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Job satisfaction on employee productivity at a selected public relations and communications organisation in Gauteng

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of job satisfaction on employee productivity within a selected Public Relations and Communications organisation in Gauteng, South Africa. Grounded in a qualitative research approach, the study investigates how employees experience job satisfaction, and how these experiences are connected to their motivation, engagement, and performance outcomes. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with ten employees across different hierarchical levels and departments; and triangulated with the company's 2024 internal employee engagement survey. Thematic analysis revealed four interrelated drivers that consistently shaped employee experiences of job satisfaction: autonomy, meaningful work, engagement, professional growth and development.

The findings highlight that these drivers are not isolated, but function in synergy to promote deeper emotional and cognitive investment in work. When these drivers were intentionally supported through relational leadership, psychological safety, and development opportunities, employees reported greater motivation, initiative, and alignment with organisational goals. The study draws on established theoretical frameworks, namely Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) which together helped to illuminate the psychological mechanisms through which job satisfaction translates into productivity. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of psychological safety and relational dynamics in facilitating meaningful engagement and sustained high performance.

The research makes a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge on employee experience in the South African public relations sector; a field marked by high performance expectations and demands. It also responds to growing global calls for more human-centred approaches to workforce sustainability. Practical recommendations are provided to help organisations embed purpose, autonomy, and continuous developmental support into daily practice. Ultimately, the study affirms that job satisfaction is not merely a desirable workplace condition, but a strategic lever for driving long-term employee productivity, retention, and organisational success.

Keywords: job satisfaction, employee productivity, autonomy, engagement, meaningful work, psychological safety, career growth and development.

DECLARATION

I, Happy Matshika, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Name: **Happy Matshika** Signature: *hmatshika*

Signed at Johannesburg

Date : 01 / 11 / 2025

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research report to God, my Lord, and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is the author and finisher of my faith, and the source of every strength I have needed throughout this academic journey. In moments of uncertainty, He gave me clarity; in seasons of pressure, He granted me peace. Every page of this report is a testimony of His faithfulness, grace, and the quiet assurance that I am never alone. To Him be all the glory, honour, and praise.

To my incredible mother, Junior Makhapane Matshika, thank you for being my rock, my cheerleader, and my unwavering source of strength. Your boundless love, encouragement, and sacrifices have shaped the person I am today. Your resilience and determination have always inspired me to strive for excellence, even in the face of challenge. You have taught me the values of hard work, humility, and perseverance. Your belief in me, even in moments when I doubted myself, has carried me further than words can express. This milestone belongs to you as much as it does to me.

Thank you for your prayers, whispered in quiet moments and spoken with fierce conviction - they surrounded me, uplifted me, and carried me through this journey. You are the foundation upon which I stand, and I will be forever grateful for your love, support, and faith.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research title

Job satisfaction on employee productivity at a selected public relations and communications organisation in Gauteng.

1.2 Statement of purpose

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the role of job satisfaction in influencing employee productivity within a selected public relations and communications organisation in Gauteng. The study aimed to identify and understand the drivers of job satisfaction and how these factors may stimulate higher productivity among employees. In doing so, the research sought to provide insights to enhance productivity within the selected organisation.

1.3 Background of the study

The fast-paced and dynamic nature of the Public Relations and Communications industry, where success hinges on managing stakeholders, delivering high-quality communication strategies, and maintaining strong client relationships, requires employees to be highly creative, adaptable, and productive in managing intense and deadline-driven demands (Men, 2015). This view is supported by Lee and Kim (2022), who underscore that high-pressure environments in client-facing roles necessitate exceptional employee engagement and adaptability. Employee productivity is crucial for maintaining client satisfaction and ensuring organisational sustainability and competitive advantage and is significantly influenced by job satisfaction (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). This connection remains relevant, with Santos, Mustafa, and Ginsberg (2021) finding that job satisfaction continues to be a core driver of employee commitment and task efficiency in rapidly evolving industries.

Job satisfaction is a multi-faceted concept, often influenced by workplace culture, managerial support, growth opportunities, and the general work environment (Aziri, 2011).

This foundational view has been reaffirmed in recent literature; for example, Katebi, HajiZadeh, Bordbar, and Salehi (2022) note that supportive leadership, autonomy, and career development remain central to job satisfaction.

Research has consistently demonstrated that high levels of job satisfaction contribute to improved performance (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017), and more recent meta-analyses have echoed this relationship. Zacher and Rudolph (2020) found that job satisfaction enhances psychological engagement and increases employee productivity over time.

For organisations in high-stakes, creative sectors such as Public Relations and Communications, where employees are routinely required to deliver under pressure, understanding what drives job satisfaction is essential for employee productivity and retaining top talent (Fletcher, 2016; Thokoa, Naidoo & Herbst 2021).

Existing studies in similar sectors have shown that job satisfaction positively influences output, particularly in creative and service-oriented industries like Public Relations (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017; van Dorssen-Boog, de Jong, Veld, & van Vuuren, 2021).

However, while much research has been conducted on job satisfaction and productivity broadly and in general terms, fewer studies have focused specifically on the Public Relations and Communications sector in South Africa. This context, with its unique challenges related to high client demands, rapid technological advancements, and the constant pressure to innovate, presents a fertile ground for investigating how job satisfaction influences productivity (Pillay & Singh, 2022).

In the fast-evolving Public Relations and Communications industry, where organisational success is tightly coupled with the timely execution of campaigns and client deliverables, investigating the drivers of job satisfaction and their influence on productivity is essential for developing strategies that foster a more engaged and productive workforce and to mitigate the serious ramifications of any dip in employee productivity (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015; Saks & Gruman, 2023).

A recent employee engagement survey conducted within the selected Public Relations and Communications organisation raised important questions about the role of job

satisfaction on employee productivity. The findings from this survey suggested a need for further in-depth investigation into how job satisfaction affects employee productivity and what challenges might be inhibiting it. These initial findings were consistent with existing literature, which highlights the vital role that workplace culture, leadership, and employee engagement play in fostering job satisfaction and, consequently, productivity (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2017; Ruzungunde, Sanhokwe, & Chinyamurindi, 2024).The insights from the employee engagement survey provided a valuable starting point, and this study proceeded to understand the role job satisfaction has on employee productivity, through a qualitative case study approach, building upon and validating these initial observations.

1.4 Problem statement

In the highly competitive Public Relations and Communications industry, where employee productivity is crucial for organisational performance, client satisfaction, and long-term business sustainability, it is essential to understand the mechanisms that drive and sustain employee output. Earlier research has established that job satisfaction is a key determinant of productivity in this sector (Men, 2015), a view that continues to be supported by evolving literature focusing on dynamic, client-facing environments (Zhang & Zhao, 2023; Ruzungunde et al., 2024).

This study addresses the need for deeper insight by examining how specific drivers influence job satisfaction and subsequently employee productivity, using a qualitative case study approach. Prior work has shown that job satisfaction is shaped by several interrelated factors, including leadership communication, recognition, autonomy, and opportunities for career development, all of which are known to significantly impact employee engagement and work outcomes (Fletcher, 2016; Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2017). More recent studies have expanded on this connection, highlighting that when employees experience supportive leadership and meaningful development opportunities, they are more likely to be engaged and perform at higher levels (Katebi et al., 2022; Nyabvudzi & Chinyamurindi, 2025).

The findings from a recent employee engagement survey conducted within the selected Public Relations and Communications organisation, highlighted several drivers that were believed to influence job satisfaction and potentially stimulate employee productivity.

A thorough understanding of the influence these drivers have on job satisfaction and productivity can inform organisational policies aimed at maintaining high productivity levels, improving employee satisfaction, and aligning workforce performance with the organisation's long-term objectives (Bakotic, 2016; Ruzungunde et al., 2024). By examining these drivers in depth, this study uncovers significant insights that can inform strategies for enhancing job satisfaction and employee productivity.

1.5 Research objectives

- This study aimed to identify relevant drivers in the 2024 employee engagement survey that allude to influencing job satisfaction.
- To explore employee perception of job satisfaction at the selected organisation.
- To investigate how job satisfaction could be improved and potentially stimulate employee productivity at the selected organisation.

1.6 Research questions

To achieve these objectives, the research sought to answer the following questions:

- Are there relevant drivers in the 2024 employee engagement survey that allude to influencing job satisfaction?
- What are the perceptions of employees regarding job satisfaction at the selected organisation?
- How can job satisfaction be improved and potentially stimulate employee productivity at the selected organisation?

1.7 Rationale of the study

Job satisfaction is a pivotal factor in employee productivity, especially in the Public Relations and Communications industry, where quality of work and client satisfaction are integral to organisational success (Harter, Schmidt, Agrawal, & Plowman, 2018; Ližbetinová, Kucharčíková, Mura & Stachová, 2020). This study addresses a gap in the

literature by focusing on job satisfaction within the South African Public Relations and Communications sector, a context with unique challenges and dynamics that have received limited attention (Jiang & Men, 2017). Understanding how job satisfaction influences productivity in this sector is significant for cultivating a motivated and productive workforce capable of meeting the industry's demands (Bakker, 2017; Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

Emerging studies underscores the importance of job satisfaction in enhancing employee productivity. For instance, a study by Chinyamurindi and Mashavira (2024) found that higher ratings of decent work experience relate positively to employee engagement and job satisfaction, which in turn influence employee turnover. Similarly, Maake, Harmse, and Schultz (2024) found that strong employment relationships, consistent developmental support and elevated levels of work engagement contribute meaningfully to job satisfaction, underscoring the importance of a positive work environment in enhancing overall employee productivity. Therefore, research provides valuable insights for maintaining job satisfaction and productivity in this context.

Accordingly, this study makes the following contributions:

- Provides a deeper understanding of how specific drivers of job satisfaction (e.g., autonomy, engagement) influence productivity within the unique context of the South African Public Relations and Communications industry.
- Explores specific factors that enhance or diminish job satisfaction within the selected Public Relations and Communications organisation

1.8 Delimitations of the study

This study was delimited to a single Public Relations and Communications organisation in Gauteng, focusing exclusively on the influence of job satisfaction on employee productivity. Other potential factors influencing productivity were intentionally excluded to maintain scope. The study relied on qualitative data collected at a single point in time, using drivers identified from the organisation’s 2024 employee engagement survey. Comparative or quantitative analysis was beyond the scope of this research.

This study was delimited to a single Public Relations and Communications organisation in Gauteng to allow for an in-depth exploration of employee experiences within a specific organisational culture and context. The selection of one organisation was intentional, as it enabled the researcher to examine job satisfaction and productivity dynamics in a controlled, contextually grounded environment rather than making broad generalisations across the industry.

The study focused exclusively on the influence of job satisfaction on employee productivity and intentionally excluded other potential determinants of productivity such as remuneration, technology infrastructure, and market performance indicators. These factors were excluded because they fall outside the scope of employee perceptions and could dilute the qualitative focus on lived experiences. Similarly, the study limited participation to full-time employees who had been with the organisation for at least one year, as this ensured sufficient organisational familiarity to provide informed reflections on satisfaction and productivity.

The research was further delimited to a qualitative, cross-sectional design, capturing experiences at a single point in time rather than longitudinally. This boundary was set to align with the study's exploratory purpose and resource constraints, while still yielding rich, contextually meaningful insights.

These delimitations, though narrowing the scope, strengthened the study's internal coherence by focusing attention on employees' lived experiences of job satisfaction and its influence on productivity within a real-world organisational setting.

1.9 Conceptual meanings of core terms

Core terms used in this research study are represented in Table 1.1, below.

Table 1. 1: Conceptual meanings of core terms

Term	Conceptual Meaning
Job Satisfaction	A positive emotional state resulting from the evaluation of one's job or job experiences, strongly linked to motivation and employee performance (Katebi et al., 2022).
Employee Productivity	The extent to which employees efficiently and effectively deliver outcomes that contribute to organisational success, including quality, innovation, and service (Malik, Butt, & Tariq, 2023), building on earlier frameworks by Huselid (1995).
Employee Engagement	A motivational construct where individuals fully invest themselves, physically, emotionally, and cognitively in their work roles, often leading to higher satisfaction and performance (Gallup, 2020).
Organisational Performance	The ability of an organisation to consistently achieve strategic goals, often measured through productivity, efficiency, employee outcomes, and profitability (Kaplan & Norton, 2020).
Autonomy	The degree of discretion and independence granted to employees in task execution and decision-making, which enhances motivation and well-being (Manganelli, Thibault Landry, Forest, & Carpentier, 2022), as first framed by Deci and Ryan (2000).
Meaningful Work	Work perceived as significant and aligned with personal values, contributing to a broader purpose and enhancing job satisfaction (Tan, Sim, Yap, Vithayaporn, & Rachmawati, 2023). This concept reinforces earlier denotations by Steger, Dik, and Duffy (2012).

Psychological Safety	Psychological safety refers to a collective understanding within a team or organisation that individuals can express themselves, share ideas, and take interpersonal risks without fearing negative repercussions. This concept fosters openness, innovation, and trust, aligning with Edmondson's (1999) seminal research and further developed by Newman, Donohue, and Eva (2020).

1.10 Assumptions

This study was informed by the following assumptions:

- The participants provided honest and authentic accounts of their experiences and perceptions.
- The selected organisation is broadly representative of similar Public Relations and communications firms in Gauteng.
- The participants felt safe and confident to speak openly due to the study's confidentiality protocols (anonymity, voluntary participation, and secure data handling).

1.11 Structure of the report

This report is structured into six comprehensive chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research problem, outlines the study's objectives, provides the rationale, and establishes the overall context. Chapter 2 then offers a thorough review of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks pertaining to job satisfaction and employee productivity. The research methodology, including the qualitative case study design, data collection procedures, and measures to ensure rigour and credibility, is detailed in Chapter 3. Subsequently, Chapter 4 presents the research findings, organised thematically in relation to the study's research questions. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth analysis of these findings, integrating them with existing literature and organisational insights. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the report by articulating the study's key contributions, practical implications, identified limitations, and recommended areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

While organisational behaviour literature has extensively explored job satisfaction and its impact on productivity, there is limited research applying these frameworks to the high-intensity, client-driven context of the Public Relations and Communications industry (University of Birmingham, 2017; Gradito, Patrizia, & Wisse, 2023). In these industries, where managing client demands, developing communication strategies, and ensuring the timely delivery of services are crucial, job satisfaction is essential for maintaining employee productivity (Ližbetinová et al., 2020). Building on these insights, more recent studies such as Zhang and Zhao (2023) and Chinyamurindi and Mashavira (2024) confirm that job satisfaction in high-pressure environments remains a crucial factor influencing both employee motivation and output.

This chapter reviews relevant literature to explore drivers of job satisfaction, their influence on productivity, and their specific application within a selected Public Relations and Communications organisation in Gauteng. Furthermore, to anchor this investigation theoretically; the chapter also draws on well-established theoretical frameworks, such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) that underpin the understanding of job satisfaction and its influence on productivity (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). These models have endured scholarly scrutiny over decades and remain relevant today as confirmed by emerging studies. As such, this chapter will also incorporate recent contributions to reflect evolving organisational realities (Newman et al., 2020; Hagger, 2024).

2.2 The concept of job satisfaction

Job satisfaction has traditionally been defined as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Locke, 1976, p. 1304). This foundational view has been widely accepted in organisational behaviour research and has shaped decades of scholarship. Building on this definition, Aziri (2011) identified

both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, such as recognition, autonomy, management support, and growth opportunities, as core influences on job satisfaction in the workplace. While these early conceptualisations and contributions remain foundational, they have since been expanded and contextualised by evolving literature to reflect the complexities of modern-day organisational environments.

Over time, the positive relationship between job satisfaction and key organisational outcomes, including employee retention, reduced absenteeism, and higher productivity, is clearly established in literature (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). In addition, Zacher and Rudolph (2020) confirmed this relationship in contemporary organisational settings, noting that employees who report high satisfaction also demonstrate greater psychological resilience, lower turnover intentions, and sustained performance.

The relevance of job satisfaction is especially apparent in creative, client-driven sectors such as Public Relations, where employees are required to navigate ambiguity, multitask across projects, and meet demanding deadlines. Bailey et al., (2017) argue that high job satisfaction enhances not only performance but also individual creativity and psychological well-being. This remains consistent with recent findings by Katebi et al., (2022), who emphasise the importance of autonomy, recognition, and leadership support in maintaining satisfaction across dynamic workplaces.

Within the PR industry, where the ability to manage multiple projects and respond to client demands is essential, maintaining job satisfaction is particularly important. Research indicates that high job satisfaction is associated with improved performance, enhanced creativity, and greater employee well-being (Bailey et al., 2017).

Furthermore, organisational stability is positively connected to job satisfaction. Satisfied employees tend to remain committed to their organisations, thereby reducing turnover and ensuring continuity in client service, which is valuable outcome in high-relationship sectors like Public Relations (Fletcher, 2016; Tan et al.,2023).

2.3 Job satisfaction in the Public Relations and Communications industry

The Public Relations and Communications industry is unique in its demand for employees who are highly creative, flexible, and capable of performing under tight deadlines. Professionals in this industry are frequently required to manage complex client relationships, deliver high-quality content under pressure, and respond swiftly to external shifts and internal expectations (Men, 2015). These conditions place emotional and cognitive strain on professionals, making job satisfaction an essential element of sustained productivity.

Jiang and Men (2017) found that Public Relations professionals who are satisfied in their jobs tend to be more engaged and productive, with improved alignment to organisational objectives. Their conclusions are echoed in more recent theoretical developments from Ohemeng and Darko (2022), who observed that in high-communication roles, satisfaction is influenced by clarity of feedback, participative decision-making, and leadership inclusivity.

Despite the acknowledged importance of job satisfaction in the Public Relations industry, limited research has specifically examined its influence on productivity within this industry (University of Birmingham, 2017). Much of the literature has historically centred on broader sectors such as healthcare, education, and manufacturing (Aziri, 2011), where the operational context differs significantly from the fluid, often unpredictable nature of Public Relations. As Gradito, et al., (2023) point out, the complexities inherent in PR work create unique challenges that traditional job satisfaction models may not fully capture. Consequently, the unique pressures experienced by Public Relations professional, including rapidly advancing technologies, increasing client demands, and the need for constant innovation, present a valuable opportunity to explore the role of job satisfaction in shaping productivity.

In South Africa, where the Public Relations and Communications industry encounters additional challenges, such as socio-economic disparities and market volatility, understanding the influence of job satisfaction on productivity is vital for organisational success. Research within this context is particularly important, as the drivers of job

satisfaction may differ from those in other regions due to cultural, economic, and technological factors (Ruzungunde et al., 2024).

Understanding job satisfaction in this context is not only a matter of organisational interest, but a strategic imperative. Research by Maake, et al., (2024) shows that in South African public relations and communications settings, satisfaction is closely linked to inclusive leadership, developmental support, and perceived fairness, factors that directly influence commitment, creativity, and overall performance.

2.4 Drivers of job satisfaction

2.4.1 Engagement

Employee engagement has long been recognised as a foundational driver of job satisfaction. It refers to the degree to which employees are emotionally and cognitively invested in their work, typically resulting in increased motivation, effort, and overall performance (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2006). Building on this foundation, Bakker (2017) affirms that elevated engagement levels are strongly associated with greater job satisfaction, resulting in enhanced productivity.

Saks (2006) highlighted that alignment between personal values and organisational objectives fosters engagement, which in turn reinforces job satisfaction and organisational commitment. This relationship has been further substantiated by recent academic discourse. For example, Byrne, Peters, and Weston (2021) found that psychological empowerment and inclusive leadership significantly enhance employee engagement, especially when paired with transparent communication and feedback.

In the Public Relations industry, where client demands, reputational sensitivity, and deadline pressure are routine, engagement assumes even greater importance. Men (2015) contends that engaged Public Relations professionals are more likely to contribute innovative ideas, manage complex stakeholder relationships, and deliver under pressure. Supporting this view, Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2022) show that employees who feel recognised, supported, and aligned with organisational purpose are more likely to adopt proactive, solution-focused behaviours, enhancing both engagement and job satisfaction.

Within high-performing teams, engagement is not solely a psychological state, but a cultural norm shaped by leadership practices and interpersonal trust. Shuck and Reio (2014) emphasised that when organisations create environments in which employees feel heard and empowered, engagement becomes self-sustaining. This principle continues to be validated in more recent work; for instance, Koay, Ong, and Tan (2023) found that inclusive leadership and transparent communication practices cultivate psychological safety.

Further insights illustrate the multi-layered effect of engagement on job satisfaction and performance. Stor (2024) demonstrated that cultivating employee engagement alongside job satisfaction significantly enhances organisational outcomes. Similarly, Song (2023) noted that employee engagement and motivation are interdependent constructs that jointly drive job satisfaction in Public Relations environments.

Drawing these insights together, both past and recent research maintain that engagement remains a significant driver of job satisfaction. Where leadership is supportive, recognition is authentic, employees demonstrate greater engagement and a deeper emotional commitment to their work, fuelling motivation, greater job satisfaction and ultimately improving productivity.

2.4.2 Autonomy

Autonomy, defined as the degree of discretion and control employees have over their work, remains a central pillar of job satisfaction (Gagné & Deci, 2005). These authors, originally conceptualised autonomy as a core driver of intrinsic motivation, fostering psychological empowerment and proactive behaviour. Employees who are granted the freedom to manage their tasks, determine their schedules, and make decisions related to their work are consistently found to report higher job satisfaction and, consequently, enhanced productivity. This is especially relevant in the Public Relations and Communications sector, where creativity, responsiveness, and strategic judgement are important. In such contexts autonomy helps to tailor outputs in ways that meet both client expectations and organisational goals (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007).

Autonomy's influence extends beyond motivation; it has a demonstrated impact on performance, psychological well-being, and organisational commitment. Parker, Wang, and Liao (2019) found that employees with greater task-level autonomy showed improved focus and performance outcomes. These insights have since been confirmed by recent findings from the literature. Medina-Garrido, Guzmán, and Galiano (2023) observed that autonomy within flexible work structures enhances job satisfaction while also acting as a protective factor against burnout, particularly in roles demanding constant client interaction.

Building on these empirical insights, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) further positions autonomy, along with competence and relatedness, as fundamental to motivation and job fulfilment. Manganelli, Thibault Landry, Forest, and Carpentier (2022) reinforce the enduring relevance of this theory, showing that autonomy is significantly associated with psychological need satisfaction, long-term commitment, and engagement in highly pressured work environments.

In addition, recent studies have explored autonomy's broader effect on work-life balance, mental health, and productivity. Lipman (2022) highlights that the right balance of autonomy improves employee well-being and output, while Boccoli, Sestino, Gastaldi, and Corso (2022) emphasise that temporal flexibility, when combined with job autonomy, supports psychological well-being through improved work-life integration.

Evidence also points to autonomy's mediating role in job satisfaction through its interaction with engagement. Juyumaya, Torres-Ochoa, and Rojas (2024) found that autonomy positively influences job performance by enhancing employee engagement. Similarly, Shafizadeh (2024) identified job autonomy and performance feedback as crucial components of job satisfaction, further demonstrating autonomy's relevance in evolving workplace models.

In the Public Relations environment, autonomy serves a dual function: it empowers strategic problem-solving while also helping employees manage stress and avoid creative fatigue. When paired with guidance and feedback, autonomy not only strengthens accountability but also fuels innovation, a vital factor in an industry where reputational risk, messaging precision, and brand alignment are non-negotiables.

This is further substantiated by Zychová, Fejfarová, and Jindrová (2024), who found that employees with high job autonomy experience greater job satisfaction, suggesting that autonomy is instrumental in driving retention and organisational performance. Likewise, Battaglio, Belle, and Cantarelli (2022) provide evidence showing that when psychological needs, including autonomy, are fulfilled, job satisfaction improves noticeably.

Reinforcing this, by Mohite, Patil, Ingole, and Zambare, (2024) identified a significant positive relationship between work autonomy and job satisfaction, emphasising that giving employees control over their work fosters well-being, increases overall job satisfaction and stimulates their productivity.

2.4.3 Professional growth and development

Professional growth and development opportunities are widely recognised as pivotal drivers of job satisfaction, which in turn significantly influence employee productivity. As workplace expectations evolve, organisations that prioritise learning and development (L&D) are better positioned to retain talent, boost morale, and improve performance outcomes. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (2022), organisations that prioritise learning and development efforts tend to see increased employee satisfaction, stronger engagement, and improved retention rates, especially in sectors where agility and innovation are crucial.

This is especially pertinent in high-stress fields like Public Relations, where ongoing upskilling is essential to maintaining morale and ensuring consistent delivery in fast-paced, reputation-sensitive contexts. Srivastava (2023) found that structured development programmes directly correlate with increased retention and job satisfaction, especially when they offer clear pathways for skill enhancement and career progression.

Earlier foundational studies have long affirmed these links. De Vos, De Hauw, and Van der Heijden (2011) emphasised that access to visible advancement opportunities and skill-building resources predicts greater long-term satisfaction and organisational commitment. These insights remain relevant today, as the pace of technological change and communication innovation intensifies the need for continuous professional renewal in industries like PR. Similarly, Fletcher (2016) highlighted that development opportunities

sharpen creative thinking, foster alignment between role and purpose, and elevate employee morale.

These findings are further reinforced by Redmond, Danson, and Yakovleva (2021), who demonstrate that structured development pathways, especially those incorporating mentorship and cross-functional learning, enhance not only job satisfaction but also productivity. Likewise, Rahman and Chowdhury (2023) argue that when employees perceive growth opportunities, they develop stronger psychological ownership of their work, becoming more engaged and resilient in the face of organisational challenges.

Naidoo and Rampersad (2022) noted that development support has become a strategic imperative in hybrid and digital-first environments. Tailored interventions such as one-on-one coaching, industry-specific certifications, and digital training tools are no longer optional, they are central to talent retention and performance sustainability. This view is echoed in Hollar, Kuchinka and Feinberg's (2022) systematic review, which confirms that professional development not only improves individual outcomes but also strengthens retention and team stability.

Additionally, Byrne, Mokoena, and Isabiry (2024) found that when development programmes are aligned with employees' aspirations and work identities, they foster loyalty, deepen job satisfaction, and contribute to a more engaged organisational culture. In dynamic fields such as Public Relations, where roles demand a blend of creative and strategic expertise, such targeted investment directly enhances job satisfaction, long-term engagement, and performance outcomes.

In summary, professional development is not merely a retention strategy but a cornerstone of sustained job satisfaction and organisational contribution. Employees navigating the rapidly evolving Public Relations landscape require access to current knowledge, tools, and development opportunities to remain relevant and effective. Where such support is consistently provided, employees report high levels of job satisfaction, confidence, and creative efficacy, factors that collectively drive productivity and long-term organisational success.

2.4.4 Meaningful Work

The perception of meaningful work has been widely recognised as as an essential element in fostering job satisfaction. Steger, Dik, and Duffy (2012) defined meaningful work as that which is experienced as purposeful, aligned with one's personal values, and contributing to a greater good. According to Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010), employees are more motivated and engaged when they see their work as socially valuable or as enabling the achievement of something larger than themselves.

Recent studies further underscore the pivotal role of meaningful work in enhancing employee engagement and reducing turnover intentions. For instance, research by Chen, Li, and Xing (2022) highlights that employees who perceive their work as meaningful exhibit higher levels of engagement and are less inclined to leave their organizations. This is especially relevant in high-pressure sectors like Public Relations, where congruence between personal values and organisational purpose can serve as a buffer against job dissatisfaction.

The concept of job crafting has also gained momentum as a practical pathway to enhance work meaningfulness. Junça-Silva, Silva, and Caetano (2022) when employees take proactive steps to tailor their tasks and workplace interactions to align with their individual strengths and interests, they tend to experience higher levels of job satisfaction and improved performance. This proactive approach empowers employees to find greater purpose in their jobs, leading to improved well-being and organisational commitment.

The importance of meaningful work has become even more pronounced in demanding sectors such as Public Relations. Allan, Duffy, Autin, and Douglass (2016) found that meaningful work moderates the negative effects of work stress and enhances psychological well-being, thereby boosting job satisfaction and productivity. Extending this, Tan et al (2023) argue that the perception of meaningfulness not only enhances engagement but also fosters resilience in high-intensity work environments.

In the Public Relations and communications field, where emotional intelligence, creativity, and public impact converge, the belief that one's work matters is often what sustains effort and motivation. Kim and Beehr (2021) provide evidence that employees who view their work as meaningful are more likely to demonstrate stronger commitment and effort, both

of which are essential for thriving in industries involving complex interpersonal interaction and external influence.

Beyond individual outcomes, meaningful work also fosters collective benefits. It contributes to stronger team alignment, enhanced morale, and purpose-driven organisational cultures. Jacobson and Ghosh (2023) found that organisations that embed purpose into their work structures experience lower turnover rates and increased productivity.

Moreover, in Public Relations, where the societal and reputational impact of one's work is often tangible, the opportunity to find purpose becomes central to long-term engagement. When personal values align with professional contributions, this creates a stabilising force that not only protects against burnout but also encourages sustained performance and innovation.

When integrated, the literature affirms that meaningful work is not a peripheral benefit, but a strategic driver of job satisfaction, engagement, and organisational success. In complex and fast-paced environments like Public Relations, where cognitive load, demanding tasks, and creative pressure converge, enabling employees to derive purpose from their roles, through job crafting, leadership support, and a values-driven culture, cultivates both individual fulfilment and collective resilience.

As the nature of work continues to evolve, embedding meaningfulness into the fabric of organisational life will remain essential for enhancing job satisfaction, stimulating productivity, and retaining top talent.

2.5 Theoretical foundations of job satisfaction and productivity

2.5.1 Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) remains one of the most enduring and widely applied models for understanding job satisfaction and employee motivation. The theory posits that two distinct categories of factors shape the employee experience: *hygiene factors* and *motivators*. *Hygiene factors*, including salary, job security, and working conditions, primarily serve to prevent dissatisfaction but do not actively generate job

satisfaction. In contrast, *motivators*, such as autonomy, recognition, and meaningful work, actively promote job satisfaction by fulfilling employees' higher-order psychological needs. Within the context of the Public Relations and Communications industry, an environment often defined by tight deadlines, client pressure, and the demand for continuous creative output, motivators play a particularly vital role in sustaining both employee engagement and long-term performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

While Herzberg's model originated in the mid-20th century, its core insights continue to hold relevance in the evolving landscape of organisational psychology. Recent empirical findings have extended and contextualised its applications. Hagger (2024), for example, underscores that motivators such as autonomy and recognition remain fundamental to fostering job satisfaction and innovation, especially in fast-paced, cognitively demanding fields such as public relations and communications. In a similar vein, Tan et al (2023) argue that although hygiene factors are essential for establishing baseline well-being, they are not sufficient for eliciting higher-order engagement. Instead, psychological fulfilment, driven by opportunities for meaning, mastery, and relational support, proves far more influential in elevating job satisfaction and sustaining employee productivity.

The validity of this distinction is increasingly supported by sector-specific research. In client-facing environments, Khan, Rehman, and Fatima (2021) found that motivators are more predictive of job performance and commitment than traditional extrinsic rewards. Similarly, Shaaban, Ebrahim, and Ayed (2022) observed that in dynamic, creative sectors, elements such as peer recognition, task autonomy, and opportunities for personal achievement are statistically stronger predictors of job satisfaction and output than salary or benefits alone. These findings reinforce the idea that in high-pressure sectors, the emotional and psychological experience of work is as important as structural conditions.

Moreover, recent research is beginning to explore how Herzberg's framework can be adapted to contemporary work models, including remote and hybrid settings. For instance, Debus, Kleinmann, König and Winkler (2022) note that in digitally mediated workplaces, motivators such as purposeful feedback, recognition, and perceived impact are essential for maintaining employee morale and cohesion.

Taken in their entirety, these insights reaffirm the theoretical utility of Herzberg's model while also calling attention to the importance of adapting it to modern contexts. What began as a mid-century theory grounded in manufacturing environments has since been meaningfully extended to creative, communication-intensive, and knowledge-based sectors. While hygiene factors continue to set the baseline for acceptable working conditions, it is the presence of intrinsic motivators that consistently sustains job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and individual performance in the 21st-century workplace (Shaaban et al., 2022; Debus et al., 2022).

2.5.2 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (2000), offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the motivational forces that underpin job satisfaction and productivity. The theory posits that individuals are most intrinsically motivated and engaged when three basic psychological needs are fulfilled: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the workplace, the satisfaction of these needs enables employees to experience meaning, ownership, and commitment; key outcomes particularly relevant in creative, high-stakes environments such as Public Relations (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

The theory has gained renewed attention in recent years as researchers seek to understand employee engagement in the context modern work models. For instance, Alamer (2023) highlights that satisfaction of psychological needs strongly predicts adaptive outcomes such as engagement and resilience. This reinforces the necessity of workplace environments that nurture psychological well-being and motivational alignment.

Autonomy has emerged as a significant predictor of job satisfaction in decentralised and creative industries. Maden-Eyiusta and Alparslan (2022) found that self-leadership, a construct closely linked to autonomy, enhances work role performance through psychological empowerment, especially in settings where employees must manage their own schedules and outputs. These findings are particularly relevant in the Public

Relations field, where professionals often operate with limited supervision and are required to exercise strategic judgment and creative initiative.

Relatedness has also become an essential area of focus in post-pandemic work environments. Cohen (2023) demonstrated that inclusive leadership behaviours, such as fairness and valuing diverse perspectives, significantly enhance employee engagement by satisfying the need for social connection. When employees feel genuinely connected to their teams and organisations, they are more likely to experience purpose and satisfaction in their jobs.

In addition, Jung and Yoon (2021) found that job crafting behaviours, where employees actively reshape the content and scope of their work, are most effective when supported by environments that foster autonomy and competence. Their research suggests that organisations should not only allow flexibility in task design but also actively promote it to enhance engagement and job satisfaction.

Moreover, the relevance of SDT has been reaffirmed through large-scale empirical studies. Battaglio et al (2022) showed through experimental research that fulfilling employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness leads to significantly higher levels of job satisfaction. This confirms the universal applicability of the theory beyond traditional work settings.

Recent integrative frameworks have also combined SDT with other motivation theories to provide a more holistic understanding of employee needs. Amayreh and Arshad (2024) found that blending SDT with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs produced a more robust model for predicting job satisfaction, particularly in education and public service. Their work highlights the importance of addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to build supportive, performance-enhancing work environments.

When considered as a unified whole, these findings demonstrate that SDT continues to offer both theoretical and practical value for organisations aiming to boost satisfaction, well-being, and performance. By fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness, organisations, particularly those in high-pressure, creative industries like Public Relations, can create workplace cultures in which employees are intrinsically motivated

and resilient. As the nature of work continues to evolve, SDT provides a highly adaptable and evidence-backed framework for enhancing engagement and sustaining employee productivity through internal psychological fulfilment rather than external incentives.

2.5.3 Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model (JCM)

Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model (JCM) (1976) offers a structured and enduring framework for understanding how job design influences motivation, satisfaction, and performance. The model identifies five core job dimensions, skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback, as key predictors of three important psychological states: experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced responsibility for outcomes, and knowledge of the results of work activities. These psychological states are essential precursors to internal work motivation, increased job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism, and improved performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976).

In the Public Relations (PR) and Communications field, these dimensions are especially relevant. Professionals in this industry routinely engage in multifaceted, deadline-driven work that requires creative ideation, content development, stakeholder engagement, and real-time problem solving. Job characteristics such as task significance and autonomy are vital in shaping how these individuals perceive their work and perform under pressure. Parker et al. (2019) confirmed that job designs that promote autonomy and task significance encourage self-directed initiative and innovation, both of which are crucial in the PR sector.

Recent research has continued to reaffirm and extend the model. Daneshmandi, Raoofi, and Torshizi (2023) explored JCM in digital creative environments and found that when job roles emphasised feedback and skill variety, employee engagement and organisational commitment improved significantly. Similarly, Kim and Beehr (2021) showed that enriched job characteristics increase psychological thriving, which in turn enhances organisational citizenship behaviours, highlighting the downstream impact of good job design on culture and team dynamics.

Furthermore, the JCM model has been applied to assess mental well-being and emotional exhaustion in high-demand service industries. Alrawadieh, Karayilan, and Cetin (2022) observed that while high task variety contributes positively to job satisfaction, a lack of regular feedback and perceived autonomy can lead to emotional dissonance, particularly in roles involving high client-facing or stakeholder communication responsibilities. This insight is directly transferable to PR professionals who must balance creativity with responsiveness and accountability.

Additional recent studies continue to validate JCM across diverse settings. Anush and Kumar (2024), in a study of healthcare administration professionals, reported that all five core job dimensions were positively associated with motivation, task ownership, and role clarity. Importantly, feedback was identified as the strongest predictor of employee confidence and learning orientation, factors that are just as applicable in PR, where campaign outcomes and messaging efficacy require continuous reflection and adjustment.

In line with this, Mukherjee (2024) applied JCM principles to industrial worker populations and reaffirmed that jobs with high levels of task identity and feedback were associated with greater productivity and reduced turnover. These findings suggest that the JCM is not only relevant to cognitive or desk-based work but has cross-industry applicability when adapted thoughtfully to the sector's demands.

Moreover, scholars such as Morgeson and Humphrey (2021) have extended the model through the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ), a validated tool for assessing job characteristics in modern roles. Their work supports the idea that psychological states derived from job design continue to predict engagement and performance outcomes, even in remote, hybrid, or asynchronous work structures that are becoming increasingly common.

These insights affirm the theoretical and practical value of Hackman and Oldham's JCM in shaping contemporary job design strategies. As workplace structures evolve, especially in creative and communication-intensive sectors, organisations must ensure that jobs are not only well-scoped operationally but also psychologically enriching. When autonomy, variety, task significance, and constructive feedback are integrated into role design,

employees report higher levels of engagement, satisfaction, and creative output, outcomes that are vital for organisational performance and talent retention in high-expectation environments like Public Relations.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study was designed to explore the key drivers of job satisfaction: engagement, autonomy, meaningful work, and professional growth and development; and their collective influence on employee productivity within a Public Relations and Communications context.

Unlike predictive or causal models commonly applied in quantitative research, this framework serves an exploratory and interpretive function. It is designed to conceptually map the patterns and linkages identified in the literature rather than to test statistical relationships. The framework positions job satisfaction as a central phenomenon influenced by four interrelated drivers, which in turn shape how employees experience motivation, engagement, and productivity.

Rooted in the principles of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), the framework proposes that satisfaction arises when employees experience autonomy, purpose, engagement, and growth opportunities; conditions that foster intrinsic motivation and emotional investment in their work. In this sense, the framework acts as a lens through which participants' experiences were explored, helping to guide the development of research questions and the subsequent thematic analysis.

The diagram presented in Figure 2.1 reflects this conceptual linkage. Arrows are used not to suggest linear causation, but to symbolise the dynamic and reciprocal connections among the constructs. The framework therefore provides an interpretive structure for understanding how these drivers of job satisfaction interact within the lived experiences of employees and how, collectively, they inform perceptions of productivity in the organisation.

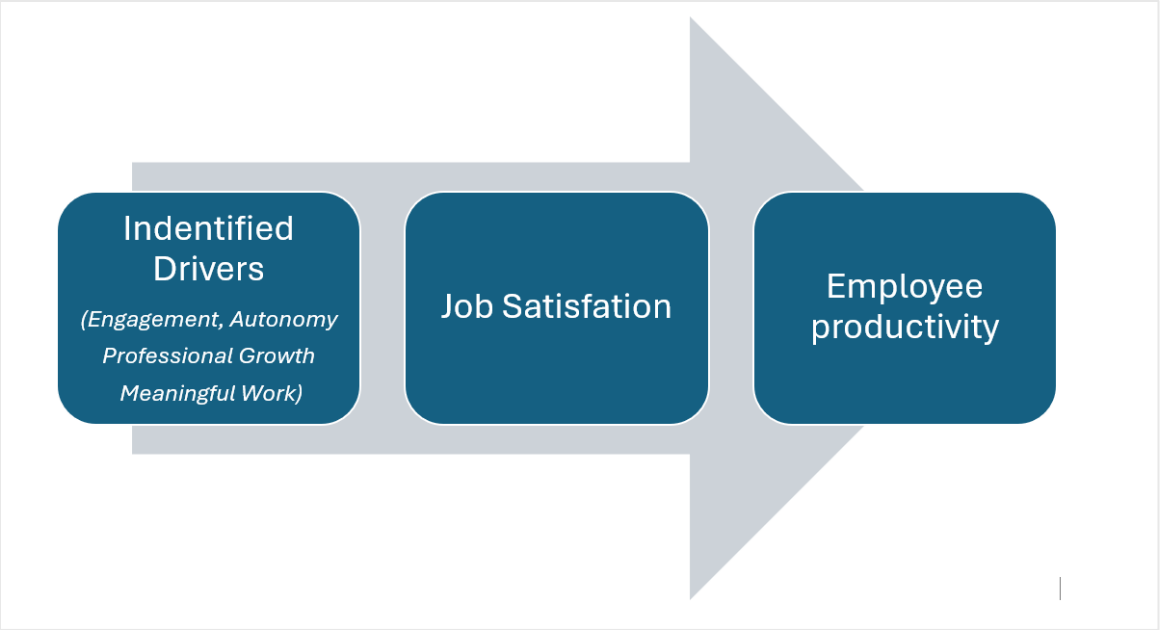


Figure 2. 1: The conceptual framework of the study
Note: Author's own compilation based on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976).

This conceptual framework informed the development of the study's research questions and hypotheses and guided the focus of the data collection and thematic analysis.

2.7 Hypotheses

Given that this study adopts a qualitative research approach, it focuses on *propositions* rather than *hypotheses*. Propositions in qualitative research serve as guiding statements derived from the literature and theoretical frameworks. They outline expected relationships between key concepts but do not aim to test or statistically verify them. These propositions provide a conceptual foundation for exploring how job satisfaction influences employee productivity within the selected Public Relations and Communications organisation in Gauteng.

Based on the theoretical insights from Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), the following propositions guided this study:

- **Proposition 1:** Employees who experience higher levels of engagement are likely to report greater job satisfaction, which, in turn, enhances employee productivity.
- **Proposition 2:** Greater decision-making autonomy contributes to higher job satisfaction and fosters increased motivation, creativity, and productivity.
- **Proposition 3:** Opportunities for professional growth and development enhance employees' sense of purpose and long-term productivity.
- **Proposition 4:** Meaningful work serves as a psychological enabler that strengthens the relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance.

These propositions provided a conceptual lens through which the research questions, interview design, and thematic analysis were framed, allowing the study to explore patterns and meanings emerging from participants' lived experiences rather than to test pre-determined hypotheses.

2.8 Summary

This literature review examined the drivers of job satisfaction and their influence on employee productivity, particularly in the Public Relations and Communications industry. Engagement, autonomy, meaningful work, professional growth and development, were identified as key drivers that foster job satisfaction, which in turn enhances productivity. Although significant research has been conducted on job satisfaction in general, there was a clear need for more focused studies on the Public Relations industry, particularly in the South African context. This study aimed to fill this gap by investigating how job satisfaction influenced employee productivity in a Public Relations organisation in Gauteng.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology employed to investigate the influence of job satisfaction on employee productivity within a selected Public Relations and Communications organisation in Gauteng. It provides a detailed account of the research approach, design, sampling methods, data collection techniques, and strategies implemented to establish the trustworthiness of the findings.

3.2 Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study, conducted within a selected Public Relations and Communications organisation. A qualitative approach was deemed more appropriate than a quantitative design given the study's aim to capture detailed, context-specific experiences and perceptions that may not be measurable through numerical data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and perceptions, thereby allowing for the capture of intricate dynamics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Furthermore, Nowell, Norris, and White (2022) emphasise that qualitative methodologies remain indispensable for uncovering patterns of engagement, motivation, and workplace dynamics.

3.2.1 Research Paradigm

This study is grounded in a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises the subjective and socially constructed nature of reality. This paradigm assumes that individuals develop unique meanings from their lived experiences and that these meanings are best understood through interaction and interpretation rather than measurement or prediction (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Within this philosophical orientation, knowledge is viewed as co-created between the researcher and participants through dialogue and reflection. The constructivist–interpretivist stance therefore aligns with the study's objective to explore employees'

perceptions of job satisfaction and its influence on productivity, as opposed to testing predefined variables or relationships.

This paradigm supports the qualitative approach adopted in the study, guiding the use of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis as appropriate tools for capturing rich, contextualised insights into employees' lived experiences. The paradigm further justifies the researcher's interpretive role in analysing and presenting the data, acknowledging that understanding human behaviour in organisational settings requires sensitivity to context, meaning, and subjectivity.

3.3 Research Design

An exploratory case study design was employed to investigate the influence of job satisfaction on employee productivity within the selected Public Relations organisation. The case study approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of job satisfaction and its key drivers within the specific organisational context. This design enabled the examination of the unique organisational factors shaping employee satisfaction and productivity (Yin, 2018). Additionally, Braun and Clarke (2022) posits that the case study method is especially appropriate for organisational research where the aim is to understand employee experiences, which are influenced by workplace dynamics.

3.4 Sampling Technique

This study employed a purposive sampling technique, chosen for its effectiveness in identifying participants who possess in-depth knowledge and direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling is particularly well-suited for qualitative research as it enables the intentional selection of individuals who can provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). A sample size of 10 participants was determined, with the aim of achieving data saturation, the point at which no new themes emerge.

This approach is supported by recent literature advocating for information-rich sampling in exploratory case studies. Etikan and Bala (2017) emphasise that purposive sampling is appropriate when researchers aim to understand complex issues through those most

knowledgeable about them. Likewise, Ahmad and Wilkins (2025) highlight that purposive sampling enhances data relevance and ensure methodological congruence when exploring human experiences, such as job satisfaction in specific organisational contexts.

A sample size of ten was determined to be sufficient for reaching data saturation, the point at which no new information or themes emerge (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This is consistent with recommendations in qualitative research that stress depth over breadth, particularly when exploring subjective experiences in case studies (Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, & Young, 2018).

3.5 Data Collection Techniques

3.5.1 Document Analysis

Document analysis served as one of the two primary data collection methods in this study, with a focus on the organisation's employee engagement survey. The survey findings offered insights into the key drivers influencing job satisfaction and their contribution to productivity within the organisation. The use of document analysis was justified by its capacity to enable the researcher to systematically examine existing data, thereby providing an unbiased foundation for further investigation (Morgan, 2022).

Recent methodological guidance also supports the triangulation of document data with participant interviews. O'Leary (2021) explains that organisational documents can provide contextual grounding for qualitative inquiries, while Williams (2023) further adds that such sources increase the breadth and depth of understanding, especially when used to identify preliminary themes for further exploration.

3.5.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

To complement document analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants lived experiences in relation to job satisfaction and productivity. This method offers flexibility, allowing for the probing of emergent themes while maintaining consistency across interviews (Naz, Gulab & Aslam 2022). The interview guide was

informed by the themes emerging from the engagement survey, ensuring alignment with the study's core objectives.

Semi-structured interviews are widely recommended in qualitative research for their ability to capture both factual content and emotional nuance (Brinkmann, 2022). Furthermore, Jackson and Bazeley (2023) argue that this format is ideal for uncovering latent meanings and workplace dynamics that formal surveys often overlook.

3.6 Population, Sample, and Sampling Method

3.6.1 Population

The study population consisted of employees from various functional and hierarchical levels within a selected Public Relations and Communications organisation in Gauteng. This included individuals occupying roles such as Account Managers, Account Directors, Assistant Account Executives, and Creative Personnel

3.6.2 Sample and Sampling Method

A sample of 10 (ten) participants was selected using purposive sampling, with a focus on individuals capable of providing detailed insights into the drivers of job satisfaction and their influence on productivity. The sample encompassed employees from various levels and roles within the organisation, allowing for the capture of a broad spectrum of perspectives. The goal was to include a diverse but relevant subset of the population, ensuring both credibility and transferability of the findings (Palinkas et al., 2015; Ahmad and Wilkins (2025). The sample size was determined with the aim of achieving data saturation (Guetterman, 2015), thereby ensuring the comprehensive exploration of all major themes.

3.7 Research Instrument

The semi-structured interview guide functioned as the primary research instrument for qualitative data collection. This guide comprised open-ended questions formulated to explore participants' perceptions of job satisfaction and its influence on their productivity. The development of the interview guide was informed by findings from the employee

engagement survey, ensuring alignment with the research objectives. Prior to its broader application, the guide underwent a pilot with a select participant group to refine question clarity and contextual appropriateness. This method is well-established in qualitative research for capturing detailed personal accounts and uncovering patterns (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Similarly, Adhabi and Anozie (2022) highlight that the approach is suitable for exploring human experiences that are context-dependent, such as employee motivation and engagement.

3.8 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data gathered through document analysis and interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, a method well-suited for identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analytical process entailed familiarisation with the data and identification of recurring themes. These themes were subsequently drawn upon to understand the influence of job satisfaction on employee productivity within the organisation.

The thematic analysis yielded insights that aligned with the research objectives and aided in the exploration of key factors driving productivity. To ensure transparency and alignment with the study's research objectives, a thematic analysis framework was applied to both the interview transcripts and organisational documents to derive key patterns. Annexure 1 contains an organised presentation of participant responses, structured by research question, and serves as a supporting reference to the thematic insights explored in Chapter 4.

3.9 Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting its findings. Firstly, the research focused on a single Public Relations and Communications organisation in Gauteng, which limits the transferability of the results to other contexts or industries. While this boundary was deliberate to achieve contextual depth, the findings may not fully represent the diversity of experiences across the broader South African public relations sector.

Secondly, the study relied primarily on self-reported data gathered through semi-structured interviews, which may be influenced by participants' personal interpretations, emotions, and recollections. Although confidentiality and anonymity were emphasised to encourage openness, social desirability bias may still have affected some responses.

Thirdly, data were collected at a single point in time, offering a cross-sectional snapshot rather than a longitudinal view of how job satisfaction and productivity perceptions might evolve. Time and resource constraints precluded a longitudinal design, but triangulation with the organisation's 2024 employee engagement survey partially mitigated this limitation by validating and enriching the qualitative findings.

Finally, the qualitative nature of the study means that findings emphasise depth over breadth. While this limits generalisability, it enhances the richness of understanding regarding employee experiences. The researcher maintained methodological transparency, detailed documentation, and triangulation to strengthen the study's dependability and credibility despite these constraints.

3.10 Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness is vital to the integrity of any qualitative study. Thus, in ensuring trustworthiness, the researcher adopted various strategies to establish the credibility, transferability, and dependability of the study. According to Megheirkouni and Moir (2023), credibility, trustworthiness, and legitimacy in qualitative research are built through techniques such as prolonged engagement, keen observation, and providing rich, thick descriptions (Cain, Williams, and Bradshaw (2023). The researcher ensured trustworthiness by providing a detailed description of the research context, sampling methods, and assumptions that underpinned the study. Triangulation was also used, combining document analysis with interview data to enhance the richness of the findings. By maintaining a transparent and well-documented research process, the study ensured consistency and reliability.

3.10.1 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other settings. By providing thick descriptions of the research context, the drivers of job satisfaction, and the organisational environment, this study allowed readers to assess the applicability of the findings in their own contexts (Younas, Fàbregues, Durante, Escalante, Inayat, & Ali, 2023). While the study is specific to one organisation, the insights gained can inform broader discussions on job satisfaction and productivity in similar PR and Communications contexts.

3.10.2 Credibility

Credibility ensured that the research findings accurately reflected the experiences of the participants. This study used triangulation by combining document analysis with interview data to ensure that the findings were supported by multiple sources. Triangulation strengthened the reliability of the findings and ensured that they reflected a balanced understanding of job satisfaction and productivity within the organisation (Flick, 2018). Prolonged engagement with the organisation further enhanced the credibility of the study, allowing the researcher to capture accurate understanding of the factors at play (Dado, Spence, & Elliot, 2023).

3.10.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of the research process and findings over time, ensuring that the study could be repeated with similar results (Connelly, 2020). To enhance dependability in this study, methodological transparency was prioritised throughout the research process. The researcher maintained a comprehensive audit trail that documented each stage of the research, including sampling decisions, data collection procedures, thematic development and analytical decisions. This audit trail provides a clear record of how data were gathered and analysed, allowing others to assess the logical coherence and rigour of the study. This transparent documentation strengthens

the methodological integrity of the research and supports its potential for replication in similar organisational contexts.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. The following measures were implemented to safeguard participants' rights:

- **Informed Consent**: Participants were provided with comprehensive information about the study and requested to sign a consent form prior to their participation in the interviews.
- **Confidentiality**: Identities were anonymised and data securely stored. Personal information was redacted to protect privacy. Identities were anonymised through the use of participant codes (P1–P10), and no personal identifiers were included in the final report.
- **Voluntary Participation**: All participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any stage without consequence.

3.12 Summary

Chapter 3 presents a robust qualitative methodology designed to explore the relationship between job satisfaction and employee productivity within a selected Public Relations and Communications organisation in Gauteng. An exploratory case study design was adopted to capture the experiences of employees within their organisational context.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed, targeting ten participants from diverse roles to ensure relevance and depth. Data were collected through document analysis of the organisation's employee engagement survey and semi-structured interviews, enabling methodological triangulation. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns across both data sources, allowing for a rich interpretation of the factors shaping satisfaction and performance.

Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, and dependability strategies, including prolonged engagement, detailed documentation, and triangulation.

Ethical principles, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were rigorously upheld. Overall, the chapter outlines a methodologically coherent and ethically sound framework that supports the study's analytical depth and contextual relevance.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from in-depth interviews conducted with ten employees at a selected public relations and communications organisation in Gauteng. The purpose is to understand how participants experience job satisfaction, the factors that influence it, and how these, in turn, affect their productivity. The findings are organised thematically and guided by the study's three research questions**.** The chapter explores what job satisfaction means to the participants, how it manifests in their day-to-day jobs and how it affects their motivation and performance. It further uncovers the practical realities that influence their workplace experiences.

Annexure 1 provides a detailed, thematically structured synthesis of participant perspectives, aligned to each research question. References to this annexure are integrated throughout the chapter to support and contextualise the findings presented.

4.2 Demographics

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The study drew insights from ten employees across different hierarchical levels and functional areas within the organisation. To preserve confidentiality, participants are identified as P1 to P10. Each participant represented diverse perspectives in terms of role, tenure, and background. Demographic details such as job title, organisational level, gender, and years of service are summarised in Table 4.1. This diversity allowed for a balanced exploration of how job satisfaction and productivity are experienced across the organisational structure**.**

Table 4. 1: Profile of participants

Participant Code	Job Title / Role	Organisational Level	Gender	Years of Experience	Years with Organisation
P1	Group Account Director	Senior Level	Female	12 years	3 years
P2	Strategist	Top Management	Male	15 years	3 years
P3	Senior Account Manager	Middle Level	Female	8 years	3 years
P4	Senior Writer	Middle Level	Male	12 years	4 years
P5	Account Director	Senior Level	Female	10 years	7 years
P6	Account Director	Senior Level	Female	10 years	7 years
P7	Copy Writer	Mid-Level	Female	5 years	2 years
P8	Business Unit Director	Top Management	Male	22 years	8 years
P9	Senior Account Executive	Junior Level	Male	4years	2 years
P10	Senior Account Executive	Junior Level	Female	4years	3 years

Note: Participant identifiers (P1 – P10) are consistently used in Chapters 4 and 5 when citing direct quotations to ensure traceability and clarity while maintaining confidentiality.

The thematic analysis yielded several core themes, which are presented in Table 4.2. These themes emerged from cross-participant responses and reflect the most significant drivers, perceptions, and enablers of job satisfaction and employee productivity in the selected organisation.

Table 4. 2: Key Themes emerging from the data

Key Themes emerging from the data, developed through thematic analysis.

Research	Theme	Sub-Themes
RQ1: **What are the relevant drivers in the 2024 employee engagement survey that allude to influencing job satisfaction?**	Organisational Connectedness and Commitment	Emotional commitment, feeling valued, recognition, cultural alignment, collaborative environment
	Autonomy and Trust in Work Execution	Managerial trust, flexibility, ownership, reduced micromanagement, initiative-taking
RQ2: **What are the perceptions of employees regarding job satisfaction?**	The Intrinsic Value of Purpose-Driven Work	Meaningfulness work, impact, personal fulfilment, alignment of personal and organisational values, motivation
	Professional Growth and Development	Learning opportunities, mentorship, skill expansion, career advancement, future orientation
RQ3: **How can job satisfaction be improved and potentially stimulate employee productivity?**	Meaningful Work as a Catalyst for Sustained Performance	Purpose, visible outcomes, emotional engagement, motivation, resilience
	Autonomy as a Driver of Initiative and Productivity	Decision-making freedom, trust, creativity, agile execution, accountability
	Intentional Investment in Growth and Development	Organisational investment, learning pathways, talent retention, performance alignment
	Harnessing Engagement for Proactive Productivity	Emotional investment, collaborative behaviour, going the extra mile, sustained effort

The themes presented in Table 4.2 are grounded in detailed analysis of the interview data. A full account of the participant responses, grouped according to the research questions and clustered thematically, is presented in Annexure 1.

4.3 Exploring the essence of job satisfaction

4.3.1 Experiences of job satisfaction

Participants identified autonomy and supportive relationships as central to their experience of job satisfaction. These elements were viewed not in isolation, but as deeply embedded within the organisation's leadership culture and work environment. One participant described job satisfaction as "*doing what you love, waking up with purpose, and being in an environment that allows freedom and self-expression*" (P10). Another added that it involved "*meaningful and challenging work, a conducive workspace, and positive relationships with colleagues*" (P9).

A sense of psychological and emotional safety consistently emerged as a foundational contributor to satisfaction. One participant explained that job satisfaction meant having "*the ability to build from scratch with support and not being micromanaged*" (P4), while another emphasised the value of team cohesion and shared goals, stating, "*It's the positive relationships and shared goals that make it worthwhile*" (P5).

Job satisfaction, as seen through these accounts, is not merely transactional but deeply personal. It stems from alignment between an employee's internal drivers and the external conditions of the workplace. Job satisfaction is shaped by autonomy, meaningful contribution, the quality of team dynamics, and leadership behaviour.

These individual experiences reflected broader patterns of meaning that were consistently observed across participants. Evidence of this convergence is illustrated in Annexure 1, where perspectives on autonomy, support, and meaningful contribution are shown to recur across different levels and roles.

4.3.2 Satisfying work experiences

When reflecting on the most rewarding aspects of their jobs, participants emphasised experiences that offered personal meaning, tangible impact, and opportunities for collaboration and growth. Job satisfaction was not limited to individual tasks but was anchored in deeper connections to purpose, learning, and shared success.

Working with others toward common goals was a frequent source of fulfilment. One participant shared, *"I thrive when others are growing, challenging me, and loving what they do. Seeing my team happy and fulfilled brings me joy"* (P2). Another echoed this sentiment: *"Working in sync with the team and collectively achieving goals brings joy"* (P5). These accounts reveal that team connection and mutual support enhanced the overall sense of purpose in the work.

For others, alignment between their daily tasks and personal values played a vital role. As P6 noted, *"I value the opportunity to do work that aligns with my personal purpose, such as storytelling campaigns that change lives."* This connection between professional contribution and personal meaning stood out as a consistent enabler of satisfaction.

Intellectual stimulation and the freedom to be creative were also highly valued. P10 explained, *"Being paid to think, solve problems, and collaborate with smart people is what makes this job satisfying,"* while P3 highlighted that *"the creative process is the most fulfilling part of my role."* These comments point to the energising effect of problem-solving, idea generation, and innovation.

Overall, the findings suggest that job satisfaction stems from more than task completion, it emerges when employees feel intellectually engaged, emotionally connected to their work, and part of a broader mission. Experiences that nurture purpose, creativity, and collaboration contributed most strongly to positive perceptions of work.

4.3.3 Engagement and its role in job satisfaction

The findings reveal that employee engagement is closely tied to job satisfaction, underpinned by experiences of inclusion, trust, and psychological empowerment.

Participants reported feeling most engaged when their input was acknowledged, their voices respected by leadership, and when they felt genuinely included in the decision-making process. As P5 described, *"…being in sync with a team and achieving goals together, that's when I'm most engaged."*

Collaboration and mutual respect surfaced as essential conditions for meaningful engagement. P1 remarked, *"Engagement is driven by collaboration and being heard across levels. Feeling valued and contributing beyond one's scope increases job satisfaction,"* while P2 similarly noted, *"Engagement stems from collaboration... everyone's ideas matter."* These perspectives highlight that when employees are invited to participate actively and their perspectives are taken seriously, their emotional investment in the organisation deepens.

Participants often associated being valued with a sense of purpose and commitment. *"Feeling heard and valued is key,"* said P5, while P7 added, "*When my contributions are recognised, I feel motivated to give more and be present".* The emotional impact of feeling seen and acknowledged by others, particularly leadership, appeared to amplify both engagement and satisfaction.

Trust emerged as a powerful enabler of engagement, particularly when leaders fostered an environment that encouraged autonomy and initiative. P8 explained, *"Engagement is driven by trust and autonomy from leadership. The freedom to contribute ideas and run with them enhances job satisfaction significantly".* This trust-enabled freedom helped employees feel a stronger sense of ownership and commitment to their work.

Several participants also connected engagement directly to how they showed up at work. As P5 reflected, *"Feeling like you're contributing increases confidence and encourages proactive behaviour".* P7 elaborated, *"Job satisfaction directly impacts how I show up. When I am disengaged at work, I feel disconnected and less motivated. When I experience job satisfaction, I am more willing to go the extra mile*". Similarly, P6 emphasised the intrinsic motivation that came from being deeply engaged: "*When I'm engaged, I want to contribute more. It's no longer about ticking a box; it's about delivering something excellent".*

Considered in unison, these accounts suggest that engagement is not simply a measure of involvement, but an emotional and psychological state rooted in trust, recognition, and connection. Where these conditions are present, participants described increased motivation, stronger teamwork, and a greater willingness to exceed expectations. Conversely, where engagement was lacking, job satisfaction declined, often giving way to detachment and disengagement. These insights reinforce the reciprocal nature of the relationship between engagement and job satisfaction, each reinforcing the other in a virtuous cycle that ultimately drives productivity and performance.

4.4 Employees' perceptions of job satisfaction

4.4.1 How job satisfaction affects productivity

Across all ten interviews, participants strongly affirmed that job satisfaction significantly influenced how they approached and executed their work. When individuals felt fulfilled and supported in their jobs, they reported higher motivation levels, increased focus, and a greater commitment to quality outcomes. Satisfaction appeared to fuel a personal investment in the work, which translated into enhanced productivity.

P1 illustrated this clearly: *"When there is job satisfaction, one takes more responsibility, shows greater care, and goes the extra mile for the organisation."* This connection between fulfilment and performance was echoed by P6, who reflected: *"When I experience job satisfaction, my productivity level increases. I give more energy, I take initiative, and I am more focused."* These insights suggest that satisfaction does not merely make work more pleasant, it activates enhanced role ownership and deepens professional engagement.

In contrast, the effects of dissatisfaction were just as telling. P9 admitted: *"When I experience dissatisfaction in my job, I do the bare minimum."* This candid reflection highlights how job dissatisfaction can result in emotional withdrawal, reduced effort, and a loss of intrinsic motivation. The qualitative accounts indicate that dissatisfaction does not necessarily manifest in overt resistance or conflict, but rather in subtle

disengagement, marked by decreased focus, minimal contribution, and lowered commitment.

A clear pattern emerges from the data: job satisfaction acts as a lever for productivity, unlocking a more proactive, accountable, and energised approach to work. Conversely, where satisfaction is lacking, productivity suffers, not because of incompetence or lack of skill, but due to a decline in emotional connection to the work.

These findings underscore the vital role of job satisfaction in shaping not only employee well-being but also organisational performance. When employees feel satisfied in their jobs, they are more likely to take initiative, persist in the face of challenges, and produce higher-quality outcomes, all of which directly benefit organisational productivity.

The role of job satisfaction on employee productivity was especially noticeable across participants, with recurring emphasis on ownership, focus, and emotional investment. These patterns, captured across multiple narratives, are presented in detail in Annexure 1, to illustrate their consistency and relevance.

4.4.2 The role of autonomy

Autonomy featured prominently in participants' accounts as a crucial factor underpinning both job satisfaction and sustained productivity. The ability to work independently, exercise judgement, and be entrusted with meaningful responsibilities emerged as key to how employees experienced their jobs. Importantly, participants did not equate autonomy with isolation. Rather, they described it as a space to think creatively, act decisively, and be held accountable within a framework of mutual trust and clear expectations.

P6 captured this sentiment, noting: *"I need space to work without someone always looking over my shoulder. It's how I do my best thinking and feel proud of what I delivered."* In a follow-up reflection, the same participant added: *"Autonomy is important because it shows that the organisation trusts my judgement. When I have space to deliver in my way, I feel more confident and satisfied in my job."* P1 reinforced this, stating: *"When I'm trusted to lead and execute, I feel like a professional, not just an employee."*

Autonomy was often associated with motivation and a higher sense of responsibility. As P4 articulated, *“Autonomy means I can manage my work without being micromanaged. It shows trust, and that motivates me to be productive.”* Similarly, P8 remarked: *“The freedom to take initiative and not be second-guessed gives me confidence and makes my output better.”* These reflections affirm that autonomy serves as more than just a structural condition; it is an expression of trust that affirms employees' capabilities and encourages personal ownership of outcomes.

Conversely, constraints on autonomy were perceived as demoralising. Participants expressed frustration when subjected to excessive oversight or bureaucratic bottlenecks that inhibited their ability to act. P3 noted, *“Too many approval layers wear you down. It delays things and makes me feel like my judgement isn’t valued.”* P7 added, *“When I’m not allowed to decide on simple things, it feels like I’m not trusted. It’s demotivating.”* These insights suggest that a lack of autonomy erodes not only motivation but also an employee’s sense of agency and professional confidence.

The relationship between autonomy and productivity was also consistently highlighted. Several participants shared that when they were empowered to make decisions and lead initiatives, they felt more capable, committed, and engaged. P9 summarised this dynamic: *“When I have room to make decisions, I feel more capable, like a partner in the work, not just someone doing tasks.”* Similarly, P2 reflected, *“Freedom in how I work gives me energy. That’s when I perform best.”*

Participants did, however, emphasise that autonomy works best when paired with guidance and constructive feedback. Without alignment on expectations, autonomy could become disorienting rather than empowering. As P8 cautioned, *“I don’t want to be left alone, I want direction, but I also want freedom to do it my way. That balance builds trust.”*

The narratives explored in this chapter reveal that, autonomy was perceived not merely as a job feature, but as a fundamental condition that enables creativity, accountability, and meaningful contribution. When autonomy is granted within a trusting and supportive environment, it serves as a powerful enabler of job satisfaction and productivity, reinforcing employees’ sense of purpose, competence, and alignment with organisational goals.

4.5 Enhancing job satisfaction to stimulate productivity

4.5.1 The role of purpose and meaningful work

A strong and consistent theme across the interviews was the significance of meaningful work as a source of job satisfaction and a catalyst for enhanced productivity. Participants articulated that their motivation and fulfilment were deeply influenced by whether their work held personal significance, created visible impact, and aligned with broader values or societal contributions. For many, meaningfulness was not an abstract concept, it was a lived experience that infused their daily tasks with purpose and emotional resonance.

P6 captured this connection, stating, *"Work is most satisfying when it has meaning, when it's not just about delivery, but about making a difference."* Similarly, P1 reflected, *"When what I do connects to something bigger, something that matters, that's when I'm most fulfilled."* These comments emphasise that job satisfaction deepens when employees perceive their roles as contributing to a cause or outcome greater than themselves.

Participants also linked meaningful work to their capacity to support and uplift others. Acts of mentorship, collaboration, and service were described as energising and personally rewarding. P2 expressed this by saying, *"When I know my work contributes to someone's growth or wellbeing, it gives me the drive to keep going".* P4 echoed this sentiment, stating, *"I find meaning in my work through the growth and mentorship of others. Watching my team develop gives me purpose".*

The interviews revealed that meaningful work is often intertwined with relational and developmental dynamics. It is not only about what is achieved, but how it is achieved, for instance through connection, empathy, and shared success. When participants saw their efforts contributing to a team's growth, a client's progress, or a broader social good, they reported feeling more emotionally invested, motivated, and productive.

Moreover, participants indicated that the experience of meaningfulness helped them navigate challenges and maintain resilience. Even in high-pressure environments, having

a clear ‘why’ provided a sense of direction and reinforced their commitment to excellence. This suggests that purpose-driven work serves as an intrinsic motivator, bolstering both satisfaction and sustained performance.

Ultimately, the chapter illustrates how, meaningful work emerged as a central pillar of job satisfaction within the organisation. When roles were perceived as impactful, personally relevant, and aligned with one’s values, participants described deeper emotional engagement and a stronger willingness to contribute. These findings highlight the potential for organisations to harness purpose as a strategic lever, not only for employee wellbeing, but also for productivity and long-term organisational commitment.

4.5.2 Career growth and development

Career growth consistently emerged as a fundamental driver of job satisfaction. Participants linked opportunities for development, whether through formal training, stretch assignments, mentorship, or exposure to new challenges, to a heightened sense of motivation, professional purpose, and engagement. P2 reflected, *“Without development, you lose your spark. It’s hard to stay motivated when there’s no sign of growth,”* while P6 added, *“I thrive when I’m learning. If I’m not being stretched, I start feeling stuck and disengaged”.*

The importance of clarity and progression was also frequently emphasised. Several participants noted that stagnation or a lack of direction negatively affected morale. As P9 explained, *“Career development is essential. Without clarity on the next step, motivation drops.”* Echoing this sentiment, P3 remarked, *“Feeling stagnant leads to demotivation and self-doubt. Growth brings both personal and professional fulfilment”.*

Participants' reflections on the importance of growth opportunities were prominent across the data. Annexure 1 presents these perspectives in detail, highlighting the centrality of developmental support in sustaining motivation and satisfaction.

Participants placed value not only on learning opportunities but also on visible growth pathways, recognition of potential, and leadership support. P4 noted, *“Development isn’t just about training, it’s about being seen, being backed, and knowing there’s room to*

grow". Exposure to decision-making forums, mentorship from senior leaders, and succession planning were cited as enablers of confidence and long-term commitment. P7 highlighted the impact of intentional support: *"Being given stretch roles and supported through them makes me feel trusted. That's what keeps me going".*

These viewpoints suggest that organisations that proactively invest in career development cultivate higher levels of employee satisfaction and productivity. When growth is encouraged and achievements are acknowledged, employees report greater loyalty and commitment. As one participant powerfully concluded, "*If you show you're invested in my growth, I'll show you my best work" (P5).*

4.6 Further Insights

4.6.1 Psychological safety

While not initially defined within the study's conceptual framework, psychological safety emerged as a profound and recurring theme across interviews. Participants repeatedly emphasised the need for a work environment where they felt safe to speak openly, offer ideas, ask questions, and admit mistakes, without fear of blame or negative repercussions. This type of safety was described as a prerequisite for building trust, fostering collaboration, and sustaining both engagement and productivity.

P3 illustrated this sentiment clearly: *"You can't be your best if you're walking on eggshells. When I feel safe, I'm more creative, more honest, and more productive"*. Similarly, P7 explained, *"Psychological safety is crucial. When I know I won't be punished for small mistakes, I take more ownership of my work and explore new innovative ways".* These reflections highlight that employees value not only operational independence but also emotional freedom and reassurance within the workplace.

Leadership was repeatedly cited as instrumental in shaping this sense of psychological safety. Empathy, consistent availability, and authentic listening were identified as leadership behaviours that helped foster trust. P4 commented, *"I feel safe when my leader listens, really listens, and doesn't make me feel small for asking questions"*. Reinforcing

this point, P6 added, *“If I’m constantly worried about how feedback will land, I’ll just keep quiet. That hurts the work”.*

The emphasis on psychological safety, though not initially anticipated, emerged as a strong theme. As seen in Annexure 1, participants across the spectrum described psychological safety as a prerequisite for openness, contribution, and sustained engagement.

These narratives suggest that psychological safety is not a peripheral concern but a foundational enabler of effective performance and job satisfaction. Workplaces that intentionally cultivate openness, mutual respect, and compassion not only elevate employee wellbeing but also enhance their motivation to contribute productively and creatively over the long term. A comprehensive presentation of participant responses and their alignment with the core and emergent themes is provided in Annexure 1.

4.6.2 Team dynamics

Team dynamics proved to be a notable factor influencing both job satisfaction and productivity, even though their significance is often underestimated. Participants reflected on how the quality of interpersonal relationships within teams, especially trust, mutual respect, and cohesion, directly shaped their day-to-day experience at work. When these dynamics were positive, they created an energising atmosphere; when negative or fragmented, they became a source of stress and disengagement.

P1 illustrated this clearly: *“My team is my anchor. When we’re in sync, I’m at my best. We drive each other and pick each other up”*. In contrast, P7 admitted, *“It’s hard to stay motivated when you’re in a toxic team. Even when you love your work, the environment makes it unbearable”*.

Collaboration and shared responsibility were particularly valued. Participants frequently referred to their most fulfilling work experiences as those grounded in mutual support, transparency, and common purpose. P3 remarked, *“We don’t compete, we collaborate. That makes me want to show up and give more”*. Similarly, P6 explained, *“Knowing that*

your team has your back makes a huge difference. It creates a sense of belonging and purpose".

Collectively, these reflections point to the powerful role that team climate plays in shaping job satisfaction. Effective team environments not only contribute to individual motivation but also enhance organisational productivity. When teams operate with cohesion and mutual trust, employees feel more empowered, valued, and willing to give their best.

4.7 Summary

This chapter presented the key findings from in-depth interviews conducted with ten employees at a selected public relations and communications organisation in Gauteng. The aim was to explore how participants perceive and experience job satisfaction, as well as how this shapes their levels of motivation and productivity. Findings were organised thematically and aligned to the study's three research questions, with participant perspectives taking centre stage throughout the narrative.

Several core themes were identified as central to job satisfaction: engagement, autonomy, meaningful work, career development and growth. These insights revealed that satisfaction is not only driven by task-related factors, but also by relational dynamics, leadership behaviours, and the availability of meaningful development pathways. Participants consistently linked job satisfaction to enhanced focus, motivation, and sustained productivity.

Beyond the anticipated themes, additional insights, such as the significance of psychological safety and the impact of team dynamics, also became evident. Although not originally included in the study's conceptual framework, these findings provided valuable depth into the social and emotional conditions that shape how employees interact with their work and colleagues.

This chapter has sought to present an authentic account of participant voices, grounded in their lived experiences. These findings set the stage for the next chapter, which will offer a discussion of these findings, drawing on relevant literature and theoretical perspectives and the company employee engagement survey data, to contextualise and deepen the understanding of the themes identified.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 4. The chapter will discuss how employee experiences and perceptions align with existing literature and insights from the 2024 employee engagement survey conducted by Company A. Through this triangulated analysis, the chapter seeks to develop a deeper understanding of job satisfaction and its influence on employee productivity within the context of a selected public relations and communications organisation in Gauteng.

The discussion is structured around the study's three research questions:

- What are the relevant drivers in the 2024 employee engagement survey that allude to influencing job satisfaction?
- What are the perceptions of employees regarding job satisfaction at the selected organisation?
- How can job satisfaction be improved and potentially stimulate employee productivity at the selected organisation?

By drawing connections between participant narratives, organisational data, and literature, this chapter not only interrogates themes, patterns and divergences but also offers a greater appreciation of how the drivers of job satisfaction interact to shape the employee experience. Findings are discussed thematically, with reference to the perspectives detailed in Annexure 1, which presents participant reflections organised by research question. This lens allows for a holistic view of job satisfaction as both an outcome and enabler of employee engagement and productivity, grounded in both employee experiences and evidence-based frameworks.

5.2 Drivers that influence job satisfaction

5.2.1 Engagement through organisational connectedness and recognition

Organisational connectedness and recognition were consistently identified as significant drivers of job satisfaction in both the Company A (2024) employee engagement survey and the qualitative data gathered from participant interviews. The survey findings underscored that employees who felt emotionally connected to the organisation's mission and values, and who received regular recognition for their contributions, reported higher levels of engagement and satisfaction. These employees demonstrated greater motivation, stronger alignment with strategic goals, and enhanced productivity outcomes (Company A, 2024).

Participants' reflections powerfully mirrored these organisational insights. Many highlighted the importance of being seen, heard, and meaningfully included in the workplace. As detailed in Annexure 1, P1 noted feeling most energised when their efforts were acknowledged, explaining that such recognition affirmed their value and deepened their connection to the organisation. P5 emphasised that their engagement was strongest when working collaboratively toward shared objectives, particularly in environments where mutual respect and appreciation were part of the culture. Similarly, P7 expressed that being invited into strategic conversations and feeling genuinely valued fostered a deeper emotional investment in their work.

These insights are closely aligned with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), which identifies recognition and emotional support as essential job resources that foster work engagement, particularly under high-performance conditions typical in the Public Relations industry. Participants' expressions of vigour, dedication, and absorption in their work reflect the model's core engagement dimensions. This alignment is further supported by Saks' (2006) organisational engagement theory, which underscores that mutual investment between employees and organisations enhances job satisfaction, performance, and retention.

To strengthen the theoretical foundation, developments in literature further affirms these relationships. For example, Bakker and Albrecht (2018) demonstrated that supportive

leadership and ongoing appreciation significantly predict employee motivation and creativity. Similarly, Koay et al (2023) highlight the role of inclusive communication and recognition in reinforcing psychological safety, conditions participants in this study frequently associated with meaningful engagement and satisfaction (as also shown in Annexure 1).

Conversely, the absence of connection and recognition was linked to disengagement. Several participants recounted feeling overlooked, when their contributions were not acknowledged, and as a result their motivation declined, and the work began to feel routine or transactional. These reflections were corroborated by Company A (2024) survey data, where lower engagement scores were evident in teams lacking purpose-driven dialogue or feedback mechanisms.

The convergence of organisational data, academic literature, and participants' voices reinforces that organisational connectedness is more than a cultural aspiration, it is a strategic enabler of job satisfaction and performance. When employees experience emotional resonance with their work, are aligned with organisational values, and receive authentic recognition, they are more likely to be engaged, committed, and productive.

To embed these conditions meaningfully, organisations should move beyond surface-level recognition practices. Recognition must be timely and authentic, while leaders must embody and reinforce shared purpose through transparent and inclusive communication. Additionally, organisations should cultivate relational leadership practices, ensure consistent alignment between values and behaviour, and integrate recognition into everyday team dynamics. These practices, when sustained, foster deeper connection, higher engagement, and ultimately, elevated job satisfaction and productivity.

This finding aligns closely with Schaufeli and Bakker's (2004) Job Demands–Resources model, which posits that recognition and emotional support serve as essential job resources that foster engagement and buffer against burnout. It also echoes Byrne, Peters, and Weston's (2021) argument that relational leadership and psychological empowerment are critical antecedents of engagement. The congruence between the current study and these theoretical perspectives reinforces that recognition and

connectedness remain central to sustained job satisfaction, particularly within high-pressure creative industries such as Public Relations.

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5.2.2 Autonomy and decision-making freedom

Autonomy emerged as a prominent driver of job satisfaction, across both the Company A (2024) employee engagement survey and participant interviews. The survey revealed that employees who were afforded a sense of ownership over their tasks, flexibility in decision-making, and low levels of micromanagement reported significantly higher levels of engagement and job satisfaction. These employees were more confident, intrinsically motivated, and better positioned to sustain performance over time (Company A, 2024).

Participants' reflections strongly echoed these findings. As detailed in Annexure 1, autonomy was described not as isolation but as the freedom to exercise professional judgment, take initiative, and innovate within clear parameters. P6 highlighted that "space to work without someone always looking over my shoulder" was essential to their ability to think critically and produce high-quality work. P4 expressed that being trusted to lead projects enhanced their sense of professionalism and pride, while P7 linked autonomy with increased motivation. Across these reflections, autonomy was linked to psychological safety, innovation, and intrinsic motivation.

Conversely, participants viewed excessive oversight, unnecessary approval hierarchies, and restricted discretion as demoralising. P3 described these conditions as barriers to creativity and initiative, while P7 pointed out that being denied simple decision-making

authority signalled a lack of trust and eroded engagement, which undermined engagement and job satisfaction. These perspectives illustrate that autonomy is not merely a structural feature of work, but a relational signal of trust, competence, and psychological safety.

These empirical findings are strongly supported in literature. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), positions autonomy as one of three fundamental psychological needs that must be met to foster intrinsic motivation and wellbeing. When employees perceive themselves as agents of their own work, their engagement deepens, and their connection to their work strengthens. This is most apparent in pressure-intensive and agile industries such as public relations, where independent thinking and creative agility are essential (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Similarly, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) identifies autonomy as a key motivator that fulfils higher-order psychological needs such as responsibility, growth, and self-actualisation. Recent literature reinforces these theoretical propositions. Bakker and Albrecht (2018) found that autonomy directly enhances psychological empowerment, which, in turn, sustains motivation and performance. Within communication-intensive industries, Hagger (2024) and the University of Birmingham (2017) similarly argue that autonomy is vital to supporting innovation and managing client-facing pressures.

Notably, participants did not perceive autonomy as the absence of direction. Several emphasised the importance of supportive frameworks that offered guidance, while still allowing space for independent thought and innovation. As P8 explained "the balance between freedom and guidance builds trust". This perspective reflects a view of autonomy as structured empowerment. Employees desire the freedom to lead and contribute meaningfully, but within a system that offers clarity, alignment, and developmental support.

The importance of autonomy as expressed by participants affirms the assumptions of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which identifies autonomy as a foundational psychological need essential for motivation and well-being. Similarly, recent empirical work by Medina-Garrido et al. (2023) and Manganelli et al. (2022) confirms that autonomy contributes not only to satisfaction but also to resilience in demanding work

contexts. The present study thus extends this body of knowledge by illustrating how autonomy functions in the Public Relations sector as both a psychological enabler and a performance driver.

In alignment, the convergence of organisational evidence, participant experiences, and theoretical models provides compelling support for autonomy as a foundational condition for job satisfaction. When nurtured within a culture of trust, accountability, and support, autonomy enables employees to feel capable, respected, and professionally fulfilled. These outcomes, in turn, translate into higher levels of engagement, stronger innovation, and sustained productivity.

These findings resonate strongly with Steger, Dik, and Duffy's (2012) conceptualisation of meaningful work as a source of intrinsic motivation and life purpose. Allan et al. (2016) further found that meaningful work moderates stress and enhances well-being, consistent with participants' accounts of renewed energy and commitment when their work felt purposeful. In line with Tan et al. (2023), this study demonstrates that meaningful work within the Public Relations context acts as both a psychological buffer and a motivational amplifier, shaping employees' engagement and productivity.

5.3 Employees' perceptions of job satisfaction

5.3.1 The value of meaningful and purpose-driven work

A dominant theme across the interviews was the pivotal role of purpose and meaning in shaping employees' experiences of job satisfaction. Participants consistently linked fulfilment to the ability to contribute to goals beyond the immediate task, whether by creating social impact for clients, uplifting their teams, or advancing the organisation's broader mission. Job satisfaction was perceived to deepen when work resonated with personal values and fostered a sense of emotional connection.

As illustrated in Annexure 1, participants such as P1 and P6 reported their most fulfilling experiences stemmed from work that made a tangible difference or inspired others. For many, activities such as storytelling, advocacy, and mentorship were cited not only as professional responsibilities but as meaningful endeavours that reinforced a sense of

significance and direction in their jobs. This emphasis on value alignment and purpose reinforces the notion that meaning is not theoretical, it is a lived experience that energises employees and strengthens engagement.

This finding aligns closely with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Allan et al. (2016) demonstrated that meaningful work moderates the negative effects of work stress and enhances psychological well-being, thereby boosting job satisfaction and productivity. Extending this, Tan et al. (2023) argued that perceptions of meaningfulness at work foster not only engagement but also resilience, particularly important in high-pressure, creative industries such as Public Relations. Similarly, Kim and Beehr (2021) provided evidence that employees who view their work as meaningful are more likely to display strong commitment and effort, highlighting the psychological depth that meaning brings to performance and satisfaction.

The Company A (2024) employee engagement survey corroborates these perspectives. 'Connection to purpose' was consistently associated with high-performing teams, where individuals demonstrated clarity on how their jobs contributed to the organisation's mission. Employees who felt this alignment reported higher motivation, improved productivity, and stronger retention intent. These findings are reinforced by Tan et al. (2023), who found that meaningfulness in work enhances not only engagement but also psychological resilience, particularly valuable in dynamic environments. Additionally, Jacobson and Ghosh (2023) demonstrated that organisations that foster purpose-driven cultures experience lower turnover and stronger organisational performance, further highlighting the strategic importance of meaningful work.

When viewed holistically, the integration of participant perspectives, organisational data, and scholarly theory underscores that job satisfaction is not merely the result of favourable working conditions or rewards. Rather, it is deeply rooted in the perceived significance of one's job. Employees who are enabled to engage in purpose-driven work, work that aligns with their values, allows them to contribute meaningfully, and fosters emotional resonance, are more likely to demonstrate sustained engagement, commitment, and a drive for excellence.

5.3.2 Career growth and development opportunities

Career growth and development were consistently identified as central to job satisfaction across both the Company A (2024) employee engagement survey and participant interviews. Employees who reported access to learning opportunities, mentorship, and clear career progression pathways expressed higher levels of engagement, motivation, and organisational commitment. The survey findings showed that teams with regular career conversations, structured learning interventions, and visible support for development displayed stronger satisfaction indicators, while teams where such opportunities were limited were flagged as potential engagement risks.

These findings align with the perspectives shared by participants in the interviews. Individuals such as P3, P6, and P10 expressed that growth opportunities contributed to feelings of relevance, confidence, and momentum in their careers. The ability to take on stretch roles, engage in cross-functional projects, and receive mentorship from senior leaders was seen as both affirming and empowering. Where development was lacking, however, participants described feeling stagnant, disconnected, and demotivated (Annexure 1).

These insights are strongly supported by recent literature. Srivastava (2023) found that structured development programmes directly correlate with increased retention and job satisfaction, especially when they offer clear pathways for skill enhancement and career progression. Similarly, Rahman and Chowdhury (2023) argue that when employees perceive growth opportunities, they develop stronger psychological ownership of their work, becoming more engaged and resilient in the face of organisational challenges. Naidoo and Rampersad (2022) further emphasise that development support has become a strategic imperative in digital-first environments, were talent retention hinges on adaptive learning and meaningful progression.

The theoretical relevance of development is also well established. Ryan and Deci’s Self-Determination Theory (2000) positions mastery and growth as fundamental psychological needs, and recent findings by Alamer (2023) confirm that satisfying these needs fosters

intrinsic motivation and long-term engagement. Likewise, while Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) originally identified advancement as a key motivator, its contemporary application is affirmed by Tan et al. (2023), who highlight that developmental fulfilment is essential for sustaining psychological engagement, particularly in high-pressure sectors like communications.

The alignment between Company A's (2024) engagement survey data and the participant experiences underscores a key organisational opportunity: development is not a peripheral benefit, but a strategic imperative. Where employees feel that their growth is supported, they are more likely to remain engaged, perform at a higher level, and commit to the long-term success of the organisation.

These findings are consistent with De Vos et al. (2011) and Srivastava (2023), who highlight professional development as a significant predictor of long-term job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Hollar, Kuchinka, and Feinberg (2022) similarly found that employees who perceive their organisations as investing in their growth exhibit higher retention and performance outcomes. The current findings therefore extend these insights into the South African Public Relations environment, where continuous learning and mentorship are particularly valued due to rapid technological and client-driven change.

5.4 Enhancing job satisfaction to stimulate employee productivity

5.4.1 The role of meaningful work in enhancing productivity

Meaningful work has been identified as a key element impacting both job satisfaction and employee productivity. Participants expressed that when their work resonated with their personal values or contributed to a greater purpose, they were more engaged, motivated, and willing to exert sustained effort. This sense of fulfilment was closely tied to engagement and a deeper commitment to performance excellence.

As detailed in Annexure 1, several participants highlighted the link between purpose-driven tasks and their willingness to go beyond the basic requirements of their jobs. For

instance, P10 described feeling most productive when their work felt purposeful, noting that meaning and fulfilment inspired them to be fully present, even under pressure. Similarly, P6 linked meaningfulness to enhanced performance, noting that initiatives with visible impact on others elicited greater effort and ownership. These insights indicate that meaningful work not only enhances job satisfaction but also drives employees to deliver higher-quality results.

These insights were mirrored in Company A's (2024) employee engagement survey. Teams with a strong sense of connection to organisational purpose demonstrated higher levels of motivation, increased productivity, and greater retention intent. Employees who could clearly see how their contributions supported the organisation's mission consistently reported higher levels of satisfaction and performance.

These experiences are echoed in literature. Chen et al. (2022) found that employees who perceive their work as meaningful exhibit stronger engagement and are more likely to remain committed to their organisations. Likewise, Junça-Silva et al. (2022) affirms that when individuals view their work as contributing to something greater than themselves, they show deeper engagement, which are closely tied to motivation and productivity.

Additionally, Mukherjee (2024) applied meaningfulness frameworks to industrial workforces and confirmed that when tasks are designed to reflect purpose and autonomy, employee output and commitment improve significantly. This is supported by Amayreh and Arshad (2024), who emphasised that integrated models addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic needs lead to more consistent engagement and satisfaction.

In essence, meaningful work acts as a psychological driver that strengthens the link between job satisfaction and productivity. Employees who perceive their work as valuable are more likely to invest their time, creativity, energy, and initiative into their work. This alignment between personal purpose and organisational objectives strengthens emotional commitment and contributes to sustained performance, innovation, and long-term engagement.

5.4.2 Driving productivity through autonomy

Autonomy was identified as a valuable factor influencing both job satisfaction and employee productivity across participant interviews and the Company A (2024) employee engagement survey. Employees consistently expressed that the freedom to self-manage, apply personal judgement, and take initiative deepened their motivation and commitment to delivering quality outcomes. This was mirrored in survey findings, where teams reporting higher levels of trust and discretion also demonstrated elevated engagement and output.

Several participants, including P4 and P8, described autonomy as an enabler of creativity, confidence, and self-direction. P6 indicated that leading initiatives without micromanagement fostered a sense of ownership, while P3 described how limited autonomy diminished motivation and led to hesitation in decision-making. These responses reflect that autonomy, when coupled with trust, fosters a more empowered and proactive workforce.

These accounts align with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits autonomy as a core psychological need essential to intrinsic motivation and well-being. Gagné and Deci (2005) further assert that autonomy contributes to sustained performance and adaptability, particularly in dynamic and cognitively demanding work context. Contemporary studies have continued to validate and expand this view. For example, Alamer (2023) affirms that fulfilling autonomy needs leads to stronger engagement and well-being, while Maden-Eyiusta and Alparslan (2022) found that self-leadership, grounded in autonomy, enhances work role performance through psychological empowerment.

In client-facing and fast-paced industries such as Public Relations and Communications, autonomy allows employees to be more responsive and innovative. Medina-Garrido et al. (2023) demonstrated that experiencing autonomy at work promotes job satisfaction and reduces the likelihood of burnout. In parallel, Shafizadeh (2024) noted that when autonomy is supported by constructive feedback and clear expectations, employees show stronger motivation and productivity.

In synthesis, the findings suggest that autonomy serves not only as a motivational force but as a functional driver of productivity. It enhances employees' sense of control, encourages initiative, and contributes to more meaningful and effective engagement in daily work tasks. When autonomy is embedded within a supportive environment that balances independence with guidance, autonomy becomes a catalyst for employee productivity and sustainable organisational outcomes.

5.4.3 Driving productivity through career growth and development

Career growth and development were consistently recognised by participants as central to sustaining both job satisfaction and employee productivity. When individuals experienced clear opportunities for learning, mentorship, and career progression, they reported feeling more energised, accountable, and future-oriented in their roles. This was mirrored in the Company A (2024) employee engagement survey, which identified development as a key driver of employee engagement, particularly in high-performing teams.

Participants such as P3, P6, and P10 described how exposure to new challenges, access to mentoring relationships, and structured upskilling initiatives reinforced their sense of value and capability. Development was viewed not merely as a benefit, but as a tangible expression of organisational trust and long-term investment in their potential. Conversely, participants such as P2 reflected that when growth opportunities were limited or ambiguous, their motivation, satisfaction, and alignment with organisational goals diminished.

These insights are strongly supported by current literature. Srivastava (2023) found that structured development programmes, particularly those that offer clear skill enhancement pathways, directly increase retention and job satisfaction. Similarly, Rahman and Chowdhury (2023) argue that access to growth opportunities fosters psychological ownership and sustained engagement, key traits in dynamic, performance-driven industries such as public relations.

Moreover, Hollar et al. (2022) systematic review confirms that when development is integrated into everyday organisational practices, through coaching, tailored training, and visible succession planning, not only does it elevate individual output, but it also fosters consistent team dynamics, cohesion, and retention. This is echoed by Mampuru, Mokoena, & Isabirye, 2024 (2024), who found that when developmental initiatives align with employees' aspirations and work identities, they generate deeper job satisfaction, loyalty, and workplace investment.

Within fast-paced, creativity-intensive sectors like Public Relations, these findings take on even greater significance. The need to remain adaptable, innovative, and future-ready makes career development a strategic imperative. Organisations that invest in learning pathways and provide mentorship structures are better positioned to retain top talent, promote engagement, and stimulate high-quality output.

In this study, participants clearly associated growth with personal and professional vitality, positioning it as a lever not only for job satisfaction but also for sustained performance.

Ultimately, the evidence suggests that career growth and development plays a dual role, reinforcing employee morale while equipping individuals with the tools to deliver impactful work. When career growth is prioritised, employees respond with renewed commitment, higher engagement, and a stronger contribution to organisational success.

5.4.4 Harnessing engagement to stimulate productivity

Engagement was reflected in the interviews and the Company A (2024) employee engagement survey as a powerful, recurring influence on both job satisfaction and employee productivity. Participants described engagement not merely as enthusiasm or presence, but as a holistic investment, emotional and cognitive involvement in their work. This engagement was sustained by a combination of enabling conditions such as autonomy, recognition, purposeful work, and supportive leadership. When these elements were present, participants reported increased energy, initiative, and a desire to exceed expectations.

Participants such as P1 and P5 emphasised the emotional fulfilment they experienced when working in cohesive teams aligned with shared goals, while P8 attributed increased output to feeling personally connected to the organisation's mission. These observations are captured in detail in Annexure 1, where participant reflections highlight the synergy between emotional commitment, trust, and productivity.

These perspectives are affirmed in the Company A (2024) survey results, where high-performing teams with elevated engagement scores demonstrated stronger collaboration and productivity. Employees who felt psychologically safe, recognised, and included exhibited greater ownership and resilience in navigating work demands.

The role of engagement in driving performance has also been well-articulated in contemporary scholarship. For instance, Stor (2024) emphasises that when organisations simultaneously prioritise satisfaction and engagement, the outcome is not only improved morale but also measurable gains in performance and retention. This interplay is further reinforced by Song (2023), who argues that motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction operate as mutually reinforcing forces, particularly in high-demand, knowledge-intensive work environments.

Expanding on these dynamics, Byrne et al. (2021) demonstrate how inclusive leadership contributes meaningfully to sustaining engagement, noting that psychological empowerment, when paired with transparent communication, builds trust and strengthens employee commitment. In a similar vein, Koay et al. (2023) emphasise psychological safety as a foundational element in preserving engagement levels in fast-paced environments. Their work demonstrates that when employees feel secure in expressing ideas and navigating challenges, engagement becomes more resilient and enduring.

These findings refine and extend earlier models, of psychological engagement, by demonstrating that engagement thrives where relational trust, voice, and leadership inclusivity are prioritised. This is echoed in the reflections of participants in Annexure 1, who reported that consistent feedback, shared purpose, and emotional validation were key to maintaining engagement and delivering impactful work.

Altogether, the triangulation of interviews, survey data, and theory confirms that engagement is not a static trait but a cultivated organisational outcome. When employees feel trusted, valued, and aligned with their organisation's goals, their engagement intensifies, resulting in improved productivity, innovation, and long-term organisational commitment.

These insights correspond with Stor's (2024) finding that engagement mediates the relationship between job satisfaction and organisational performance, as well as Song's (2023) argument that engagement, motivation, and satisfaction operate as mutually reinforcing constructs. The participants' emphasis on collaboration and emotional connection also supports Koay, Ong, and Tan's (2023) conclusion that inclusive leadership and psychological safety are foundational to sustaining engagement in dynamic professional environments.

5.5 Summary

This chapter offered a discussion of the research findings by triangulating insights from participant interviews, the Company A (2024) employee engagement survey, and relevant academic literature. Centred around the study's three research questions, the analysis deepened the understanding of the conditions that drive job satisfaction and explored how satisfaction influences employee productivity.

The discussion began by examining the organisational elements, highlighted in the engagement survey, that influence job satisfaction. Key themes such as meaningful work, engagement, emotional connectedness, autonomy, and professional growth featured prominently across both organisational data and participant reflections. The convergence of these perspectives reinforced the study's credibility and demonstrated coherence between empirical insights and theoretical constructs.

In exploring employees' perceptions of job satisfaction, the analysis confirmed that it is a multidimensional construct shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. While various influences were discussed, four key drivers consistently stood out across the literature, participant interviews, and Company A (2024) engagement survey: meaningful work,

autonomy, engagement, and professional growth and development. These elements were not perceived in isolation, but as interconnected experiences that collectively contribute to how employees evaluate their satisfaction in the workplace.

The chapter also explored the influence of job satisfaction on employee productivity. The findings revealed that when employees are supported through purposeful work, decision-making freedom, recognition, and continuous development, their levels of engagement rise, resulting in enhanced motivation, performance, and organisational commitment. Productivity, in this view, is not a separate outcome, participants described it as a natural extension of a satisfying work environment where trust, alignment, and psychological support are present.

The findings support the study's central proposition: job satisfaction is not merely a passive by-product of organisational dynamics, but rather a strategic lever capable of enhancing employee productivity. When nurtured through deliberate organisational practices and enabling work environments, job satisfaction serves as a driver of sustained performance and productivity. The next chapter presents the study's overall conclusions, practical recommendations, and final reflections on the research journey.

The findings presented and discussed in this chapter collectively address the central research problem: understanding how job satisfaction influences employee productivity within a selected Public Relations and Communications organisation. Each of the study's sub-questions was explored through a qualitative, interpretive lens, guided by the conceptual framework rather than a causal model. The research revealed that job satisfaction operates as an interconnected system of experiences, shaped by engagement, autonomy, meaningful work, and professional growth;rather than as a single measurable construct. This integrative perspective resolves the research problem by demonstrating that these interrelated drivers form a dynamic network of motivational and relational conditions that foster sustained employee productivity.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents the concluding reflections of the study, which explored the influence of job satisfaction on employee productivity within a selected public relations and communications organisation located in Gauteng. Grounded in a qualitative case study approach, the research incorporated semi-structured interviews with ten employees, complemented by insights from the organisation's 2024 employee engagement survey and underpinned by relevant academic literature and conceptual frameworks.

The chapter begins by presenting conclusions derived from the study's three research questions, followed by practical recommendations for enhancing job satisfaction and productivity within similar organisational contexts. Consideration is also given to the study's limitations and the implications they hold for the interpretation and generalisability of the findings. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research aimed at advancing knowledge of the job satisfaction–productivity nexus in the public relations and communications sector.

The study successfully resolved the research problem and its sub-questions through an interpretive analysis that explored employees' lived experiences. By applying a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm, the study moved beyond a linear process model to provide an integrated understanding of how job satisfaction manifests in practice. The research concluded that job satisfaction is co-constructed through employees' interactions with their work environment, leadership, and opportunities for growth. This qualitative resolution aligns with the study's aim; to uncover how the psychological and relational dimensions of satisfaction stimulate productivity, thereby addressing the identified problem of sustaining performance in high-pressure Public Relations contexts.

6.2 Conclusion of the study

This study set out to explore the influence of job satisfaction on employee productivity within the context of a selected public relations and communications organisation in Gauteng. Anchored in a qualitative research approach, the study combined semi-structured interviews with ten participants and triangulated these insights with data from the organisation's 2024 employee engagement survey. Thematic analysis was employed to derive meaningful patterns and themes from the data, ensuring a rich, contextual understanding of employee experiences and perceptions.

Chapter One introduced the research problem, the study's objectives, and the three research questions guiding the inquiry: (1) to what extent the employee engagement survey reflected drivers of job satisfaction; (2) how employees perceive job satisfaction; and (3) how job satisfaction could be enhanced to stimulate productivity. Chapter Two provided a review of the literature on job satisfaction and its drivers, drawing attention to its connection with employee productivity and organisational outcomes. Chapter Three detailed the research design and methodology, outlining the rationale for a qualitative research approach and the process of data collection and analysis.

Chapters Four and Five presented and discussed the findings. Thematic insights revealed four key drivers: engagement, autonomy, meaningful work, professional growth and development as central to how employees experience job satisfaction. The findings further indicated that when these drivers were present and well-supported through organisational practices, employees were more likely to be motivated, committed, and productive in their work.

By integrating perspectives from participant interviews, organisational survey data, and existing literature, the study contributed insights into how job satisfaction functions as a dynamic and strategic contributor to employee productivity.

By triangulating findings with existing theoretical models and recent empirical studies, the research contributes to the growing discourse that job satisfaction is not a static condition but an evolving, relational construct shaped by autonomy, purpose, and developmental opportunity (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Tan et al., 2023; Stor, 2024). These findings both validate

and extend established theories within the context of South Africa's Public Relations and Communications industry.

6.2.1 Identified drivers that influence job satisfaction

The findings presented affirmed that the internal employee engagement survey conducted by Company A (2024) effectively identified several core drivers that influence job satisfaction within the organisation. Among the most salient factors identified were emotional connectedness to organisational purpose, consistent and meaningful recognition, opportunities for career development, and autonomy in daily work responsibilities.

These insights were significantly enriched through the semi-structured interviews. Participants elaborated on how these drivers were experienced in practice, adding credibility to the survey data. Recognition was repeatedly associated with feelings of value and motivation, especially when it was specific, authentic, and timely. Participants expressed that this sense of being seen and appreciated contributed not only to job satisfaction, but also to engagement, a deeper psychological connection that enhanced their willingness to contribute meaningfully to their work and their teams.

Autonomy**,** also emerged as a pivotal element, often linked to enhanced confidence, initiative, and a sense of ownership. Participants emphasised that the ability to exercise independent judgment and contribute to decision-making processes fostered job satisfaction, enhanced their sense of empowerment and a commitment to high productivity. Similarly, career growth and meaningful work were viewed as intertwined, with development opportunities and purpose-aligned roles promoting both engagement and long-term commitment.

These perspectives were not only aligned with the Company A (2024) survey results but were also supported by relevant literature explored in Chapter 2. Alamer (2023) affirms that the satisfaction of psychological needs, particularly autonomy and relatedness, cultivates sustained motivation and workplace engagement. In addition, Srivastava (2023) and Rahman and Chowdhury (2023) demonstrated that opportunities for structured growth and career progression significantly enhance job satisfaction and

retention. The role of recognition and psychological safety in sustaining engagement was further supported by Mishra et al. (2022), who found that communicators who feel valued and included exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction and productivity.

In summary, the triangulation of organisational data, employee experiences (detailed in Annexure 1), and theoretical models offers a credible and evidence-based framework for understanding job satisfaction. These findings validate the engagement survey as a reliable diagnostic tool and confirm that the identified drivers, when intentionally supported, contribute directly to enhanced employee engagement and sustainable productivity.

6.2.2 Employees' perceptions of job satisfaction

The second research question focused on understanding how employees perceive job satisfaction within the context of the selected public relations and communications organisation. The findings revealed that job satisfaction is a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, cognitive, and relational dimensions. Participants consistently described satisfaction as influenced not only by the tasks themselves, but also by the quality of interpersonal relationships and the broader organisational culture.

Feeling heard, supported, and recognised emerged as core elements of satisfaction. These relational dynamics were closely associated with inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and transparent communication, conditions that enabled participants to contribute with confidence and feel valued in their work. These findings align with recent studies such as Koay et al. (2023), who found that psychological safety and trust-based leadership enhance employee engagement and fulfilment. Mishra et al. (2022) similarly underscore the value of authentic recognition in fostering proactive and emotionally invested workplace behaviour.

Engagement was also central to participants' conceptualisations of job satisfaction. Employees who described being emotionally and cognitively immersed in their work, particularly through collaboration, shared purpose, and authentic recognition reported higher levels of satisfaction. This reflects the interconnected nature of engagement and

satisfaction, as illustrated in Stor (2024) and Song (2023), both of whom demonstrate that engagement is a powerful conduit for job satisfaction, resilience, and performance.

Meaningful work emerged as another significant dimension. Participants consistently highlighted that satisfaction deepened when tasks aligned. This sense of purpose enhanced motivation and emotional commitment. As evidenced in Chen et al. (2022) and Junça-Silva et al. (2022), alignment between personal meaning and professional contribution increases job satisfaction and psychological ownership of one's work.

Professional growth and development were equally valued. Participants expressed that mentorship, continuous learning, and exposure to new challenges enhanced their sense of relevance and optimism about their careers. Studies by Rahman and Chowdhury (2023) and Mampuru et al. (2024) support these findings, demonstrating that organisations that invest in employee development see higher levels of satisfaction, retention, and productivity.

Overall, these findings affirm that job satisfaction is not merely a personal or emotional state, it is profoundly influenced by environmental factors such as leadership, organisational culture, and developmental support. As seen in Annexure 1, when employees experience purpose, growth, autonomy, and engagement in a psychologically safe environment, they are more likely to feel valued and perform at their highest potential.

6.2.3 Enhancing job satisfaction to stimulate productivity

The third research question explored how job satisfaction can be intentionally enhanced to stimulate employee productivity within the selected organisation. The findings affirmed a reciprocal relationship: participants who described themselves as satisfied in their jobs consistently demonstrated higher motivation, initiative, and commitment to delivering high-quality outcomes.

Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed four core drivers that were perceived as pivotal to enhancing job satisfaction in ways that directly influenced productivity: meaningful work, autonomy, opportunities for career growth and professional development, and high levels of engagement. These were triangulated with insights from

the Company A (2024) employee engagement survey and substantiated through academic literature.

Participants described meaningful work as work that resonated with their values and contributed to broader organisational or societal goals. This sense of purpose fostered emotional connection, deepened engagement, and stimulated productivity. These findings align with Tan et al. (2023), who found that purpose-driven work enhances employee motivation and resilience, particularly under pressure.

Autonomy also played a central role in shaping job satisfaction and productivity. Participants highlighted that being entrusted with responsibility, empowered to make decisions, and given flexibility in how they executed their tasks fostered a sense of ownership and confidence. These reflections echo the principles of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits autonomy as a core psychological need essential for sustained motivation and performance. Likewise, Medina-Garrido et al. (2003) demonstrated that autonomy increases job satisfaction and buffers against burnout in fast-paced settings.

Opportunities for professional growth; through mentoring, skills development, and structured learning, were also identified as key enablers of job satisfaction and productivity. Participants reported that when organisations invested in their learning and advancement, their confidence, loyalty, and motivation increased. This is supported by Hollar et al. (2022), whose systematic review found that the intentional development of clear growth pathways for employees enhance job satisfaction and long-term commitment.

A collaborative and psychologically safe environment further emerged as a significant enabler of productivity. Participants described that when they felt supported, included, recognised for their contributions, and able to contribute ideas freely, they were more energised and willing to go beyond task requirements. These observations are reflected in Byrne et al. (2021), who emphasise that inclusivity and psychological safety in the workplace directly foster sustained engagement.

As illustrated in Annexure 1, these drivers were not experienced in isolation but as overlapping and reinforcing. Employees who reported autonomy also described higher engagement; those who experienced meaningful work were often those receiving authentic recognition. These intersections suggest that enhancing job satisfaction is not a peripheral initiative but a strategic imperative; one that requires deliberate leadership, supportive systems, and a culture that nurtures both individual fulfilment and collective performance. When these drivers are actively supported, organisations are more likely to unlock peak performance, deepen engagement, and achieve sustained levels of employee productivity and organisational outcomes.

6.3 Limitations of the study

As with most qualitative case studies, this research is subject to certain limitations that must be considered when interpreting its findings. Firstly, the study was conducted within a single public relations and communications organisation located in Gauteng. While this provided valuable contextual depth and organisational specificity, it may limit the transferability of the findings to other sectors or geographical regions, particularly those with different workplace cultures, operational environments, or workforce compositions.

Secondly, while ten employees were interviewed, thematic saturation was reached by the eighth interview, suggesting that additional participants were unlikely to introduce new insights relevant to the study's objectives. The inclusion of more voices beyond the sample would not have added marginal depth, therefore the selected sample was deemed sufficient for the exploratory nature of the research. Several employees expressed interest in participating; however, methodological considerations, particularly the principle of saturation, guided the decision to conclude data collection at ten interviews.

Thirdly, the study relied on self-reported data obtained through semi-structured interviews. While this approach allowed for rich, reflective, and experience-based insights, it is inherently influenced by participants' personal interpretations, memory, and the prevailing organisational climate. As such, it introduces potential for subjective bias. Nevertheless, the incorporation of Company A's internal employee engagement survey

provided an additional layer of validation and helped to triangulate findings, thereby enhancing the credibility of the results.

Finally, practical constraints were encountered during the data collection phase. Coordinating interviews within full-time professionals posed logistical challenges and extended the data collection timeline beyond what was initially projected. Despite these operational constraints, the resulting dataset was robust and yielded meaningful insights into the research problem.

In summary, while these limitations may restrict the generalisability of the findings, they do not diminish the study's contribution. This research offers a valuable lens into how job satisfaction operates as a lever for employee productivity within a real-world organisational setting, providing insight that is both practically relevant and theoretically grounded.

6.4 Recommendations

In the sections below recommendations gathered during the study are presented.

6.4.1 Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several actionable recommendations for organisations, particularly those operating within the public relations and communications industry, seeking to enhance job satisfaction and, in turn, improve employee productivity.

Organisations should institutionalise purpose-led leadership at all levels. Employees are more likely to engage and perform when they understand how their individual roles contribute to broader organisational objectives. This can be achieved through intentional internal communication, integration of purpose into performance management frameworks, reinforcing organisational values through authentic and timely recognition. When employees perceive their work as meaningful and aligned with a greater mission, they demonstrate deeper emotional investment and sustained performance.

Fostering autonomy through trust-based leadership is essential. Managers should be empowered to delegate decision-making authority and support employees in determining the most effective approaches to achieving their objectives. This structured autonomy,

supported by clear goals, ongoing feedback, and accountability, enhances innovation, confidence, and job ownership. In the context of public relations, where adaptability and independent thinking are significant, autonomy significantly contributes to both job satisfaction and output.

A sustained focus on career growth and development is crucial. Organisations must commit to continuous learning and progression by offering tailored professional development pathways, regular career conversations, mentorship opportunities, and accessible training platforms. These initiatives convey a clear message of long-term investment in employee potential, bolstering both engagement, productivity, and retention.

Psychological safety should be actively nurtured through open dialogue, non-hierarchical communication, empathetic leadership, and fair recognition practices. This contributes to emotional security and fosters a sense of belonging in the workplace. Environments that allow employees to openly contribute and question without risk of retaliation promote thriving collaboration, innovative thinking, and greater resilience.

Importantly, these drivers should not be implemented as siloed interventions. Their collective impact lies in how they interconnect to foster sustained engagement, which is a mediating force between job satisfaction and productivity. A workforce that feels connected to organisational purpose, trusted to act, supported in their growth, and valued for their contributions is more likely to deliver consistent high performance, exhibit proactive innovative behaviours, and remain committed to the organisation’s long-term success.

6.4.2 Future Studies

Building upon the findings of this study, several avenues warrant further academic exploration to deepen understanding of the job satisfaction and productivity relationship within evolving organisational contexts.

Firstly, given the single-case design of this research, future studies could adopt a comparative, multi-organisational, or cross-sectoral approach to examine the generalisability of the identified drivers of job satisfaction. Exploring how job satisfaction

manifests across varying industries, organisational sizes, or geographic regions would offer insight into the contextual factors that shape employee experience. Such comparative studies could also illuminate how organisational culture moderates the relationship between job satisfaction, engagement, and productivity.

Secondly, longitudinal research is recommended to capture how perceptions job satisfaction and its influence on productivity evolve over time. Long-term studies could evaluate the sustained impact of interventions related to autonomy, meaningful work professional growth and development, providing valuable input for the development of sustainable employee engagement strategies. Tracking changes in employee perceptions across time points would also allow organisations to assess the effectiveness and adaptability of engagement initiatives in a shifting workplace landscape.

Thirdly, future research is needed to explore the specific role of leadership behaviours and organisational structures in shaping job satisfaction. Investigating the impact of leadership attributes such as emotional intelligence, inclusive communication, and trust-based decision-making could extend this study's focus. This is especially pertinent in fast-moving, high-energy sectors like public relations and communications, where strong interpersonal relationships, adaptability, and creative independence are critical to success.

Finally, as hybrid and remote work models continue to redefine the nature of work, future studies should investigate how these evolving arrangements influence job satisfaction, engagement, and productivity. Understanding how virtual environments influence relational connection, autonomy, and psychological safety will be essential for advancing both theoretical frameworks and practical strategies in the digital era and evolving world of work.

6.5 Summary

This chapter synthesised the key findings of the study, highlighting how job satisfaction is shaped by a group of interrelated drivers: autonomy, meaningful work, employee engagement, professional growth and development. Drawing from participant interviews, organisational data, and literature, the chapter illustrated how these elements converge

to create conditions that not only foster job satisfaction but also stimulate higher levels of employee productivity within the organisational context.

A series of practical recommendations were presented, offering actionable guidance for organisations, particularly within the public relations and communications sector seeking to cultivate a more engaged, fulfilled, and high-performing workforce. These included embedding purpose into leadership practice, fostering autonomy through trust-based management, investing in structured career development, and building a psychologically safe and inclusive organisational culture.

In addition, the chapter outlined directions for future research, aimed at extending the study's contribution and addressing its methodological boundaries. These include broadening the scope to multiple sectors and geographies, adopting longitudinal approaches, examining leadership dynamics in more depth, and investigating the influence of hybrid and remote work models on employee experience and job satisfaction.

In conclusion, the findings reinforce the study's central argument: job satisfaction is not a passive outcome, but a strategic lever, one that enhances employee productivity, fuels engagement and supports sustainable organisational performance.

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ANNEXURE 1 : CONSOLIDATED PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

Research questions	Questions: Interview schedule	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	Making sense of what participants are saying as a group
RQ1	1	The participant views job satisfaction as a combination of both functional and emotional factors. From a practical standpoint, satisfaction involves working in a stimulating, professional environment that allows independence and minimises micromanagement. He emphasised that being trusted to perform autonomously contributes significantly to satisfaction. On the emotional and cultural side, he highlighted the importance of working in a supportive, values-aligned environment, stating that remuneration and recognition for output also play a critical role.	She defines job satisfaction as working in an environment where employees can be their authentic selves, feel valued, and experience emotional safety. She views job satisfaction as closely tied to team support, shared values, and psychological comfort.	The participant associates job satisfaction with a sense of cohesion and effective teamwork. For her, job satisfaction is achieved when employees operate in a cohesive team environment supported by coaching and collaboration. She emphasises that shared goals and mutual support contribute significantly to a satisfying work experience.	The participant defines job satisfaction as working under supportive leadership that allows autonomy. Satisfaction is enhanced by being trusted to complete tasks in a self-directed manner, and by collaborating with motivated colleagues who understand their roles.	The participant views job satisfaction as deeply linked to organisational culture. It includes how colleagues interact across hierarchies and whether the work environment supports healthy relationships. She also associates satisfaction with ongoing conversations around career development and personal accomplishments.	The participant described job satisfaction as being rooted in autonomy and the ability to work independently without micromanagement. She placed high value on being trusted to lead and build teams and initiatives from the ground up. She associated satisfaction with being given a clear vision and then being empowered to execute without interference.	The participant described job satisfaction as an evolving concept that has changed with personal life stages. Initially, it was about working on high-profile accounts and enjoying a collaborative culture, strong rewards, and professional growth. Over time, job satisfaction became linked to financial stability and personal well-being at home. The participant noted a decline in rewards and recognition, which has contributed to reduced satisfaction.	Job satisfaction was described as a combination of personal growth, team harmony, and a sense of purpose. The participant highlighted the emotional rewards of seeing her team succeed and enjoying work that aligns with her values.	The participant described job satisfaction as having the freedom to manage her responsibilities with minimal oversight. She emphasised that trust and autonomy allowed her to feel more confident, less anxious, and more productive in her role.	The participant described job satisfaction as waking up with a sense of purpose and doing work they love. They highlighted the importance of the work environment, noting that even if one loves their job, a toxic environment can diminish satisfaction.	Job satisfaction was broadly described by participants as a multifaceted experience shaped by both emotional and practical dimensions. A strong emphasis was placed on autonomy, with many participants expressing that being trusted to work independently significantly enhanced their satisfaction. Supportive leadership, cohesive teams, and alignment with organisational values were also frequently mentioned as critical to fostering a positive work experience. In addition, recognition for contributions, opportunities for personal growth, and the ability to engage in meaningful, purpose-driven work emerged as central drivers. Overall, participants viewed job satisfaction as an outcome of feeling valued, empowered, and connected, both to their roles and to the organisation at large.
RQ1	2	He finds satisfaction in delivering high-quality work and receiving recognition for it. Autonomy is a major factor, being able to lead projects without excessive oversight. He also values being respected as a professional, and having room for creative thinking and innovation. Additionally, working in a team that is aligned in terms of values and purpose enhances his overall satisfaction.	She finds most satisfaction in collaborative work, particularly when her efforts contribute meaningfully to client outcomes. Angela feels deeply fulfilled when her work aligns with her personal values and when teams work together to achieve impactful goals.	She finds the most satisfaction when working collaboratively in a well-aligned team. Delivering excellent outcomes through collective effort brings her joy, and she values seeing her team succeed together rather than individually.	She finds satisfaction in the flexibility offered by her role, which enables her to invest time in thorough planning, research, and delivery of high-quality work. This freedom helps her avoid feeling rushed and promotes a sense of ownership.	As a copywriter, the participant finds the preparatory stages of her work; the brainstorming and conceptualization, more satisfying than the final act of writing. She values the intellectual challenge and creativity required to shape ideas before execution.	She found satisfaction in building structures, leading teams, and creating environments where others thrive. She valued creativity, strategic thinking, and collaboration, and enjoyed seeing her team excited and engaged. The ability to develop others and reflect on her own leadership growth was also deeply fulfilling.	The participant found the most satisfaction in seeing her team happy, growing, and excited about their work. People and relationships were central to her motivation, and she drew satisfaction from fostering a culture where her team could thrive, challenge her, and develop professionally.	She found great satisfaction in mentorship, collaboration, and developing others. Working in a supportive team and being able to contribute meaningfully were essential sources of motivation.	She finds it most satisfying to ideate and implement creative campaigns. Watching her ideas come to life brings a deep sense of fulfillment and pride.	They described feeling most satisfied when they have autonomy and space to express themselves creatively. The ability to think freely and contribute meaningfully without micromanagement fosters deeper satisfaction.	Across the interviews, participants consistently found job satisfaction in tasks that offered autonomy, intellectual stimulation, and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully. Many highlighted the value of collaboration, particularly in environments where teamwork was aligned with shared values and purpose. Recognition for high-quality work, space for creative thinking, and the ability to lead or mentor others were also key motivators. For several participants, satisfaction stemmed from seeing the impact of their work—whether through team success, client outcomes, or personal growth. Collectively, these insights suggest that job satisfaction is enhanced when employees experience freedom, purpose, and a sense of contribution in their roles.
RQ1	3	The participant believes that feeling intellectually stimulated and emotionally connected to the work increases his engagement. He notes that when he understands how his work fits into the organisation's larger mission, his motivation increases. He confirmed that engagement contributes significantly to job satisfaction, reinforcing his sense of value and commitment.	Angela believes engagement stems from recognition, inclusivity, and mutual respect within a team. When she feels heard, appreciated, and emotionally supported, her engagement and satisfaction are enhanced. She views engagement as both emotional and psychological.	The participant believes that being heard, valued, and given opportunities to express oneself are key contributors to engagement. When employees feel invisible or undervalued, their confidence diminishes. She strongly affirms that engagement positively impacts job satisfaction, enhancing both confidence and motivation.	She attributes engagement to leadership that encourages trust and does not micromanage. Being able to share her ideas freely and take initiative without constant oversight significantly enhances both her engagement and job satisfaction.	Engagement, for her, is primarily driven by strong interpersonal relationships within the team. She believes that understanding each other's emotional states contributes to smoother collaboration and ultimately boosts job satisfaction. She strongly agrees that engagement enhances satisfaction.	Challenge was identified as a key contributor to engagement. She explained that the optimal level of challenge, tasks that are neither too easy nor too difficult keeps her motivated. Engagement, for her, increases when she can continuously grow and improve. She believes challenge drives both growth and satisfaction.	Collaboration and mutual learning were highlighted as key drivers of engagement. The participant appreciated a non-hierarchical, inclusive work environment where ideas were welcomed from all levels. She affirmed that engagement, driven by collaborative learning, directly influenced her job satisfaction.	Team synergy, shared goals, and a sense of belonging were identified as key contributors to engagement. She emphasised that feeling engaged makes her more proactive, creative, and willing to go the extra mile.	Engagement for her stems from two sources: self-initiated involvement and being invited by others. When colleagues value her input and invite her into key initiatives, she feels highly motivated and deeply engaged.	Recognition, creative freedom, alignment with organisational values, and strong team dynamics were cited as the most satisfying aspects. The participant values being part of a collaborative, trusting environment.	Participants generally perceived engagement as a multifaceted concept that is both emotional and relational. Key drivers of engagement included feeling intellectually stimulated, being emotionally connected to the organisation's mission, and having opportunities to contribute meaningfully without excessive oversight. Many highlighted the importance of being trusted, recognised, and heard, especially within collaborative, inclusive teams. Engagement was often described as being fostered in environments where leadership was empowering, interpersonal relationships were strong, and team dynamics were built on mutual respect. Across the responses, it was evident that when engagement is nurtured through trust, recognition, and autonomy, job satisfaction and motivation are significantly enhanced.
RQ2	4	He described feeling highly engaged during a crisis communication project where he was trusted to lead and deliver results independently. In contrast, he recalled feeling disengaged when his efforts were not acknowledged, particularly in environments where leadership failed to provide feedback or transparency. These experiences highlight the role of trust and recognition in sustaining engagement.	Angela recalled a particularly engaging moment during a campaign centred on science communication, where she was empowered to lead creatively. In contrast, she felt disengaged during moments of exclusion or when ideas were dismissed without meaningful dialogue.	She described a disengaging experience when her follow-ups on a task received no response, leading to frustration and extra hours of work. In contrast, she felt highly engaged when collaborating on a project involving external stakeholders, which boosted her confidence and reinforced her sense of contribution to the organisation.	She felt disengaged when unprepared for meetings due to lack of information, which led to withdrawal. On the other hand, she was highly engaged during collaborative efforts on projects with external stakeholders where she felt well-prepared and valued.	The participant felt disengaged when she perceived herself as a 'tool in a toolbox,' being used across various teams without clear direction. This led to confusion about her value and a lack of clarity around her core strengths, resulting in frustration.	The participant described her early days at the organisation, where she built a division from a single account and two creatives into a broader, high-functioning team. This growth journey kept her engaged. However, she noted that repetitive tasks or roles lacking new challenges can lead to disengagement.	She shared an example from early in her career when she built a team from scratch. This journey was highly engaging and satisfying due to the challenge and growth it offered. Conversely, she noted that repetitive, unchallenging tasks led to disengagement.	An example of high engagement was leading a successful campaign where the team felt aligned and energised. Disengagement occurred when communication broke down or when workloads became overwhelming without support.	She described a time early in her role where she was unexpectedly asked to lead a large campaign. The team's support and trust helped her feel confident and deeply engaged despite the initial challenges.	The participant understands engagement as being emotionally and intellectually present in one's work. Feeling a sense of connection, purpose, and trust in leadership drives their engagement.	Across the board, participants recalled moments of high engagement as those marked by autonomy, trust, and meaningful contribution, particularly during challenging projects where they felt empowered and supported. Many participants highlighted that being given responsibility and clarity of role boosted their engagement, especially when they could see the impact of their work. Conversely, disengagement was commonly triggered by lack of communication, unclear direction, feeling undervalued, or repetitive, low-stakes tasks. When leadership failed to provide feedback or recognise contributions, participants felt disconnected. Overall, it was clear that supportive environments that offer challenge, inclusion, and recognition cultivate engagement, while ambiguity, exclusion, and lack of purpose undermine it.

RQ2	5	Autonomy is described as a cornerstone of both job satisfaction and productivity. The participant stated that being given room to lead and take ownership of tasks helps him feel empowered and valued. Conversely, in roles where his autonomy was restricted, he found motivation and performance to decline.	Angela noted that autonomy is empowering when balanced with clarity. She feels trusted when given freedom to lead, but stressed that autonomy without support can lead to insecurity. The right balance enhances her productivity and satisfaction.	She views autonomy as an indirect indicator of trust. When given ownership of a task, she feels responsible and motivated to deliver high-quality outcomes. Autonomy empowers her to take initiative and meet expectations without being micromanaged, which enhances her productivity and satisfaction.	Autonomy plays a crucial role in her satisfaction and productivity. When she is trusted by leadership to take ownership, she becomes more motivated and confident. Support from her team also enhances her productivity in such environments.	She experiences moderate autonomy and appreciates the flexibility allowed by her manager. However, she acknowledges that creativity is often subject to approval, which sometimes limits her sense of control. Despite this, the balance between structure and freedom supports her overall satisfaction.	She reinforced that autonomy is essential for her productivity and job satisfaction. Autonomy was described as being allowed to make decisions independently within the boundaries of a defined vision. She emphasised that autonomy is earned through trust and is vital to her effectiveness.	Autonomy was seen as essential. The participant noted that she is trusted by leadership to operate independently and make decisions for her team, which she finds empowering. This autonomy allows her to motivate her team through gestures like weekend time off or recognition rewards, enhancing both her satisfaction and their productivity.	The participant viewed autonomy as essential, noting that having the freedom to make decisions empowered her to take ownership of her work. It also contributed to a sense of trust and confidence in her abilities.	Autonomy significantly boosts her job satisfaction. She feels empowered and trusted to manage her work, which enhances her confidence and reduces the need for constant validation or oversight.	They described being disengaged in environments where their autonomy is restricted or where they feel undervalued. A rigid culture or micromanagement tends to diminish their motivation.	Participants widely acknowledged autonomy as a foundational component of job satisfaction and productivity. Being trusted to make decisions, manage their tasks independently, and operate with minimal oversight enhanced feelings of confidence, ownership, and motivation. Many participants indicated that autonomy made them feel respected and empowered, fostering a stronger sense of purpose and drive. However, several participants also noted that autonomy must be balanced with clear expectations and support, without which it can lead to insecurity or diminished control. Conversely, environments characterised by micromanagement, rigid processes, or lack of trust were consistently linked to disengagement and reduced job satisfaction. Overall, autonomy was not seen as working in isolation but as the freedom to lead and innovate within a supportive structure.
RQ2	6	The participant indicated a direct correlation between satisfaction and productivity. He shared that when he feels recognised, supported, and empowered, his output improves. Satisfaction creates a sense of pride and ownership in his work, which naturally leads to increased productivity.	She stated that job satisfaction greatly influences her motivation to deliver quality work. When satisfied, she feels energised and committed. A lack of satisfaction, however, results in emotional fatigue and disengagement.	She explained that job satisfaction has a direct impact on productivity. When she feels aligned with the team and the organisational culture, she is more driven to perform. However, when team cohesion is lacking or cultural dynamics feel isolating, her motivation and output decline.	Job satisfaction is closely linked to the organisational culture and leadership style. She believes that when employee interests are acknowledged and aligned with their tasks, engagement and productivity increase. Feeling unheard or misaligned leads to disengagement.	Job satisfaction has a direct and significant influence on her productivity. When she feels fulfilled by her work and aligned with the organisational culture, her output improves. A lack of purpose or engagement, however, leads to a noticeable drop in motivation and productivity.	The participant believed that while job satisfaction can positively influence productivity, too much satisfaction, when things become too easy , can reduce motivation. She suggested that satisfaction must be balanced with discomfort and challenge to keep productivity high. Growth and continuous improvement were key to her remaining productive.	She acknowledged that her current job satisfaction is lower due to lack of rewards and missed promotion opportunities. Despite this, she maintains her productivity for the sake of her team. She suggested that greater satisfaction—through recognition and compensation, would positively affect her productivity.	She stated that job satisfaction drives her to perform at a high level. When she feels valued and supported, her productivity increases because she's motivated to contribute positively.	She noted that when she is dissatisfied, it diminishes her motivation and energy to perform well. In contrast, satisfaction drives her to go the extra mile, even working late hours, because she feels invested in her work.	The participant described a highly engaging work environment as one that encourages freedom of thought, transparency, and mutual respect between team members and leadership.	Participants consistently described a strong link between job satisfaction and productivity. When employees feel recognised, supported, and aligned with organisational values, they report increased motivation and are more likely to go the extra mile. Satisfaction fosters a sense of pride, commitment, and ownership, which translates into higher-quality output. Several participants also highlighted the role of leadership and organisational culture in shaping this dynamic, when leaders are transparent and inclusive, productivity tends to flourish. Conversely, dissatisfaction stemming from misalignment, lack of recognition, or missed development opportunities often led to emotional fatigue, disengagement, and reduced performance. A few participants noted that a balance between challenge and comfort is necessary to sustain productivity; environments that are either too easy or too rigid hinder performance. Overall, the findings reinforce that job satisfaction is a powerful driver of productivity, especially when underpinned by trust, growth, and meaningful engagement.
RQ3	7	He finds his work meaningful when it contributes to broader organisational goals or helps clients during critical moments. The participant mentioned storytelling and advocacy as especially fulfilling. This sense of purpose motivates him to go the extra mile, increasing both satisfaction and productivity.	Angela finds her tasks meaningful when they resonate with her values and create social impact. Meaningfulness enhances her commitment and performance, particularly when outcomes contribute to client wellbeing or societal good.	She finds tasks meaningful when they make sense and contribute to collective goals. Meaningful work enhances her sense of purpose and allows her to engage more deeply with her responsibilities. However, she noted that lack of clarity or delays in task allocation can reduce the perceived value of the work.	She considers her work meaningful when it contributes to teaching others or helps clients navigate challenges. Activities like supporting junior staff or handling media during crises give her a strong sense of purpose and satisfaction.	Currently, she does not find her work meaningful. She feels that the organisation is uncertain about how best to utilise her skills. This lack of clarity leads to diminished job satisfaction and a sense that her work is undervalued.	She found meaning in both the creative nature of her role and the ability to make a difference in the lives of others, particularly through mentoring. For her, the most meaningful aspect of work was witnessing her team's growth. She believes meaningfulness contributes significantly to job satisfaction and motivation.	Yes, the participant found deep meaning in her work, especially in seeing her team grow and succeed. Mentorship and people development were sources of strong purpose for her, enhancing both her satisfaction and motivation.	She found her work highly meaningful, especially when it involved positive impact on clients and professional development of team members. This connection to purpose increased her satisfaction and drive.	She acknowledged that meaningfulness plays a role in satisfaction, even if it's not something she consciously thinks about. Campaigns that create real-world impact, particularly in underprivileged communities, contribute to her sense of purpose.	Meaningful work was seen as work that makes a difference , either to colleagues, clients, or society. They feel most fulfilled when their work has visible impact and aligns with their personal values.	Participants overwhelmingly associated meaningful work with alignment to purpose, personal values, and visible impact. Many found their roles most fulfilling when they contributed to societal or client outcomes, especially during critical moments or in support of vulnerable communities. Storytelling, mentoring, and people development were also described as meaningful, particularly when they helped others grow or navigate challenges. A common thread was that meaningfulness enhanced motivation, satisfaction, and productivity by creating a sense of emotional investment. However, in the absence of role clarity or impactful tasks, participants reported diminished satisfaction and a sense of being undervalued. Overall, meaningful work was viewed not as an abstract ideal but as a tangible and powerful contributor to how employees perceive their value and purpose within the organisation.

RQ3	8	He stressed that decision-making authority is vital. Being able to make choices about how to approach work fuels his creativity and productivity. When leadership trusts him to make those decisions, he feels empowered and more committed to delivering quality results.	She believes that decision-making autonomy fosters ownership and accountability. When trusted to lead projects, she becomes more innovative and motivated. However, this autonomy must be supported by access to guidance when needed.	The participant reiterated that autonomy and decision-making authority reinforce trust. She feels more accountable and driven when she has the freedom to lead tasks and influence outcomes, which positively affects her satisfaction and productivity.	Autonomy and the ability to make decisions contribute positively to her motivation. Being able to take the lead, offer suggestions, and be trusted to execute tasks boosts both her satisfaction and performance.	She believes autonomy and decision-making play a key role but are not absolute in her role. She experiences a degree of creative freedom, but decisions are often subject to revision. This conditional autonomy can affect her sense of ownership and satisfaction.	Career development was seen as vital. The participant felt that having a clear vision for her future was an important indicator of job satisfaction. She believed that organisations often fail to provide this vision, and she tried to offer it to her own team. Development opportunities, such as mentorship and recognition, were seen as strong motivators for both satisfaction and productivity.	Career development was described as critical. The participant believed she had reached a plateau in her current role and needed new challenges to continue growing. While she remained productive, she felt that the organisation could no longer support her development.	Autonomy and decision-making were seen as critical to both satisfaction and productivity. She valued being consulted and having input into processes, which made her feel respected and accountable.	Autonomy and decision-making are seen as critical to her motivation. She noted that trust and responsibility drive her to perform better and maintain high standards in her work.	Autonomy and decision-making were described as vital motivators. When given space to decide and lead, the participant feels more invested and driven to produce quality outcomes.	Participants strongly associated autonomy and involvement in decision-making with increased satisfaction, accountability, and productivity. Many described feeling more motivated when they had the freedom to make choices, lead initiatives, and influence outcomes. This sense of control fostered trust, creativity, and a deeper emotional investment in their roles. However, participants also stressed the need for a balanced approach, where autonomy is supported by clear expectations and guidance. A few participants noted that conditional autonomy or lack of consistent support could diminish its effectiveness. Overall, autonomy was viewed not just as independence, but as a demonstration of organisational trust that empowers employees to take ownership and perform at higher levels.
RQ3	9	He identified open communication, clear feedback, and recognition as supportive practices. On the other hand, opaque decision-making, inconsistent leadership communication, and lack of acknowledgement were cited as barriers to job satisfaction. He advocated for more regular dialogue between employees and leadership.	Career development is crucial to Angela's job satisfaction. She values mentorship and opportunities to learn, noting that stagnation undermines morale. She advocates for structured growth pathways to retain talent and drive performance.	She identified organisational structure and culture as critical influences. Practices that support collaboration and clarity enhance satisfaction, while lack of transparency or recognition can hinder motivation. She also noted that when roles overlap without clear responsibilities, it can create frustration.	She values supportive teams and leaders who provide space for independent thinking. However, lack of clarity about whom to approach for skills development or support can hinder job satisfaction. She highlighted the need for better communication and access to resources.	Supportive team dynamics and trust from leadership enhance her satisfaction. However, the absence of transparent communication and vague role definitions hinder productivity and create a sense of being underutilised.	She recommended providing employees with a clear vision of their future and fostering psychological safety. She emphasised the importance of "hiring the whole person," recognising that employees bring their full selves to work, including personal roles like parenthood. She advocated for inclusive practices that accommodate employees holistically.	She called for leadership to better understand and acknowledge the financial needs of employees. She felt that conversations about compensation and value were often dismissed, which undermined morale. She advocated for recognition, transparency, and fair reward structures to improve satisfaction.	Career development was very important to her. She appreciated access to mentorship and learning opportunities and felt that clear growth pathways were essential to retaining motivated employees.	Career development is very important. She linked it to both financial and professional growth, noting that recognition of potential motivates her to invest further in her own development. The presence of supportive colleagues also boosts satisfaction.	Career development was considered essential. The participant values access to mentorship and career pathways that foster growth, innovation, and self-fulfilment.	Career development emerged as a critical driver of job satisfaction across nearly all participants. Respondents consistently emphasised the importance of structured growth opportunities, mentorship, and access to learning. Many participants described how a lack of development support led to stagnation, underutilisation, or frustration, while those with clear pathways for progression reported higher motivation and stronger performance. Several also called for more transparent communication regarding skills development, clearer role expectations, and fair recognition systems. There was a shared belief that investing in professional development not only increases satisfaction but also plays a vital role in talent retention and long-term productivity. For many, development was tied not just to career advancement, but to a broader sense of self-fulfilment, recognition, and purpose within the organisation.
RQ3	10	His recommendations included increasing feedback loops, allowing more space for independent decision-making, and providing more visible career growth pathways. He also suggested that leaders be trained to lead with emotional intelligence and to ensure team alignment on purpose.	Angela suggests that job satisfaction could be improved through more visible leadership, authentic recognition, and intentional team inclusion. She emphasises the need for transparent feedback and clearer communication to build a stronger organisational culture.	She recommended a more balanced and structured organisational framework. Using a pyramid analogy, she highlighted the need for clear responsibilities across all levels, especially among senior staff. She suggested that empowering those on the ground with more ownership would lead to improved culture, satisfaction, and productivity.	She suggests more visible and accessible developmental resources, such as writing or project management training. Clear policies and encouragement to seek help could remove barriers, especially for employees unsure about where to turn for support.	She suggests creating more transparent dialogue about organisational tensions rather than masking issues with surface-level solutions. Open communication and genuine efforts to understand employee concerns would create a more supportive and productive environment.	While no explicit response was captured for this question, insights throughout the conversation highlighted her belief in continuous growth, personal impact, and supportive leadership as essential components of satisfaction and productivity.	The participant expressed that employees should be supported holistically, including financially, to allow them to focus on performance. She believed that when financial needs are met, employees are better equipped to pursue excellence and maintain emotional well-being.	She recommended improving communication across departments and creating more opportunities for recognition. She also suggested leadership training to ensure that managers are equipped to support and engage their teams effectively.	She believes accountability should be applied equally across the organisation. Unequal treatment and selective accountability diminish trust and satisfaction. Transparent, fair, and consistent management practices would improve morale and productivity.	The participant suggested improving internal communication, creating more development opportunities, and ensuring recognition is fair and consistent. A more inclusive and trusting leadership style would also improve satisfaction.	Participants offered practical suggestions to enhance job satisfaction and, by extension, improve productivity. A dominant theme was the need for more transparent, consistent, and empathetic leadership. Respondents called for leaders to communicate clearly, recognise effort meaningfully, and create psychologically safe spaces for honest dialogue. Development opportunities, such as accessible training, career conversations, and mentorship, were also prioritised as essential enablers of motivation and retention. Many highlighted the importance of equity in leadership behaviours and recognition practices, noting that inconsistencies can undermine morale. Additionally, participants advocated for stronger cross-team collaboration, inclusive practices, and alignment around purpose as means to strengthen engagement. Collectively, their recommendations reflect a desire for organisational cultures that are fair, empowering, and growth-oriented.