducted with the twelve support staff working in Finance, Human Resources and Information and Communication Services at UKZN. This study explored the following five areas of well-being: physical well-being, mental well-being, psychological well-being, social well-being and institutional wellness programs, and their impact on staff performance.

The study undertook a qualitative approach and employed thematic analysis, using NVivo 12 to code the data into themes. Each theme is discussed with reference to the relevant sub-themes and includes the participant quotes to illustrate how these themes are grounded in their lived experiences. The analysis is further supported by the literature and the conceptual framework of the study to better understand how well-being and workplace performance are related. This chapter presents and discusses the themes, drawing on the following research questions presented in Chapter 1:

- I. In what ways does physical well-being affect the performance of support staff at UKZN?
- II. How does mental well-being contribute to support staff performance within UKZN?
- III. What is the correlation if any, between psychological well-being and support staff performance at UKZN?
- IV. How does social well-being shape support staff performance at UKZN?
- V. To what extent do well-being programmes enhance support staff performance at UKZN?

4.2 Participant profile

The twelve participants in the study were selected from the three support departments, namely Finance, Human Resources (HR) and Information and Communication Services (ICS) at the

UKZN. Four participants were interviewed from each department. Table 4.1 below provides a summary of the participants in the thematic discussion. To maintain confidentiality, participants were identified by the coded IDs associated with their department. For example, F01 represents Participant 1 in the Finance department.

Table 4. 1: Participant ID and Department

Participant ID	Department
F01	Finance
F02	Finance
F03	Finance
F04	Finance
HR01	Human Resources
HR02	Human Resources
HR03	Human Resources
HR04	Human Resources
ICS01	Information and Communication Services
ICS02	Information and Communication Services
ICS03	Information and Communication Services
ICS04	Information and Communication Services

4.2.1 Socio–demographic characteristics

Table 4.2 shows the composition of the sample group regarding gender, age, ethnicity and qualifications. The study sample comprised a predominance of males to females (8 males and 4 females). Most participants were Indian and Black, and only one Coloured participant was included. The age range of participants was from 27 to 62 years, which reflects varied professional experience and life stages. Most participants had post-school qualifications, from certificates to diplomas, bachelor's, honours and master's degrees. The years of work experience ranged from two to 40 years. Notably, 40% of the participants had over 20 years of experience in their current roles, which allows for considerable insight into long-term exposure to institutional practices and their effects on well-being and work performance.

This degree of diversity in the educational and professional experience adds to the understanding of how different levels of academic and professional education may shape the well-being and job performance of the support staff members.

Table 4. 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Race	Highest Level of Qualification	Years of Experience
F01	Female	36	Black	Honours Degree	5
F02	Male	57	Indian	Bachelor's Degree	25
F03	Male	44	Indian	National Diploma	23
F04	Male	27	Black	Bachelor's Degree	2
HR01	Female	27	Black	National Diploma	3
HR02	Male	30	Black	Honours Degree	8
HR03	Female	62	Indian	Bachelor's Degree	40
HR04	Female	33	Indian	Master's Degree	3
ICS01	Male	49	Indian	Master's Degree	28
ICS02	Male	61	Indian	Certificate	12
ICS03	Male	50	Black	National Diploma	15
ICS04	Male	48	Coloured	Certificate	30

4.3 Summary of themes

Using NVivo 12 software to perform inductive coding on the data gained from interviews produced five main themes and fifteen sub-themes. Each of the five main themes correlates to one of the research objectives and illustrates important aspects of well-being that were evident amongst participants. The themes are interpreted through the lens of relevant theoretical frameworks examined in this study.

The themes and sub-themes are reflected below in Table 4.3, along with the theoretical perspectives and, research objectives they fulfil.

Table 4. 3: Overview of the key themes and sub-themes identified from participant interviews

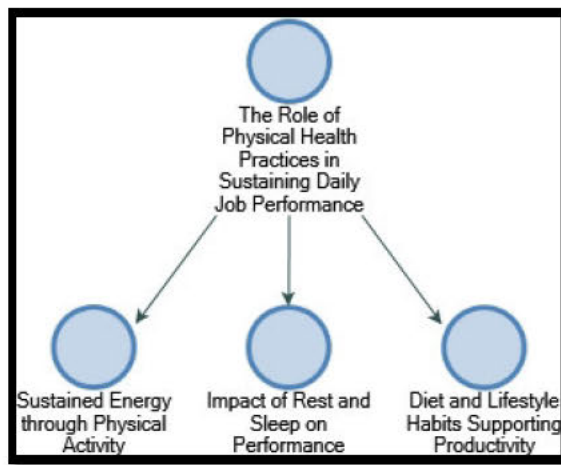
Main Theme	Sub-Themes	Theoretical Framework	Linked RO
T1: The Role of Physical Health Practices in Sustaining Daily Job Performance	1.1 Sustained Energy through Physical Activity 1.2 Impact of Rest and Sleep on Performance 1.3 Diet and Lifestyle Habits Supporting Productivity	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Physiological Needs)	RO1
T2: Managing Mental Strain in High-Demand Support Roles	2.1 Mental Strain from Workload Pressures 2.2 Managing Emotions to Maintain Functionality 2.3 Organisational Support and Adaptive Work Arrangements	Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions	RO2
T3: Psychological Resilience and Its Influence on Workplace Motivation	3.1 Self-Confidence as a Driver of Motivation 3.2 Resilience Strategies and Coping Mechanisms 3.3 Consequences of Emotional Depletion on Performance	Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Motivators)	RO3
T4: Workplace Belonging and Peer Support as Drivers of Performance	4.1 Team Relationships and Collaborative Support 4.2 Feeling Valued and Included at Work 4.3 Interpersonal Communication and Work Cohesion	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Belongingness and Love)	RO4
T5: Perceived Value and Accessibility of Institutional Wellness Programs	5.1 Awareness and Visibility of Wellness Initiatives 5.2 Engagement Barriers and Ease of Access Employee 5.3 Perceptions of Programme Impact	Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Hygiene Factors)	RO5

4.3.1 Theme 1: The role of physical health practices in sustaining daily job performance

Participants reported that their physical health affected their energy, focus and ability to meet the demands of their job. For example, they indicated higher levels of productivity and job satisfaction when they were actively exercising and getting rest, whilst making healthy lifestyle choices. Participant 3 stated, *“If I’m not physically well, I can’t focus, move around, or be efficient, it’s the starting point of my performance.”* Similarly, Participant 7 shared, *“When I’m healthy, I feel more active and positive at work. I get things done quicker.”* This was echoed by Participant 1, who noted, *“Being sick or tired makes it hard for me to concentrate or even show up. I just can’t do my best.”* Participant 11 provided a personal example, saying, *“I had back pain last month and couldn’t work properly. It really affected my daily tasks.”* This widespread sentiment illustrates how essential physical health is perceived to be by support staff in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Research supports this finding, with Blake, Malik and Suggs (2014) noting that physical fitness contributes positively to body consciousness and overall health. Moreover, Ledger et al. (2015) highlight that physical inactivity, smoking, poor nutrition and alcohol use are linked to chronic illness factors, which UKZN support staff appear mindful of based on their healthy lifestyle choices shared during interviews. These findings support the need to meet basic physiological needs, which is an important consideration in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, where physical well-being is the basis for motivation and performance (Ihensekien and Joel, 2023). **Figure 4.1** below illustrates Theme 1 and its associated sub-themes.

Figure 4. 1: NVivo 12 map showing Theme 1 and related sub-themes on physical health and job performance



4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Sustained energy through physical activity

A majority of the participants found that routine physical activity led to increased energy levels and mental clarity. One participant shared: *"I try to run at least three times a week. It clears my head, and I can focus better after that."* (HR04)

Empirical evidence indicates that physical well-being significantly enhances cognitive functioning, thereby positively influencing occupational performance. Ghaleb (2024) posited that the fulfilment of physiological requirements, including adequate rest, proper nutrition, and consistent exercise, facilitates improved attentional capacity and social engagement. Supporting these assertions, Singh and Bhatia (2023) demonstrated a positive correlation between moderate aerobic exercise and enhancements in executive functions and working memory amongst employed adults. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2022) emphasised that regular physical activity modulates hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis activity, leading to reduced cortisol levels, which in turn facilitates emotional regulation and heightened mental alertness in high-stress occupational settings. Additionally, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) guidelines articulate that physical activity contributes to cognitive health preservation, resilience development, increased motivation and overall productivity within professional environments.

4.3.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Impact of rest and sleep on performance

Many participants highlighted the importance of getting adequate rest, linking sleep deprivation to irritability and low productivity. For example: *“When I don’t sleep enough, I’m irritable and slow the next day.” (ICS02)*

This evidence substantiates the notion that sleep constitutes a fundamental physiological requirement, and deprivation thereof impairs cognitive and executive functions. Sagherian et al. (2023) demonstrate that sleep deprivation in occupational settings precipitates cognitive lapses, emotional dysregulation and diminished task performance efficiency. Similarly, Walker (2017) highlights that inadequate sleep adversely affects attentional processes, decision-making capabilities and emotional regulation, thereby impairing overall workplace productivity. Frank, Matta, Sabey and Rodell (2022) report that chronic sleep restriction induces functional impairments within the prefrontal cortex, disrupting executive functions and interpersonal interaction paradigms. Additionally, the World Health Organization (2023) classifies sleep as an essential component of mental and physical health, emphasising its critical role in maintaining cognitive integrity, psychological well-being and productivity.

4.3.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Diet and lifestyle habits supporting productivity

This perspective was commonly shared among participants who emphasised how their food choices and health-oriented behaviours affect their performance at work.

“I try to avoid junk food at work... it helps me not feel sluggish.” (HR01)

“Since 2018, I made a radical change because my health wasn't in very good order, so we did a diet change, a lot of exercise and sleep for recovery, which has made a very big difference in my performance as well at work.” (ICS04)

This result supports Maslow's (1943) theory, highlighting the important first step relating to physiological needs, that is, nutrition, rest and physical welfare as a foundation to perform. Studies support the idea that healthy lifestyles are positively related to performance and reduced fatigue at work (Frates, 2021). Furthermore, Proper et al. (2022) demonstrated that employees participating in health-promoting activities such as consistent physical activity, balanced nutrition and sufficient sleep exhibit elevated job satisfaction, reduced burnout incidence and enhanced productivity metrics.

This theme illustrates how physical well-being is a condition necessary for optimal performance at work. The results illustrate that regular exercise, adequate sleep and healthy

eating act as a first stage toward effective job performance. Participants believed that having good physical health allowed them to think clearly, feel energised and complete work effectively, consistent with Maslow's (1943) assertion that physiological needs must be met before one can attain any higher-level processes of thought or job functioning.

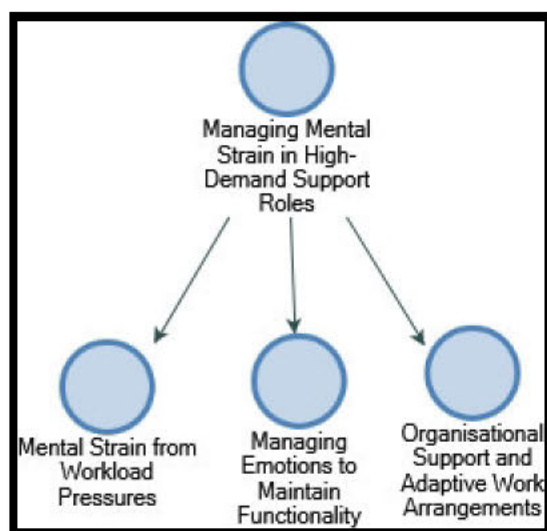
Moreover, as Sagherian et al. (2023) noted, physical health includes factors such as exercise and sleep and is a strong predictor of job satisfaction and job task performance. Likewise, Ghaleb (2024) put forth a rationale for the negative influence of variables such as fatigue and physical health on job shift and chances of job burnout, especially amongst those in positions that require attention to detail and tasks of precision/performance accuracy.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Managing mental strain in high-demand support roles

This theme examined how participants dealt with cognitive and emotional demands in their workplace, particularly with regard to workload, stress and institutional support. A number of participants noted that they experienced mental strain when managing periods of high workload, whilst also being aware of the institutional flexibility and the need for emotional regulation to maintain performance. Participant 2 shared, *“My mental state helps me to focus and make decisions. I haven’t been diagnosed with any issues, and I feel balanced in handling stress at work.”* Similarly, Participant 5 stated, *“I feel mentally strong, especially when I’m not overwhelmed. I perform better when my mind is at ease.”* Echoing this, Participant 8 explained, *“As long as I feel emotionally balanced, I can complete my tasks and deal with pressure well.”* These responses reflect a strong connection between cognitive stability and effective work execution. The ability to remain mentally focused and emotionally regulated appears to enhance participants' confidence and ability to perform well under workplace pressure.

These results are in close alignment with Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions, which argues that emotional well-being facilitates the building of psychological resources, a more creative thinking process and better coping strategies for stress (Tugade et al., 2021). Theme 2 and its sub-themes are visually presented in the project map in Figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4. 2: NVivo map showing Theme 2 and sub-themes on managing mental strain in support roles



4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Mental strain from workload pressures

Most participants expressed feeling overwhelmed during peak times of administrative activity and stressed that workloads were often so excessive that their mental perspectives became limited, and the ability to be productive was compromised.

“Yes, it does impact me a lot. Workload, long hours, and poor conditions really affect my mental well-being and performance.”

(F04)

“The IT department, in particular, is highly stressful, and that has a real impact on mental well-being, both in the office and at home.” **(ICS01)**

This finding corroborates the conclusions of Tugade et al. (2021), who assert that excessive workload demands are associated with decreased cognitive focus, elevated levels of emotional exhaustion, and an overall decline in well-being amongst staff within higher education institutions. In the same way, Kinman and Wray (2022) note that prolonged exposure to continual administrative demand without sufficient institutional support mechanisms significantly increases the chances of burnout and disengagement for academic and support staff.

4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Managing emotions to maintain functionality

Participants noted that emotional regulation and clarity of thought during high-pressure moments were fundamental to maintaining mental well-being. One participant stated:

“...work can take away family time, which affects your mental health, because even your spouse and your kids are deprived of getting your full essence when you are at home.” (HR02)

“I’ve had to learn to keep calm, even when I’m stressed or upset. Otherwise, I can’t think clearly or help anyone properly.” (HR01)

Fredrickson’s conceptualisation and advancement of emotional regulation underscore its capacity to enhance problem-solving abilities and adaptive functioning under stress (Johnson et al., 2021). This substantiates the proposition that emotional regulation is integral to workplace agility whilst also supporting cognitive clarity and effective interpersonal engagement in non-occupational settings. Johnson et al. (2021) further corroborate this assertion by indicating that unmanaged emotional distress leads to the depletion of psychological resources vital for maintaining optimal performance and interpersonal stability.

4.3.2.3 Sub-theme 2.3: Organisational Support and Adaptive Work Arrangements

Participants voiced that organisational flexibility, such as hybrid working patterns or empathetic line management, was essential to alleviating stress and enhancing mental focus. One participant acknowledged the value of institutional support structures, explaining:

“They called Wellness days, I-Cares. So that if you have any problem, we can contact those people. So yes, they do support us”. (F01)

“Actually, I’ve got my own workspace, and I’m free to do whatever I want in my own time, and my support structure, as my managers are very kind to me”. (ICS03)

Participants' reflections highlight the role of self-sufficiency and empathetic supervision in encouraging mental well-being. Whilst participants feel in control of their space and schedule, this leads to trust and self-regulation, which is critical to emotional well-being and ongoing performance. This sub-theme aligns with Dewangan and Goswami (2025), who noted the role of staff morale and seeing a lower psychological strain is enhanced by flexible institutional practices or its equivalent, leading to better performances.

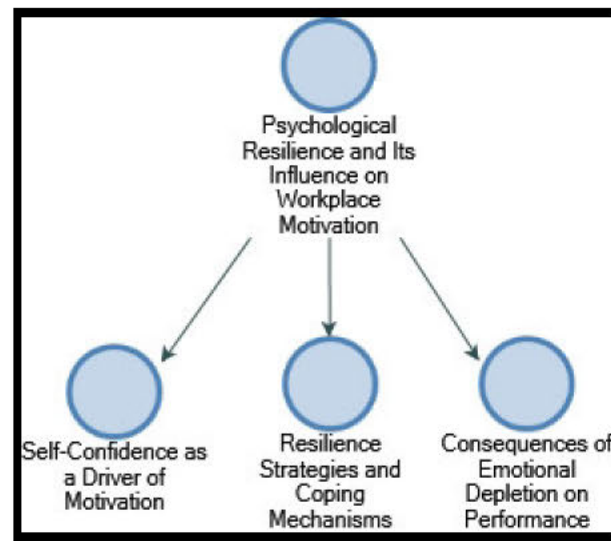
The findings under this theme indicate that mental well-being appears to be determined not only by the individual's management of their coping methods, but also the institution's capacity to provide emotional and practical support. To provide context, Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden-and-Build Theory suggests that positive emotional states broaden people's cognitive and behavioural action repertoires while building associated physical, intellectual and social resources (Tugade et al., 2021). Participants indicated that they were better able to remain grounded and engaged when they accessed positive emotions like hope, gratitude and calmness, even when they were under significant stress.

The relevance of this finding is parallel to Lee's (2021) position that failure to address workplace stressors will reduce an employee's psychological safety and availability, thereby decreasing withdrawal (e.g., performance), commitment and ultimately levels of engagement in their role. Clarke et al. (2025) also echo this point, highlighting that emotional self-regulation and stress management are key risk-mitigating factors for persistently productive outcomes from staff in emotionally demanding roles. More recently, Dewangan and Goswami (2025) have illuminated the importance of daily recovery to sustain mental resilience over time, which includes factors like detaching from work and engaging in proactive rest. From this perspective, mental well-being is clearly more than the absence of stress or psychological discomfort. Instead, it is the use of emotional and job conditions, which enable people to manage their stress and remain effective in work.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Psychological resilience and its influence on workplace motivation

This theme explores factors such as confidence, resilience and emotional coping that influence psychological well-being on motivation and workplace engagement for support staff. Many participants reflected on their own need to remain psychologically strong in their own personal and professional journeys. Participant 6 noted, *"I've been emotionally stable, and that helps me deal with the pressure and still perform well."* This sentiment was echoed by Participant 1, who said, *"I haven't gone through anything traumatic lately, so mentally I've been in a good place, and I think that's why I'm productive."* Similarly, Participant 9 stated, *"My psychological state is quite balanced, and I can handle stress without breaking down or falling behind."* These responses reflect the importance of emotional steadiness in supporting resilience and performance under pressure. This theme is again congruent with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959), with regard to the influence of motivators, such as achievement, recognition, and personal growth, on motivators and internal drivers and ultimately job satisfaction. Figure 4.3 below illustrates Theme 3 and its sub-themes.

Figure 4. 3: Visual map of Theme 3 and its sub-themes on psychological well-being from NVivo analysis.



4.3.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Self-confidence as a driver of motivation

A number of participants indicated that self-worth and belief in the ability to perform their role were strong indicators of motivational persistence and performance. One participant shared:

“I know what I’m capable of. Even when it gets difficult, I remind myself of my skills and keep going.”

(HR01)

This perspective aligns with Aljumah (2023), who noted that self-confidence and acknowledgement are driving factors of intrinsic motivation, particularly of support functions, where external forms of reward may be limited. Furthermore, Deci and Ryan (2020) contend that intrinsic motivation optimally develops within contexts that facilitate autonomy, competence and relatedness conditions that are frequently absent in support roles, unless deliberately fostered.

4.3.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Resilience strategies and coping mechanisms

Participants also recognised the value of individual resilience and an institutional structure to support their stress management and performance. Emotional resilience was seen as not only an internal capacity but also driven by institutional mechanisms, such as wellness programs. One participant stated:

“...through the Employee Wellness Programme, there’s a voluntary service, as well as when a manager needs to refer you for assistance. So, you can choose. You either go yourself or you get your manager involved.”

(HR04)

Another participant reinforced this point, noting the wide-ranging support offered:

“The programme offers support services such as counselling, managerial guidance, financial and legal advice, as well as assistance with family and childcare matters.” **(HR01)**

The quotes reveal a strong dependence on institutional support mechanisms as primary contributors to emotional resilience. Participants did not see coping as standalone personal work, but rather something that is reinforced through structured supports, including counselling, managerial support and wellness initiatives. This intersects closely with findings from Jolliff and Strubler (2021), who note that resilience is important for a sense of control and sense of purpose, both of which are essential to keeping on the job.

4.3.3.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Consequences of emotional depletion on performance

A few participants expressed feeling emotionally exhausted, despite their attempts to manage and be resilient. The experience of emotional exhaustion occurred in response to longer work hours, insufficient time for recovery and additional personal responsibilities encroaching on their work lives. For example, one participant stated that after prolonged stress, some work tasks remained unfinished. The participant stated:

I don't think there's a single person in my department who doesn't put in extra hours. You can do so for so long... but for example, I'll say, you know, there's a laptop, it's even on the desk. But maybe one item is attended to—nothing else. Too much.” **(HR03)**

“There are days I just feel drained. I'm here, but mentally, I'm not really present.” **(F01)**

These quotes show how long hours inevitably promote mental fatigue and decrease the ability to perform. These participants acknowledged that fatigue not only affects one's energy but can also impair focus and disrupt accuracy. This implies that emotional fatigue may affect job performance, increasing mistakes at very high, accountable levels. These reflections embody

the bipartite nature of Herzberg's theory, that an absence of support creates a demotivator, even with the most psychologically sound employees (Aljumah, 2023).

Psychological well-being is critical for maintaining staff motivation and sustained performance. Staff identified confidence and resilience as intrinsic assets that facilitate the effective management of challenging circumstances. However, emotional exhaustion was also noted as a potential risk factor in the absence of adequate institutional support. These findings echo Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, drawing upon the notion that motivation is derived from internal strengths- such as the case with purpose and competence- and is subject to external stresses that can compromise an individual's psychological well-being. Furthermore, for example, Jolliff and Strubler (2021) noted that employees who reported higher levels of resilience, optimism and self-efficacy (psychological capital), reported higher levels of job performance in the form of productivity and lower levels of burnout. Likewise, Aljumah (2023) found that resilient employees were able to manage their engagement in order to adapt to organisational change and fluctuations in their workplace. Overall, this means that psychological well-being can be seen as not only a personal resource to draw on, but an important influential resource that can influence future workplace performance.

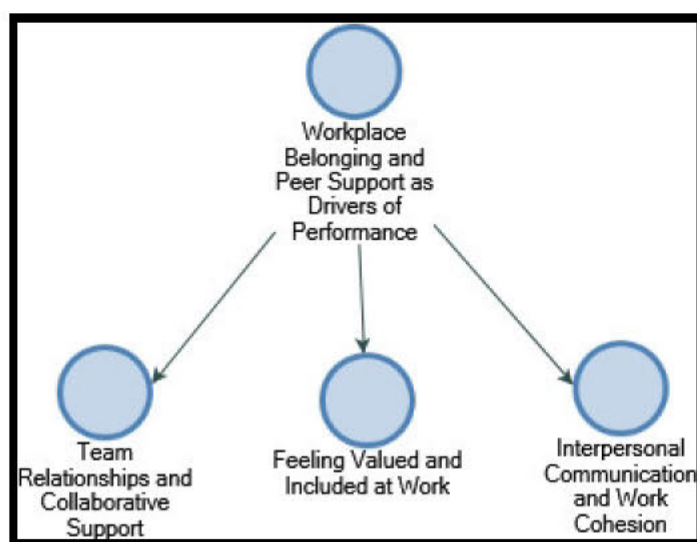
4.3.4 Theme 4: Workplace belonging and peer support as drivers of performance

The theme encapsulates the effects of the social work environment, such as peer relations, team dynamics and belongingness, on support staff motivation on performance. Participants consistently emphasised the value of being in units that were socially cohesive, with trust, open communication and emotional support. Participant 5 remarked, *"When we get along at work, everything flows; conflict makes even the easiest task hard."* This was supported by Participant 9, who shared, *"I prefer working in an environment where I can laugh, share ideas, and feel supported."* A large majority (90%) of participants expressed that they had positive relationships with their colleagues, reinforcing the idea that a social cohesive environment is essential for enhancing job satisfaction and productivity.

Furthermore, 80% of participants indicated they had developed effective conflict management skills. Participant 3 explained, *"I don't let conflict build up I try to address issues quickly so we can move forward."* This skill was perceived as vital for maintaining smooth working relationships and ensuring that disagreements do not disrupt performance. This theme aligns to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, specifically the belongingness and love need, contributing to

the sense of connectedness, security and motivation of people within "institutional" contexts (Albaram and Lim, 2023). Figure 4.4 illustrates Theme 4 and its sub-themes.

Figure 4. 4: Theme 4 and its sub-themes mapped through NVivo coding.



4.3.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Team relationships and collaborative support

A significant number of participants highlighted the role of strong peer relationships in nurturing feelings of emotional support, confidence and motivation in regard to their everyday work.

"We work as a team in our unit, so when one of us is down, the others step in. That kind of support keeps you going."
(HR02)

"I remember when we had to attend programs like Change Management... they were helping us to adjust in whatever circumstances may occur ahead. So, you get help, and they factor you in, so you don't feel isolated."
(ICS03)

These reflections suggest that collaborative peer contexts can improve task completion and could serve as a safety buffer from experiences of loneliness, especially in periods of transition or when there is an effort made to put pressure. This is in line with Ma (2024), who stated that social belonging inspires employee loyalty and teamwork and increases workplace satisfaction. Baumeister and Leary (2017) posit that the need for belonging constitutes a core psychological

motivation. Its fulfilment within organisational environments promotes stronger interpersonal relationships, mitigates stress levels, and enhances overall work performance.

4.3.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Feeling Valued and Included at Work

Participants described how feeling valued and included by their colleagues and management enhanced their morale and willingness to perform.

“When you feel like part of the team, it changes everything. You want to show up and do your best.” (F03)

This sentiment was echoed by several participants, thus demonstrating that psychological inclusion is a motivator. Maslow (1943) identified the need to belong as a fundamental human drive that is necessary for growth and productivity.

4.3.4.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Interpersonal communication and work cohesion

Open communication was named in this study as an enabler for effective collaboration and conflict resolution. A few participants mentioned that interpersonal transparency reduced stress and nurtured trust.

“I would say you’ll need a good mental well-being in your actual work. If you don’t have that, you won’t be able to communicate properly with your working colleagues and things like that.” (ICS02)

“If I can speak to my colleagues freely and we understand each other, things just run smoother. Because when you have a problem, you know we can call them, contact them, talk to them, they’ll advise you and try to resolve it with you.” (F01)

These participants communicated what was found to be a common sentiment amongst other participants, that is, communication was not only a technical aspect of their work, but it also acted as a social glue that created a cohesive, productive team culture. Additionally, the participants showed that the action of communicating with colleagues, when faced with difficult situations in the workplace, was not only a practical way to address a problem, but as

a process that may foster psychological safety and support amongst colleagues as well. This is in line with findings by Lechner and Tobias Mortlock (2022).

The findings under this theme suggest that support staff performance was substantially influenced by their social work environment. Social peer support, a cohesion of their team and a sense of belonging produced an emotionally safe space, which fostered them to be better performers. The psychological outcomes further aligned with Maslow's theory that placed belonging at the centre of motivation and well-being. An organisational social structure is not only a morale boost to producing good work but is also an aspect of performance. Ma (2024) further supported this idea by stating that peer relationships are one of the strongest predictors of work engagement and job satisfaction. McHugh et al. (2024) also provided support when arguing that when the work environment has a sense of safety and acknowledgement, and connection to others, employees are more likely to bring their full selves to work. Thus, in this instance, social well-being actively supports both purposeful emotional support, whilst also being a consistent driver facilitating job performance.

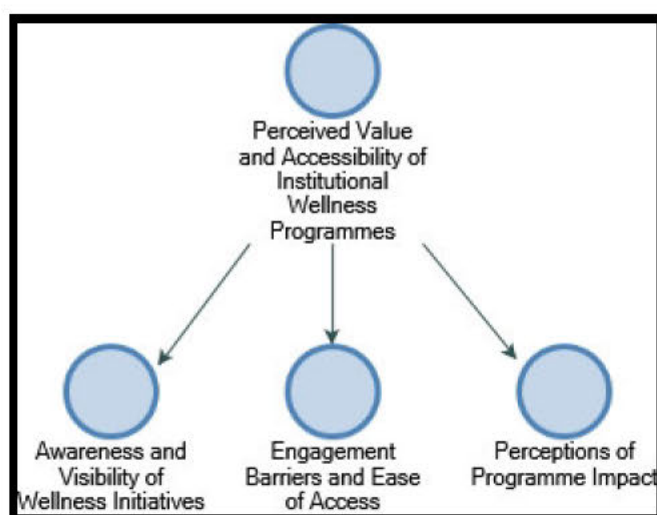
4.3.5 Theme 5: Perceived value and accessibility of institutional wellness programs

This theme highlights participants' awareness, access and attitudes towards the wellness programs within the institution. Some participants reported benefiting from these, while others described themselves as unaware of the offerings provided or had questions regarding their overall usefulness. Participant 4 stated, *"I've heard about some programs, but they're not consistent, and I don't really know when or where they happen."* This lack of clear communication was echoed by many, with 70% believing that the university did not adequately promote wellness initiatives. Participant 8 expressed concerns about the Human Resource Development unit's role, saying, *"They don't advertise these wellness opportunities enough, so a lot of us don't even know what's available."* Furthermore, 60% of participants reported being unaware of the free support services offered by the university.

Regarding the frequency of wellness activities, 90% of respondents noted that the annual Discovery Day wellness event was insufficient. Participant 10 commented, *"Having just one event a year isn't enough to keep wellness in focus."* In addition to accessibility issues, concerns about confidentiality were raised. Participant 7 shared, *"I don't feel comfortable using the psychology clinic on campus, what if word gets out?"* This distrust affects staff willingness to utilise available services, highlighting a barrier to engagement.

These findings indicate a need for UKZN to revamp its wellness communication strategies and ensure that programs are visible, regular and confidential. Enhanced employee well-being services could directly improve staff engagement and performance, aligning with literature advocating for robust, well-communicated support structures in institutions. This concept relates to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of motivation, particularly the hygiene factors, including workplace policy and working conditions. When wellness programs are seen as accessible and credible, they can indirectly help enhance employee motivation through the reduction of stress and overall wellness (Ghimire et al., 2024). Figure 4.5 represents Theme 5 and its sub-themes.

Figure 4. 5: Visual outline of Theme 5 and related sub-themes from NVivo analysis



4.3.5.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Awareness and visibility of wellness initiatives

Some participants demonstrated clear awareness of wellness offerings, such as counselling, health days and wellness newsletters. However, there was also consensus amongst a few participants that these were not clearly and effectively communicated to staff. Specifically, some participants noted that their understanding of wellness programs often seemed superficial, with little messaging surrounding mental health support. One participant shared:

“For the period I’ve been here, I may have seen a few wellness ribbons or Discovery days, but nothing around mental wellness. It all feels like a tick-box exercise.” (ICS01)

“There’s so much wellness communication lately, but I haven’t been to any. It’s hard to take out the time needed, like one or two hours for these sessions.” (F02)

These observations indicate that while wellness messaging is present, its dissemination remains insufficiently effective in engaging employees, thereby constraining its potential efficacy. The success of wellness initiatives, according to Susetyo et al. (2025), is dependent on the employees’ comprehensive awareness of available services and their unobstructed access. Similarly, Robertson and Cooper (2023) contend that for wellness programs to achieve desired outcomes, communication must be consistently maintained, inclusive of diverse employee demographics, and culturally tailored to enhance both message receptivity and motivation for service utilisation.

4.3.5.2 Sub-theme 5.2: Engagement barriers and ease of access

Participants differed on how easily they could access wellness services. Some participants indicated that they have had good experiences with counselling and health screening and that both had an impact on well-being, while others cited workload and a lack of time with respect to participating in activities.

“We do have wellness offerings, but most are now online and not everyone finds them effective. Some people simply don’t attend because of time constraints.” (HR02)

“They normally host Wellness Days every year. It helps a lot because you meet different people from different organisations who promote healthy living.” (F01)

The two quotes on accessibility imply that elements such as timing and format, such as online platforms, impacted the employee’s engagement with the wellness offerings available. Participants mentioned that while wellness offerings were available, they found it difficult to attend or to even engage with the wellness offerings in a productive manner. This sentiment appeared to be a common theme in the experience of the participants. This also speaks to the need for more flexible and inclusive formats of programming that better fit staff availability and preferences. This is consistent with the findings of Sorensen et al. (2021), who argue that the success of workplace wellness programs does not solely rely on availability, but on factors such as accessibility, relevance and alignment with the time available and work conditions faced by employees.

4.3.5.3 Sub-theme 5.3: Employee perceptions of programme impact

Despite having used various wellness services in the past, participants offered different perspectives on the usefulness of the wellness services offered. Some participants expressed that the service was useful, while others viewed the service as being generalised or weak in follow-up support.

“The session I attended was good in the moment, but nothing came after that. I’m not sure how much it helped long term.”

(ICS03)

This participant referenced a broader concern regarding the aspects of sustainability and usefulness. Herzberg's Theory pointed out that wellness services programs may not be motivators by themselves but do contribute to overall positive job satisfaction if implemented well.

In summary, this theme indicates that wellness programs could support employee well-being which in turn promotes positive job performance. However, that opportunity can falter in the absence of awareness, restricted access or a lack of follow-through. These findings demonstrate the importance of communicative proactivity and systematic support to ensure that wellness programs are visibly available and meaningfully felt by staff. This connects with Herzberg's view of hygiene factors being necessary to preserve a functioning, supportive work climate. According to Susetyo et al. (2025), wellness interventions are more effective if and when they are incorporated into an organisational culture, rather than being singular interventions (i.e. workshops). Lee et al. (2022) supported this idea and asserted that for wellness programs to have a positive impact on performance, they must not only relate directly to the employee but must be visible and must meet the actual needs of employees. Based on the current findings, it is clear that while the programs can have an impact, it is highly dependent on the way that the institution implements the programs, the communication of the program offerings, and how the programs are relevant to the realities of the staff.

4.4 Word cloud overview of participant responses

The word cloud in Figure 4.6 below illustrates the most commonly recurring words in the interviews of the 12 participants. Terms like *"well"*, *"work"*, *"performance"*, *"staff"* and *"support"* are clearly indicative of a study that is concerned with the impact of well-being on support staff performance, within the context of the UKZN. Similarly, *"mental"*, *"physical"*,

Chapter Five: Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the finding of the study is discussed in relation to the five research objectives, supported by relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. The main aim of this study is to understand the influence of well-being on support staff and the effect on their performance at a selected tertiary institution, namely UKZN. The chapter also presents recommendations for future studies, discusses the implications for institutional practices, and concludes by highlighting the broader significance of the study.

5.2 Summary of key findings

This study found that job performance for UKZN staff is positively influenced by perceived physical health concerns. Participants reported that engagement in regular physical activity, adequate rest and proper nutrition contribute to enhanced focus, productivity and presence in the workplace. Conversely, health impairments correlate with decreased motivation; increased absenteeism; and diminished task efficacy, underscoring the importance of physical health management as a determinant of organisational effectiveness.

Mental health factors, including stress levels, workload intensity and personal circumstances, substantially influence occupational performance. Participants noted that psychological stress can impair mood and cognitive function. Access to social support systems and the utilisation of emotional regulation strategies were associated with improved stress resilience. Leadership flexibility and a supportive work environment were identified as critical in mitigating burnout and promoting psychological well-being.

Psychological resilience, characterised by self-efficacy, adaptability and perceived control, was identified as a key predictor of sustained motivation and effective coping mechanisms. Emotional exhaustion was linked to task avoidance and reduced engagement, whereas high levels of confidence contributed to sustained motivation and effective problem-solving. These findings emphasise the importance of interventions aimed at strengthening intrapersonal resources.

Social well-being factors, including social connectedness, team cohesion, and trust, positively influenced motivation, collaborative behaviours and organisational commitment. Effective communication, recognition practices and fostering positive team dynamics enhanced morale,

whereas interpersonal conflicts and poor communication practices negatively affected motivation and productivity.

Although UKZN offers institutional well-being programs, participant feedback indicates concerns regarding their effectiveness. Reported challenges include insufficient communication of available resources, inconsistent program deployment and privacy issues. While some employees have benefited from these initiatives, there is a demonstrated requirement for the development of accessible, credible and systematically integrated support frameworks. Integrating well-being strategies into the organisational culture is critical to ensuring sustained enhancements in staff wellness outcomes.

5.3 Limitations of the study

The study identified the following limitations:

- **Interview instrument**

Though interviews serve as a useful means of collecting rich, insightful data, there are limits to the data that can be collected. The process of analysis was labour-intensive and time-consuming, but this was overcome by categorising the areas of well-being that the study attempted to look at. This allowed for more meaningful and more valid, and useful data.

The other limitation when it comes to interviews is the availability of the respondents and their time constraints. The important aspect in overcoming that limitation is to make a schedule and stick to those times. Also, where possible, researchers must attempt to interview respondents in their break times or after hours, as they tend to be more focused and relaxed when not having to conduct interviews whilst on company time.

- **Identifying the target population**

It is important to note the identification of the respondents as well as the respondents' willingness to be involved in the study. Possible interviewees are sometimes reluctant to speak or feel placed under pressured to speak.

- **Use of a single qualitative technique**

Whilst the use of semi-structured interviews provides valuable, rich detail and information about perceptions, it is, however, subjective, since responses are based on perceptions rather than measurable entities. The use of other complementary quantitative techniques,

such as validated job stress, burnout, or psychological well-being scales, may have produced more objectively measurable results and may have improved triangulation.

- **Collection of data from support staff only**

The provision of perceptions from line managers might have permitted a much more balanced view of well-being and performance of staff if self-perceptions were compared with managerial observations. Future research in this field may therefore employ common data sources plus methodological triangulation, which will add validity and reliability to the findings.

5.4 Recommendations for UKZN

To enhance the overall well-being and performance of support staff, UKZN should focus on sharing clear and ongoing information about wellness programs through emails, monthly calendars, staff meetings, and encouraging department representatives to spread the word.

UKZN leadership should embrace an approach of flexible and caring management that fosters a supportive workplace where staff can manage their stress levels to avoid burnout and promote mental health and wellbeing. Management is key in developing an organisation's workplace culture, and therefore managers need to be trained in Resilience, Emotional intelligence and how to communicate supportively with employees. Confidence-building and adaptability workshops provided by Human Resources will give staff the ability to better manage their workload-related stresses.

Investment in the physical well-being of employees can be made through the creation of facilities for employee exercise and well-being, such as on-campus gymnasiums and walking clubs, and access to nutrition education and counselling. In addition, the institution could establish partnerships with nearby fitness centres to make membership fees less expensive for employees to promote healthy lifestyle choices. Investment in the mental wellness of employees is similarly critical, as this will allow the institution to promote an environment that support employees to thrive mentally. This may include the implementation of a wellness check-in process at designated times, on-site counsellors and stress reduction workshops designed to meet the unique challenges faced by support staff.

UKZN must conduct ongoing surveys to determine what wellness initiatives are most in need by their employees, then tailor wellness programs to meet that need. All wellness programs must be kept confidential, all-inclusive, and conducted at work hours so as to increase both participation and access. Resilience and team-building must become an integral part of the university's culture. To create this culture, UKZN must celebrate employee successes, schedule interdepartmental events, and create opportunities for employees to collaborate with one another; thereby creating a sense of community and strengthening employee morale.

Ultimately, the University should support a culture of trust regarding confidentiality with respect to wellness services through data protection and responsible handling of personally identifiable information; promote wellness on an ongoing basis, through regular small-scale monthly events, rather than just one large event per year focusing on physical, emotional, and financial well-being; and establish systems for continuous feedback from employees to allow the university to assess employee perception of wellness programs in "real-time" and provide immediate feedback on how the university can continually enhance, maintain relevance, impact, and sustainability with its wellness initiatives.

5.5 Implications of the study

This research has a number of important implications for institutional management at UKZN. Firstly, wellness programs need to be offered in a consistent manner, be confidential and be clearly communicated. If communication is unclear, if a schedule is irregular, or if employees do not know how to access services which are being made available, then participation will decrease, and the potential benefits of wellness initiatives will be lost. Therefore, wellness initiatives should reflect authentic responses to the lived experiences of support staff and address their concerns about workloads and flexibility of working hours, and the physical campus environment's impact on their daily functioning.

In addition to this, it is essential to embed emotional, mental, and social well-being into Human Resource and Performance Management Systems. HR activities are not merely administrative in nature, but rather they need to be developed as a more people-focused, holistic model with an understanding of how employee well-being will impact the overall performance of the organisation. Organisational policies that provide support for employees to develop their own psychological safety, work-life balance, and personal growth will positively contribute to achieving better organisational outcomes.

In addition to this, the research also indicates that institutional success will be supported by creating work environments in which teams feel supported, are encouraged to collaborate and share ideas with one another, and where open lines of communication exist. The support of teamwork, through the establishment of participatory decision-making processes and open lines of communication, will contribute to increased morale and employee engagement throughout the organisation, thus increasing overall productivity.

The research results show that the ability to provide emotional health support is vital to the health and sustainability of an organisation's employees. Therefore, organisations should consider providing opportunities for their employees to take time off for rest and recovery; opportunities for mental restoration, such as mental health days, or resilience-building workshops; or targeted training for managers to better understand how to emotionally and motivationally support their employees. As a whole, these potential applications indicate that an organisational approach to well-being is needed to sustain and maintain a high level of performance in support staff.

5.6 Conclusion

This study offered a rich understanding of how the multiple dimensions of well-being (physical, mental, psychological, social and institutional) impact the performance of support staff at UKZN. Through the voices of participants and theoretical framing, this study communicates that optimal job performance occurs when both individual wellness and institutional care are in alignment. The data highlight the necessity for a multi-level approach to wellness, alluding to not only individual expectation, but that staff resilience must actively be supported. A healthier and motivated support workforce is vital to the functioning of any higher education institution.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethical clearance report



06 November 2023

Alton Llewellyn Butka (204517183)
School of Man Info Tech & Gov
Westville Campus

Dear AL Butka,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005918/2023

Project title: The relationship between wellness and support staff performance at a higher education institution
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 30 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**.

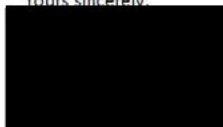
Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further 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 06 November 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 B: Information and consent

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL
For research with human participants

INFORMED CONSENT RESOURCE TEMPLATE

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 28th June 2023

Good day,

My name is Alton Butka and I am currently registered for my master's degree in the discipline of Human Resource management in the school of Management, IT and Governance at the University of KwaZulu Natal. (Westville Campus)

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research on the relationship between wellness and support staff performance at a higher education institution. The aim and purpose of this research is to draw a relationship between these two constructs and understand how the one construct affects the other in terms of support staff performance.

The study is expected to involve the participation of around 250 support staff from the Westville and Howard College campuses. In particular the participants will be from the departments of Finance, Human Resources and Information and Communication Services division at the University of KwaZulu Natal.

The study will not involve any risk to the participants as the research instruments that will be used will be based in the form of a questionnaire. The participants will thus not be in any harm as they will complete the questionnaire in their own time and in their own space. There is no reward to the participants for the completion of the questionnaire but the findings from the research will; be emailed to the participants. This feedback may be enlightening to the participants in that they will get a chance to see the correlation between the two constructs.

This research will be beneficial to both the participants in terms of the feedback that will be analyzed as well as for higher education institutions in general that all rely on support staff for their institutions to function effectively.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number_____).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at [REDACTED] 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

The participation in this study is purely voluntary and all participants are free to withdraw from the study at any point with no recourse to themselves in any way. No penalties or exclusions will be placed on the participants in the study.

There will be no consequence to participants for their withdrawal from the study. This study is purely voluntary and aims to improve the relationship between wellness and support staff in an attempt to better understand the impacts of support staff at higher education institutions.

The data that is made available from the participants will be handled in total confidentiality and kept archived for a period of 2 years, thereafter it will be discarded securely via shredding.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I _____ have been informed about the study entitled the relationship between wellness and support staff performance at a higher education institution

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 without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at [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

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion	YES / NO
Video-record my interview / focus group discussion	YES / NO
Use of my photographs for research purposes	YES / NO

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness
(Where applicable)

Date

Signature of Translator
(Where applicable)

Date

Appendix C: Gatekeeper's letter



13 June 2023

Alton Llewellyn Butka (SN 204517183)
School of Management, IT and Governance
College of Law and Management Studies
Westville Campus UKZN
Email: Butkaa@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Alton

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:

"The Relationship between wellness and support staff performance at the University of KwaZulu-Natal."

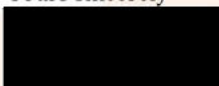
It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by handing out questionnaires and/or interviews with support staff from departments of Finance, Human Resources and Information and Communications Services (Zoom, Skype or telephone interviews recommended) on the Howard College and Westville campuses.

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

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix D: Interview schedule



Appendix A: Interview Schedule

The interview questions will be used to generate information from support staff personnel on what their perceptions are of various areas of their wellbeing and how this may or may not affect their work performance at the University of KwaZulu- Natal. The questions will be broken down into the areas of an individual's wellbeing and these will cover the areas of physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, social wellbeing as well as the impact that wellness programs may have on support staff at UKZN.

Biographical information such as gender, age, academic qualification, profession and years of experience will also be collected from participants.

Lastly, we will look at some of the coping mechanisms that support staff use in achieving their sound wellbeing.

The questions or probes that that interviewer will use are set out as follows:

Section A – Biographical information of participants

A series of questions will be presented to the participants as part of the collection process, starting with:

- A. What is your age?
- B. How many years of experience do you have in your occupation?
- C. What is your highest academic qualification?
- D. What is your job title and profession?

Section B – The categories of wellbeing and how they affect your work performance

1. How does the influence of **physical wellbeing** impact support staff performance at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
 - a Is physical wellbeing important to your performance? If so, How?
 - b Do physical impairments / limitations hamper your work performance? If so, how?
 - c Do you invest in your physical health in order to promote your work performance in the sense of getting enough sleep, eating healthy and making good lifestyle choices? If so, how?
2. How does the influence of **mental wellbeing** impact support staff performance at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
 - a Is your working environment conducive in supporting a good mental health balance and in turn allowing you to work at your best? If so, how?
 - b Do factors like workload, excessive hours and poor working conditions play a role in your mental wellbeing and in turn your work performance? If so, how?
 - c Does UKZN support staff in promoting mental wellbeing in the work space? If yes? What measures are you aware of?
3. What is the influence of **psychological wellbeing** on support staff performance at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
 - a Does UKZN promote psychological wellbeing in your work environment as a means of supporting performance? If so, how?
 - b Does UKZN offer to your knowledge any assistance for staff who may feel that their psychological wellbeing needs some improvement? If yes, how?
 - c Do you think that contributing factors like trauma, depression and loss which affect psychological wellbeing contribute one way or another to staff work performance? If yes- how?