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INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT

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An Analysis of the Hybrid Workplace in the South African Mining Industry

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	5
1.1 <i>Background.....</i>	5
1.2 <i>Problem Statement.....</i>	6
1.3 <i>Research Objectives</i>	6
1.4 <i>Rationale of the Study.....</i>	6
1.5 <i>Delimitations of the Study.....</i>	7
1.6 <i>Assumptions</i>	7
1.7 <i>Definitions</i>	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review	9
2.1 <i>Introduction.....</i>	9
2.2 <i>Theoretical View</i>	12
2.3 <i>Conceptual Frameworks.....</i>	14
Chapter 3: Research Methodology	17
3.1 <i>Introduction.....</i>	17
3.2 <i>Research Design</i>	18
3.3 <i>Research Proposition.....</i>	18
3.4 <i>Data Collection Method.....</i>	19
3.5 <i>Data Analysis</i>	20
Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions	21
4.1 <i>Demographics.....</i>	21
4.2 <i>Description of the Hybrid Arrangements</i>	23
4.3 <i>The Positives and Negatives of Hybrid Workplace.....</i>	24
4.4 <i>The Challenges of Hybrid Workplaces</i>	27
4.5 <i>The Future of Hybrid Workplaces in the Mining Sector</i>	28
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	30
6 References.....	32

List of Figures

Figure 1: Illustrates the working arrangement model based on time and place (Gratton, 2021) ...10

Figure 2: The pyramid of intersecting domains of the work-home interface (Putnik et al., 2020). 14

Figure 3: The Maslow Hierarchy of Needs Theory (Mcleod, 2024).15

Figure 4: Deloitte’s Culture Web Framework for Hybrid Work Arrangements (Deloitte, 2024).17

Figure 5: The framework of the research propositions.19

Figure 6: Graph showing the gender profile of the participants22

Figure 7: Graph showing the qualification profile of the participants.....22

Figure 8: Graph showing the working experience and occupational level of the participants.23

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Hybrid and remote workplace arrangements have long been the norm in Europe and the United States of America (Sullivan, 2012). When the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the world, these working arrangements transformed from being a rare phenomenon into a reality for most organisations worldwide. Recently, in the post-pandemic period, many organisations are transitioning back to the traditional 9-to-5 setting (i.e., corporate office). Hybrid working arrangements often serve as a transitional phase when employees no longer need to work remotely. A hybrid workplace combines remote (i.e., working from home) and in-person (i.e., reporting to the office) arrangements, allowing employees to alternate between the two (Chellam & Divya, 2022).

The South African mining industry has always been recognised for its rich ore deposits, significantly contributing to economic growth. It is known for being physically demanding, with employees exposed to various risks such as dust, noise, moving machinery, and rock falls. The COVID-19 pandemic created another challenge that caused a substantial shift in organisational design. Mining companies needed to reevaluate their conventional models to protect employees while maintaining efficient operations. During the strict lockdown restrictions of COVID-19 in South Africa, mining employees were deemed essential workers, as they were crucial to keeping the economy functioning and providing electricity (i.e., coal mines).

Remote and hybrid work arrangements were introduced for employees in administrative and support functions. This included office-based employees and those working between the office and the mining production site. Full-time office employees were offered remote workplace arrangements, while hybrid workplace arrangements were available to employees who still needed to report to the mining production site. In the post-pandemic period, some mining companies returned to conventional in-person workplace arrangements, while others opted to maintain a more hybrid approach. Employees who previously worked remotely were expected to adapt to a hybrid workplace by alternating between remote and on-site work.

1.2 Problem Statement

A hybrid workplace in the mining industry is a recent development, mainly introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are still mining companies and employees who are trying to figure out if the hybrid model is suitable for their work environments. Hybrid workplaces can provide significant advantages, including flexibility and increased productivity for employees. However, they also have drawbacks, such as insufficient attention to employee well-being, loss of corporate identity, and feelings of isolation. In hybrid work setups, employees often experience a blurred boundary between work and personal life, leading to imbalanced lives, which may cause problems like psychophysical issues, burnout, and a decline in work performance.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to identify the advantages and disadvantages of working in a hybrid mining industry and further assess the challenges faced by South African mining companies in hybrid workplace arrangements. These assessments will be conducted from the employee's perspective to gain an understanding of their experience in a hybrid workplace within the mining industry. Finally, to identify which working arrangement employees within the mining industry prefer: hybrid or in-person? These objectives have led to the following research questions (RQ):

- **RQ1:** Assess if a hybrid workplace in the South African Mining Industry is the appropriate model. What are the positive and negative impacts of hybrid workplaces from an employee's perspective?
- **RQ2:** From an employee's perspective, what challenges do South African mining companies face regarding hybrid workplaces, and how can they support their employees?
- **RQ3:** Why do certain mining companies and many employees within the industry seek to shift from a fully remote to a hybrid workplace arrangement after COVID-19?

1.4 Rationale of the Study

The study's rationale is that few studies have explored hybrid workplace arrangements from a South African, let alone an African perspective. Additionally, no research has focused specifically on hybrid workplaces within the South African mining industry. Most

papers primarily examine remote and hybrid workplace arrangements from European and United States perspectives, as these models were already in practice before the COVID-19 pandemic (Sullivan, 2012). The global focus on these workplace arrangements (hybrid and remote) surged during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as many organisations were compelled to shift from traditional in-person working models to remote and/or hybrid setups to remain viable. There are still numerous opportunities to investigate remote and hybrid working models from a South African perspective, as this was not a prevalent phenomenon before the pandemic.

Most of the available research is primarily employer-centric, focusing on work productivity. Many research articles emphasise the impact on the organisation more than on the individual. This study will focus on the employee by exploring their positive and negative experiences. The focus is primarily on hybrid working arrangements, as many organisations attempt to bring their employees back to the office. Rather than returning to the traditional model of full-time in-person workplace arrangements, organisations choose a hybrid model in which employees are expected to come to the office on certain days of the week, whether scheduled or unscheduled.

1.5 Delimitations of the Study

This study focuses specifically on the South African mining industry. Primarily, it examines the employees' perspective but will also incorporate the employers' viewpoint if necessary. The study employs a qualitative approach utilising thematic analysis, where interview responses are analysed for trends, themes, and patterns. An interview guide has been created based on three themes of the study: the negatives, positives, and challenges of hybrid workplaces in the South African mining industry. Data collection through interviews is anticipated to take two months, with a target of 14 interviewees.

The selection process for interviewees focused on job functions in the mining industry. The target audience primarily consists of individuals in administrative and support roles who work in hybrid arrangements. Additionally, the study is limited to full-time employees aged 18 and over without specific quotas for gender, race, ethnic group, or other criteria.

1.6 Assumptions

When employees are at home, it may be more challenging to identify when they are unwell compared to when they are in an office environment. Is productivity the only measure

of employee well-being? Sullivan (2012) explains how work-life balance enhances quality of life, with remote working arrangements enabling this without compromising productivity.

The assumptions made during this study are as follows:

- Hybrid workplace arrangements negatively impact employee well-being when employers do not provide adequate resources and support.
- Most employees who have been exposed to remote workplaces prefer them over hybrid and in-person arrangements. A hybrid workplace requires them to be in the office on specific days, even when it does not ensure productivity on those days.
- Most employees on remote work arrangements were neither financially nor emotionally prepared to return to the office setup, as they had adjusted their lifestyles and work habits to accommodate remote work.
- A positive hybrid workplace culture generates more beneficial than detrimental outcomes. This should not merely be a set of values; the organisation must also be able to implement it in practice.
- The participants of this study, acting in a private capacity, do not represent any organisation or employer.
- Participants will freely express any discomfort or objections to interview questions they prefer not to answer.

1.7 Definitions

Term	Definition
Mining Companies	These are mining houses, suppliers, contractors, etc within the mining industry.

Summary

A hybrid workplace, which is a combination of working remotely and on-site, has become a common phenomenon in the South African Mining Industry. The implementation of a hybrid workplace in the mining industry was introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. A hybrid workplace has its advantages and disadvantages for both the employees and the companies in the mining industry. This study aims to identify the advantages and disadvantages of working in a hybrid mining industry and further assess the challenges

faced by South African mining companies in hybrid workplace arrangements. The study focuses mainly on the employees' perspective to be able gain insights into the personal experiences.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 *Introduction*

This study evaluates the positives, negatives, and challenges of hybrid workplaces from a South African Mining employee perspective. The literature review will help unpack the history of hybrid workplaces and the dynamics recorded by other researchers. These dynamics will then later be correlated to the experiences and/or perspectives captured in the South African mining industry through the interviews that were conducted.

According to (Chellam & Divya, 2022), the concept of hybrid models was first introduced in 1989 by Bryan Borys and David B. Jemison. When these two authors described hybrid arrangements, they focused on joint ventures and mergers, where agreements were made between different hybrid organisations to utilise resources from an existing organisation (Borys & Jemison, 1989). The purpose of these hybrid agreements was to ensure efficiency, resource availability, the ability to maximise economies of scale, and to diversify business risk (Borys & Jemison, 1989). Over time, the term hybrid working has evolved and become more prevalent during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Remote workplaces and, to some extent, hybrid workplaces have always been the norm in Europe and the United States of America (Sullivan, 2012). During the COVID-19 pandemic, they became a reality in many parts of the world. A remote workplace is an off-site work arrangement away from the traditional corporate office setup. Remote workspaces can be located at home, in shared spaces, coffee shops, and more. Hybrid workplaces are viewed as a subset of remote workplaces, combining time spent in a conventional corporate office with remote work (Choo et al., 2016).

Gratton (2021) differentiates the different working arrangements based on a model that looks at two axes: place and time. Figure 1 below illustrates the two-dimensional model, which also looks at the level of flexibility (constrained vs. unconstrained). A hybrid workplace model will likely fall between the “*anywhere, anytime*” and the “*in the office, anytime*” quadrants. Hybrid workplace arrangements are further divided based on the type

of agreement one has with their employer. The agreements are based on how often and when the employee needs to report to the office relative to working remotely (off-site).

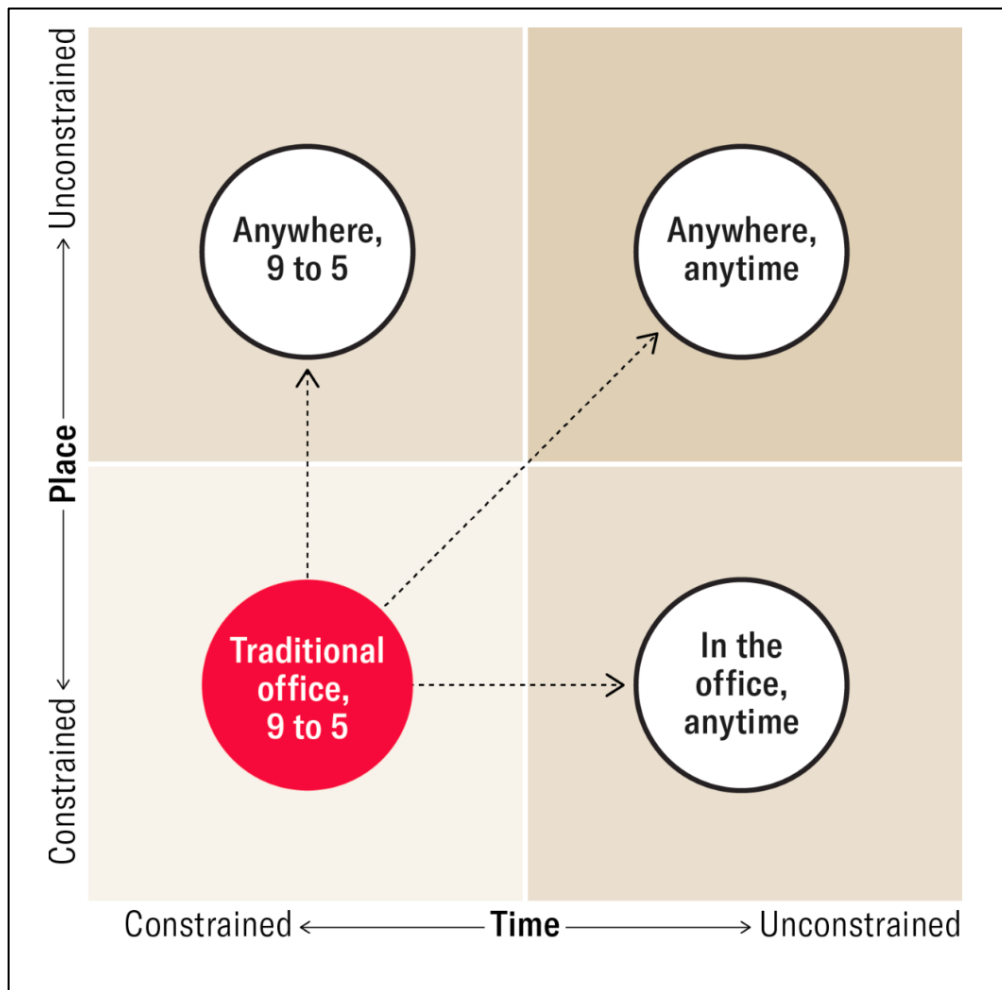


Figure 1: Illustrates the working arrangement model based on time and place (Gratton, 2021)

Technology Contributing to the Expansion of Remote And Hybrid Work

Technology has played a significant role in making remote and hybrid working arrangements possible. The rapid growth in digital technology has made it possible to communicate continuously and transfer information from anywhere (i.e., home, corporate office, shared spaces, etc.) (Petani & Mengis, 2023). Most organisations have invested so much in their Information Technology (IT) infrastructure, which was more prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period (2019 – 2022), there was a significant increase in the use of virtual platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, etc, to host virtual meetings. During this period, companies like Zoom grew significantly, with a share price rise of up to US\$480, and they put forth investments for expansion on South African shores (McLeod, 2022). Sound IT infrastructure has proven crucial even during the post-

pandemic times since it combines physical (corporate office setting), and virtual work arrangements (remote and hybrid) (Petani & Mengis, 2023).

Upside of Hybrid Work

Hybrid workplaces, considered a subset of remote workplaces, are seen as a benefit for most employees (Kiwert & Walecka, 2022). Hybrid workplace settings are believed to improve employee job satisfaction, commitment, and motivation (Choo et al., 2016). The employee benefit is influenced by the flexibility and work-life balance offered (Choo et al., 2016). This means employees can spend more time with loved ones, have more time for leisure, and even save on those travelling costs and long hours of commuting to work. Balancing personal and professional life brings about a high level of psychophysical fitness (mental and physical health), which motivates employees to be productive and deliver results (Choo et al., 2016; Walentek, 2019).

Based on the research conducted by Oppong Peprah (2024), a benefit of hybrid workplaces was the avoidance of office disturbances. Employees have the option to work at a remote location with few to no distractions when they are working on critical projects. The overall benefits of hybrid workplaces are summarised as accessibility, productivity, and flexibility (Oppong Peprah, 2024).

For hybrid models to work, they must be employee-centric, not only putting the organisation's benefits at the forefront (Gratton, 2021). As organisations aim for sustainability, the business world has shifted from solely prioritising profits to focusing on the triple bottom line (people, planet, and profits). The people aspect of the triple bottom line emphasises the importance of prioritising employee well-being.

Downside of Hybrid Work

The challenges in both remote and hybrid work arrangements are based on ergonomics, time management, reliance on technology, disruptions, social isolation, and, in some instances, lack of training (Kiwert & Walecka, 2022). The working environment significantly impacts employees' psychophysical fitness, which affects their performance (Choo et al., 2016; Walentek, 2019). In remote and hybrid work settings, some employees are forced to work in undesirable settings at home due to space constraints and/or disturbances from their surroundings (Matisāne et al., 2021).

An overreliance on technology and data security risks has also emerged as challenges (Kiwert & Walecka, 2022). When working from home, IT support services are not as easily accessible as in the corporate office, and employees connect to private networks that can be easily hacked. Employees often resolve technical glitches they encounter while working from home without proper training (Staniec et al., 2022). Training in remote or hybrid settings can easily be overlooked, introducing another level of frustration for employees.

When working from home, skill transfer can be problematic, as some employees feel isolated and disconnected from the organisation. There is also a risk of losing corporate identity, culture, trust, and collaboration. Additional negative aspects identified in a study by Oppong Peprah (2024) include slow decision-making processes, less supervision and support, work-life imbalance, loss of corporate culture, and a lack of belonging.

The most critical skill required for hybrid workplace arrangements is time management (Kiwert & Walecka, 2022). Organisations must ensure their employees have the necessary skills and training to manage their time effectively (Manko & Rosiński, 2021). When employees struggle with time management, they make mistakes, regress in their work performance, and encounter challenges with work-life balance. As employees experience imbalances, their well-being is affected. A decline in employee well-being poses a significant challenge, especially from the perspective of the mining industry. Most mining companies aim to ensure that their employees are safe and healthy. Given the high-risk nature of the work, maintaining employee wellness has always been a priority.

2.2 Theoretical View

The hybrid theories that underpin this study are the spillover theory and the pyramid of intersecting domains within the work-home interface. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of hybrid workplaces. They also illuminate the implications for both individuals and organisations.

The spillover theory involves the transfer of emotions and attitudes from one living space to another (Şahin & Açar, 2020). Zedeck & Mosier (1990) use the emotion of happiness as an example of how an employee who is happy at work can trigger happiness at home (i.e., with family). Emotions and attitudes can quickly transfer between work and home, despite the physical boundaries that may exist between these two personal spaces (Clark, 2000). In a hybrid workplace, such boundaries may not always be evident. The spillover theory is

classified into two components: positive work-family spillover and negative work-family spillover (Geurts et al., 2003). Positive work-family spillover occurs when an individual exhibits passion at work and consequently brings that same energy home, and vice versa (Wayne et al., 2006). When there is fulfilment in one space, the benefits are reflected in the other. Negative work-family spillover arises from conflicts between work and family, where an individual's responsibilities at work hinder their ability to meet family obligations (Frone et al., 1992). This can occur when work-related stress impacts an individual's well-being at home and vice versa (Şahin & Açar, 2020).

The pyramid of intersecting domains of the work-home interface refers to the integration of work and home, including culture (Putnik et al., 2020). It consists of three domains, with the fourth piece forming the base of the work-home interface (Figure 2). The three domains are: 1. Individual and home characteristics, 2. Roles, and 3. Culture. The first domain examines individual and work demands and resources (Putnik et al., 2020). Work demands may include working hours, as well as psychological and physical aspects, while resources can take the form of support from work. Home demands encompass family size, while resources pertain to support from family and friends. Individual characteristics include gender, age, personality, and more (Putnik et al., 2020).

The role domain examines the various functions individuals fulfil both at work and at home, encompassing values, norms, and expectations (Putnik et al., 2020). The cultural domain focuses on the socio-cultural and organisational factors that influence the integration of work and home (Putnik et al., 2020). Unlike the roles domain, which is more centred on the individual level, norms, values, and expectations operate at both societal and organisational levels.

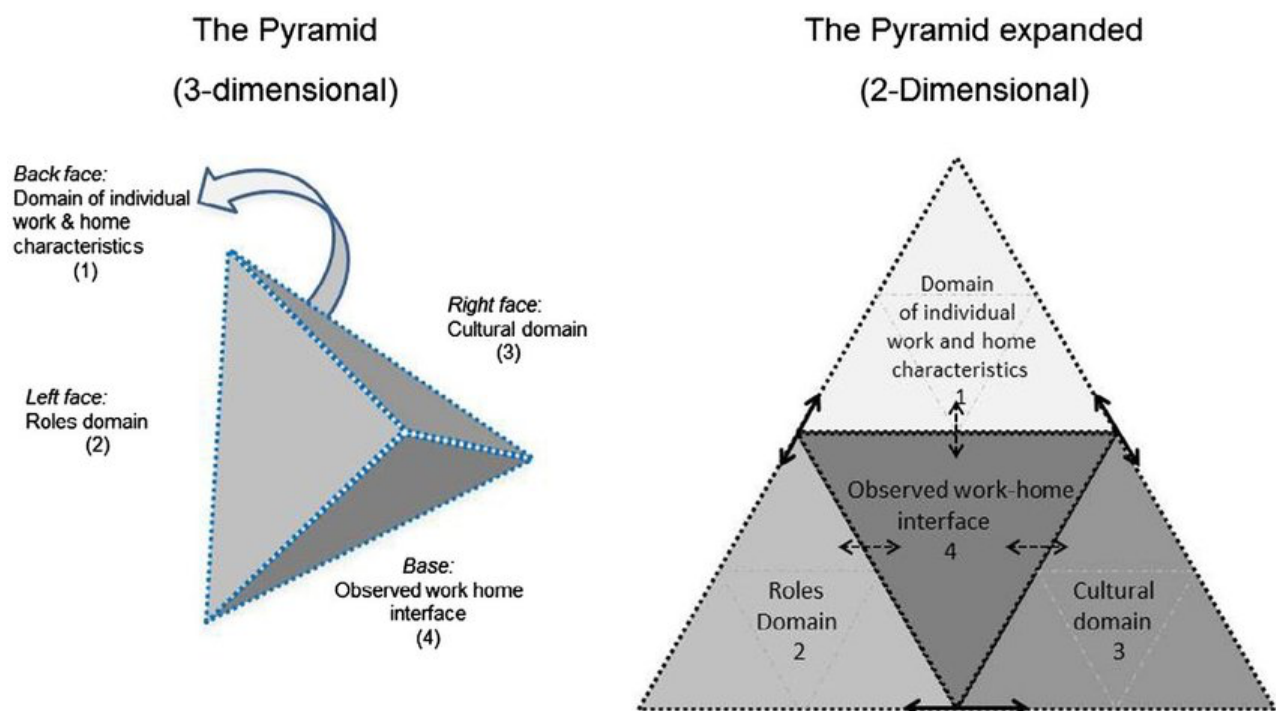


Figure 2: The pyramid of intersecting domains of the work-home interface (Putnik et al., 2020).

2.3 Conceptual Frameworks

The following section aims to explain the core concepts related to a hybrid workplace. The Maslow Hierarchy of Needs is a framework that can be used to help identify the key factors that can impact an employee's ability to adapt in a hybrid environment. The other factors that influence the outcomes (positive and negative) of a hybrid workplace are employee wellness and organisational culture. These visual and written frameworks will help guide the research process by indicating the key elements to look out for during the data collection, analysis and the summation of the findings.

The Maslow Hierarchy of Needs

An employee with a high level of psychophysical fitness is motivated and capable of managing the dynamics of hybrid workplace arrangements. The Maslow Hierarchy of Needs Theory is a five-category model used to determine what motivates an employee (Figure 3). The categories are Self-actualisation, Esteem Needs, Belongingness and Love Needs, Safety Needs, and Physiological Needs (Mcleod, 2024). The Esteem Needs and Belongingness, and Love Needs are grouped as psychological needs, which are also essential in hybrid working arrangements. In hybrid settings, employees can easily feel isolated, so systems must be established to ensure constant communication between team

members and management. These systems should also foster a culture of recognition, which helps boost self-esteem.

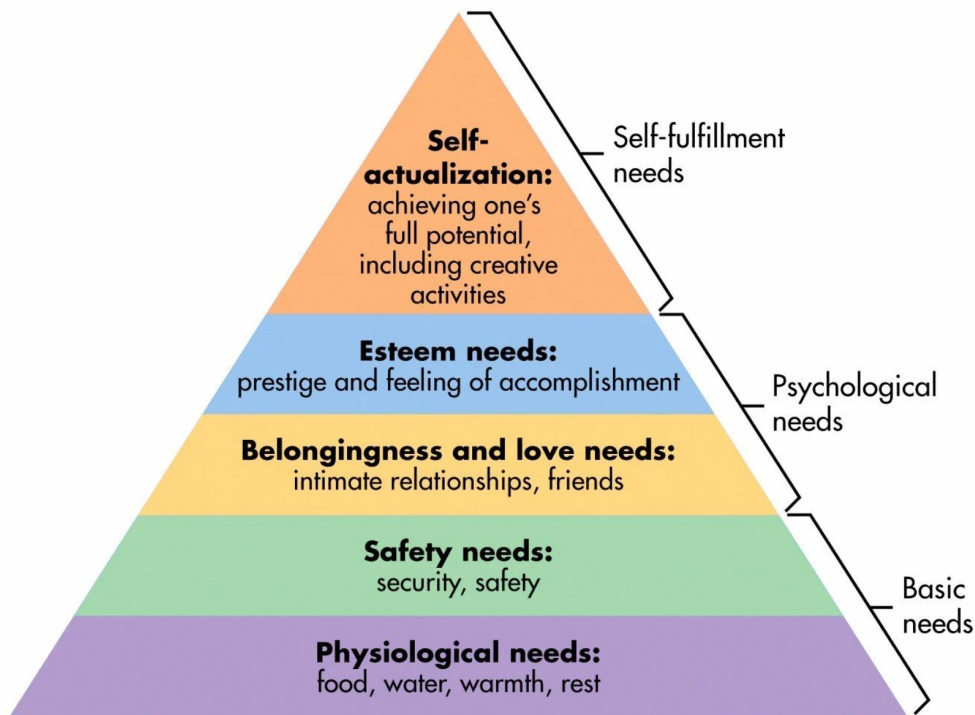


Figure 3: The Maslow Hierarchy of Needs Theory (Mcleod, 2024).

Wellness - What is Employee Wellness?

Berry et al. (2020) describe employee wellness as managing one's life to reduce health risks, enhance effectiveness, and improve quality of life. This is achievable with employer support, as a healthy and effective employee benefits the organisation. Employee wellness influences job performance and job satisfaction (Wu et al., 2017), indicating that happy and healthy employees can produce results that help organisations run efficiently. One of the most common key performance indicators (KPI) for Human Resources, also known as Human Capital, is ensuring that employees are both mentally and physically healthy (Wu et al., 2017). Employee wellness benefits include increased productivity, reduced employee turnover, fewer occupational injuries or incidents, and ultimately, savings on medical expenses (Wu et al., 2017).

Organisations typically offer employee wellness programmes that benefit both employees and employers by promoting productivity (Berry et al., 2020). A well-structured employee wellness programme can provide a return on investment (ROI) of up to 6 to 1

(Berry et al., 2020). Support and motivation from colleagues and managers significantly enhance employee wellness. This support encompasses effective communication and regular check-ins on employees' well-being. Employees who experience isolation and low motivation are more susceptible to burnout (Fernet et al., 2010). Managers must also establish realistic goals for their teams to prevent excessive working hours in pursuit of these objectives. In remote and hybrid work environments, excessive hours can quickly become standard, risking the psychophysical well-being of employees (i.e., burnout).

Organisational Culture

Organisational culture is an alignment of rules, beliefs, behaviours, and awareness through a collaborative approach (Michael, 2013). It represents an organisation's identity, and the type of culture, whether positive or negative, determines how effectively it performs. The foundation of culture lies in what people say they will do, what they do, and how they execute it (Dewar & Doucette, 2018). The characteristics of organisational culture include being a performance driver, unique, and challenging to replicate (Dewar & Doucette, 2018). A positive culture enhances performance and helps employees adapt to various situations, while a negative culture has the opposite effect (Dewar & Doucette, 2018). In a hybrid work environment, a strong organisational culture is essential for achieving results, whether remotely or in person. Fostering a culture of wellness and support encourages employees to perform at their best, making them feel valued.

Deloitte (2024) proposes a culture web framework featuring four attributes that contribute to the success of hybrid workplace arrangements. These attributes are grounded in the relationship between two components: Organisation – Work, Organisation – Career, Individual – Work, and Individual – Career (Figure 4). The Organisation – Work category emphasises the importance of events that connect employees to the organisation, establishing platforms for reflective and feedback sessions as well as cultural drives to ensure alignment (Deloitte, 2024). Organisation – Career pertains to opportunities where organisational values and culture can be reiterated through onboarding processes, performance reviews, and annual induction renewals (Deloitte, 2024).

Individual – Work and Individual – Career will ensure employees' wellness during a hybrid work arrangement. The Individual – Career category focuses on recognising good

performance during promotions, retirement, and periodic appraisals (Deloitte, 2024). Individual – Work promotes transparency, team participation, and feedback sessions. This can be achieved through team meetings, being intentional about checking on team members' well-being, ensuring safe spaces for providing feedback, and allowing the team to determine strategies that work best for them (Deloitte, 2024).



Figure 4: Deloitte's Culture Web Framework for Hybrid Work Arrangements (Deloitte, 2024).

Summary

The introductory part of the literature review gives an appreciation of the history of hybrid workplaces in general. The concept of hybrid models was first introduced in 1989 by Bryan Borys and David B. Jemison, and was also common in Europe and the United States of America. The COVID-19 pandemic allowed for a global adoption of remote and hybrid workplaces, which also encouraged the mining industry to adapt to the changing world of work. The literature review section also looks into two categories of frameworks, mainly theoretical and conceptual. The theoretical frameworks used for the study are the spillover theory and the pyramid of intersecting domains within the work-home interface. The conceptual framework is based on the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs, together with the impact of employee wellness and organisational culture on a hybrid workplace

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The study aims to evaluate the positives, negatives, and challenges of hybrid workplaces. These hybrid workplaces focus on the South African Mining Industry, as there is currently no research covering this perspective. The South African mining industry is one

of the largest in the world and significantly contributes to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

3.2 Research Design

The approach taken for this study is qualitative, which will help identify the negatives, positives, and challenges of hybrid workplaces. Qualitative studies are exploratory and enable the discovery of new aspects that might not have been considered. An interview guide was developed with open-ended questions, allowing participants to elaborate on their responses and capture diverse perspectives. The qualitative methods relevant to this study include narrative and phenomenological approaches. The narrative method studies individuals by evaluating their stories and experiences, which the researcher then retells (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The phenomenological method focuses on the lived experiences of a specific aspect (Creswell & Creswell, 2023) , in this case, the hybrid workplace arrangement.

3.3 Research Proposition

A framework has been established to explain the proposition of this study (Figure 5). These propositions are grounded in the objectives outlined and the related literature on the topic:

Proposition 1: Hybrid workplaces in the mining industry produce positive outcomes when employees receive sufficient support and training.

Proposition 2: Hybrid workplaces in the mining industry produce negative outcomes and challenges when employees do not receive adequate support and training.

Proposition 3: Most employees within the mining industry prefer hybrid workplaces compared to full-time onsite arrangements.

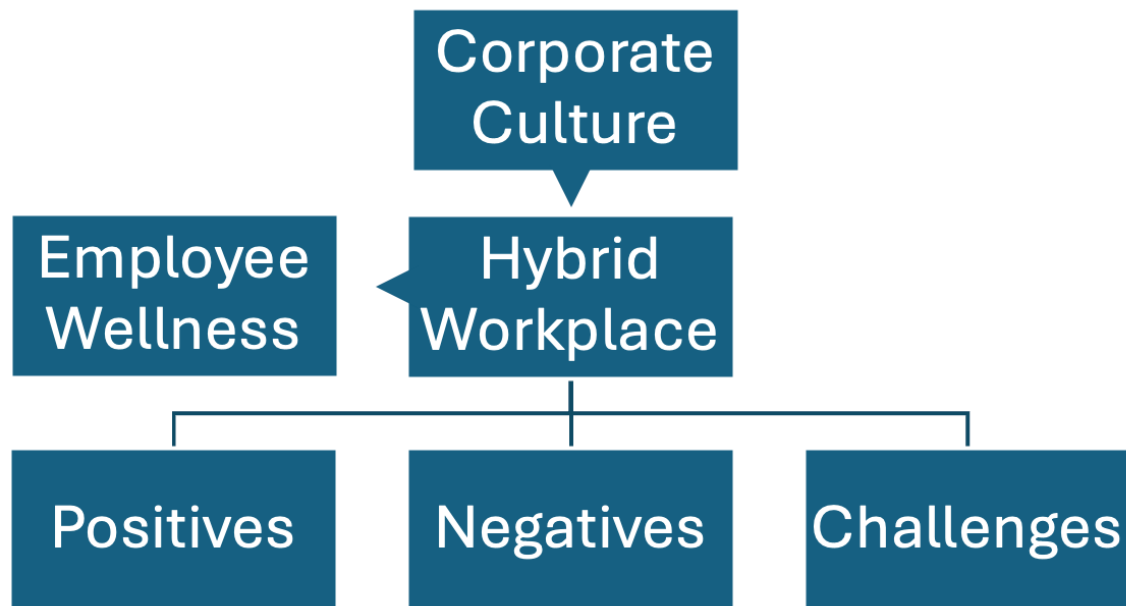


Figure 5: The framework of the research propositions.

3.4 Data Collection Method

The data for this study was collected from mining professionals who have experience and/or are currently working in hybrid workplaces. A non-probability sampling technique was employed in this study. This non-probability approach utilized judgmental sampling, selecting individuals best positioned to provide insights on hybrid workplaces. The target sample size comprised 14 participants engaged in hybrid work arrangements within the South African mining industry. The study was not company-specific but focused solely on the South African perspective.

A qualitative approach was employed to gather data. Participants were interviewed according to the study's objectives as outlined in the research questions RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. The interview questions were made available both digitally (i.e., Qualtrics XM) and in print to engage a diverse group of participants. The interview guide was organised into two sections based on the type of response requested. The first section consisted of demographic questions, which aid in understanding the respondents' characteristics. The second section included open-ended questions, allowing respondents to provide detailed responses. These descriptive responses form the foundation of the study and will help address the research questions.

The questionnaire was sent to friends, colleagues, and industry associates who work in hybrid workplace environments within the mining industry. Social platforms such as

LinkedIn were avoided because it is hard to determine how many individuals received the questionnaire, as some LinkedIn contacts can reshare it on your behalf to reach a wider audience.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data collection method is qualitative, utilising an interview guide to gather non-statistical and non-measurable data. The information obtained through the interview questionnaire provides in-depth insights into personal experiences, which will be analysed and interpreted. The unique responses of the participants will be categorised based on three themes: negatives, positives, and challenges of hybrid workplaces. The data provided by the respondents will be validated to ensure accuracy and that only the responses from the targeted audiences (hybrid working personnel in the South African mining industry) are analysed.

The interview questions were sent to 20 individuals, and by the time the results were analysed, 14 respondents had provided feedback, resulting in a response rate of 70%. The 30% of respondents who submitted their answers after the data had been extracted for analysis were excluded from the study. Nevertheless, 100% participation was achieved as the targeted audience consisted of 14 respondents.

Summary

The research methodology section gives a breakdown of how the study was conducted. This study is qualitative, which will help identify the negatives, positives, and challenges of hybrid workplaces. The qualitative methods relevant to this study include narrative and phenomenological approaches with a focus on individual stories and lived experiences. Three propositions were put in place to identify the causes of positive and negative aspects of hybrid workplaces from an employee's perspective, and also to understand the challenges mining companies face in implementing hybrid workplaces. The data for this study was collected through interviews of mining professionals who have experience and/or are currently working in hybrid workplaces

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions

The Findings and Discussions section will examine the study's results, which will also be addressed in accordance with the research questions (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3). Through these discussions, the three hypotheses will be evaluated based on the feedback received from responses. The results will be categorised into different sections, specifically demographics, a description of hybrid arrangements, and themes related to the research objectives. Analysing and interpreting the demographic data is crucial, as it aids in understanding the characteristics of the respondents.

4.1 Demographics

The demographic questions included in the study are age, gender, education level, occupation, employer, and years of experience. A question about the employment sector was added to ensure that only results from the targeted sector (mining) were utilised.

All respondents were employed in the mining industry at the time of the study and were above the legal working age of 18. Their ages ranged from 25 to 54, with 57% in the 25–34 age group, 36% in the 35–44 age group, and 7% in the 45–54 age group. Additionally, 50% of the respondents identified as male, while the remaining 50% identified as female (Figure 6). All respondents had received tertiary education, with qualifications ranging from a National Diploma to a Master's Degree. Most respondents (57%) hold an Honours Degree (Figure 7). The respondents also had significant work experience, spanning from 2 years to more than 10 years. As shown in Figure 8, 14% had 2-5 years of experience, while 43% had either 5-10 years or more than 10 years of experience. Their current roles varied from intermediate (experienced staff) to executive (senior management), with 60% of the respondents occupying middle management positions.

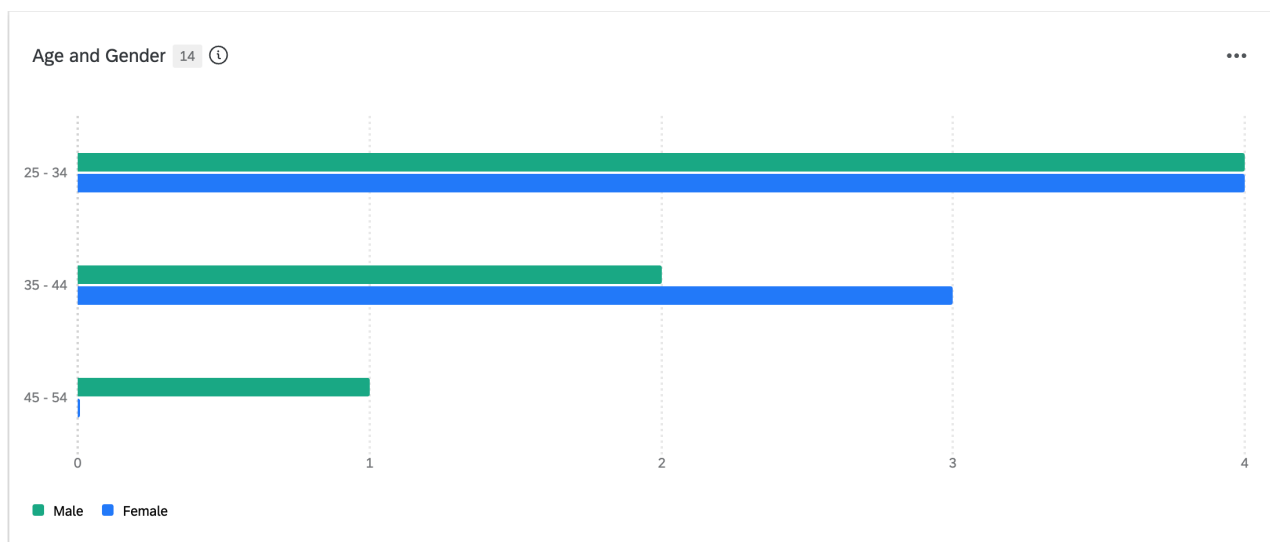


Figure 6: Graph showing the gender profile of the participants

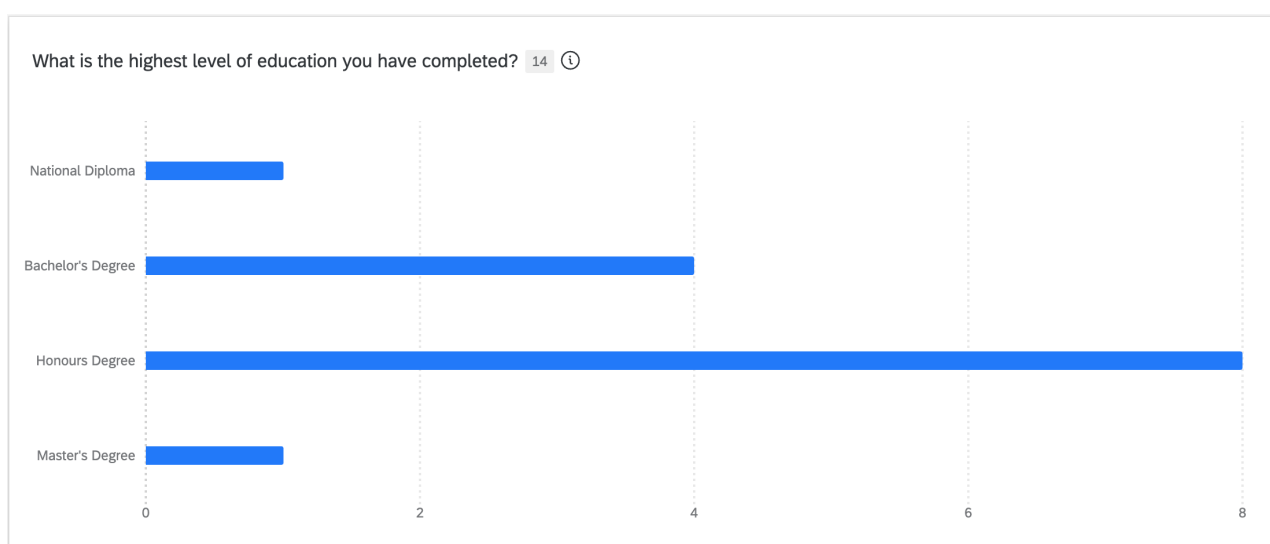


Figure 7: Graph showing the qualification profile of the participants.

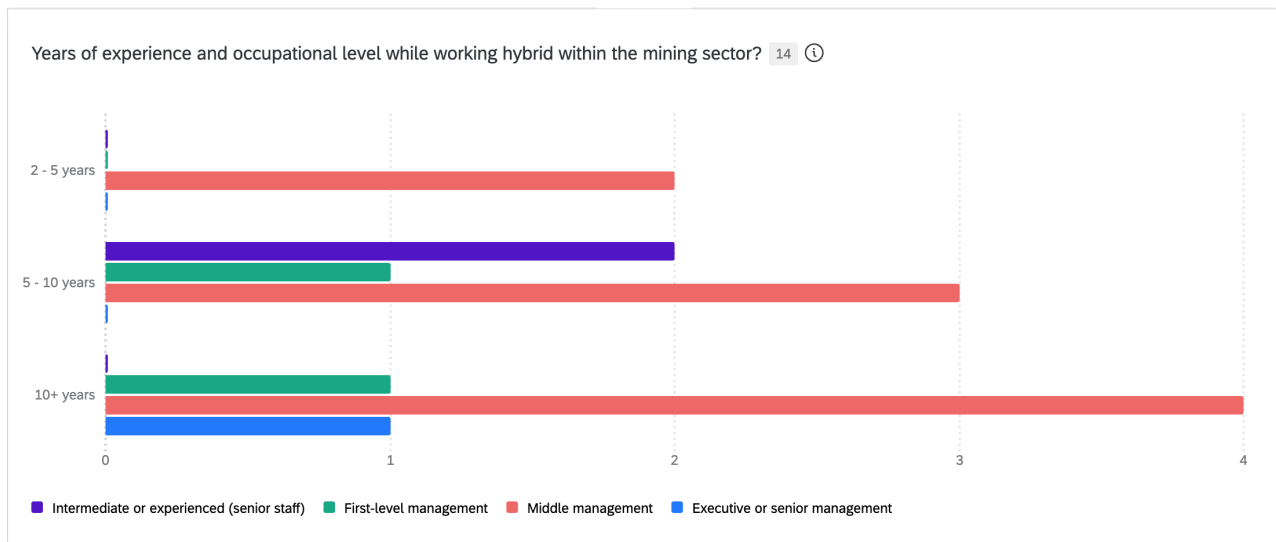


Figure 8: Graph showing the working experience and occupational level of the participants.

4.2 Description of the Hybrid Arrangements

Based on the findings above, the respondents have substantial experience in the mining industry. During the interviews, questions were posed to explore how their work experience constituted their hybrid workplace exposure and to gain a deeper understanding of the hybrid workplace environment. According to the respondents' feedback, their exposure to hybrid workplaces varied from 4 months to 15 years. Most respondents (71%) began experiencing a hybrid workplace between 2019 and 2022, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted more companies to offer hybrid work arrangements to employees. IR05 implemented a hybrid setup from April 2020 to July 2022, which included 60% of the time working from home, while Mondays and Fridays were designated as mandatory office days. Three respondents began working in hybrid workplaces prior to 2019, with one holding the most experience at 15 years. The least experienced in hybrid workplaces was a respondent who started in October 2024.

Hybrid workplaces can be either scheduled or unscheduled. A scheduled hybrid workplace means that employees are expected to be in the office and /or on-site on specific days of the week or for a certain number of days. Ten respondents (71%) indicated that their hybrid work arrangements were unscheduled, while the remaining four respondents (29%) indicated they were scheduled (Appendix 1). IR08, who has 15 years of experience working in a hybrid workplace since 2010, described his work arrangement as unscheduled. His workdays primarily involve working from home and conducting office and site visits on an ad hoc basis. IR08 also has a fully equipped home office, which is a separate building

from his house and is referred to as his base office. Separating a home office from the main house likely helps minimise distractions. IR12 is the respondent with the least experience in a hybrid workplace. She began her hybrid work arrangement in October 2024, consisting of a scheduled setting of three days in the office and two days of working from home.

4.3 *The Positives and Negatives of Hybrid Workplace*

A hybrid workplace, like any work arrangement, has its pros and cons. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, hybrid work arrangements were not as widespread as they are now. Many companies had to transition to hybrid working models without prior knowledge or experience. According to the responses, approximately 21% of participants had hybrid workplace experience before the pandemic. All respondents shared their perceptions of the positives and negatives of hybrid workplaces and how these impacted their personal and professional lives.

Positive Aspects of Hybrid Workplace

The positive attributes of a hybrid workplace that emerged most prominently from the responses include flexibility, cost savings, work-life balance, stress management, and productivity. Respondents emphasised flexibility in their answers, which, based on research, is one of the primary benefits of hybrid workplaces. IR03 described flexibility as balancing work and personal life, while IR08 noted that it allows him to engage in other activities between work-related tasks. IR08 further explained that he can spend more time with his family and promptly address personal emergencies. Most respondents who identified spending time with family as a positive aspect of hybrid workplaces also mentioned how it enabled them to drop off and pick up their children from school. IR10 added that the experience of dropping off his daughter at school is invaluable and energises him for the workday ahead.

The cost-saving aspect was explained exclusively by IR07, who emphasised how hybrid working from 2020 to 2021 lowered her fuel expenses. In a typical week, she worked three days from home and two days at the office, enabling her to save nearly three days' worth of fuel costs. IR06 additionally clarified that, besides saving on fuel, she is also reducing her insurance premiums.

IR14 described a hybrid workplace as effective and energising. She explained that she is motivated to start her work without spending time driving and getting caught in traffic. Her

response implies that she enjoys working from home more than going to the office. IR12 highlighted the advantages of hybrid working for the days spent both in the office and at home. The days she spent in the office allowed her to see her colleagues, which helped nurture strong working relationships. She emphasised that on the days she worked from home, she saved on fuel costs and commuting time, allowing her to engage in other activities. IR12's perspective indicates that some individuals find hybrid workplaces more appealing than fully remote ones, as they still offer opportunities for face-to-face interactions with colleagues.

The health benefit outlined is that hybrid workplaces facilitate stress management. Employees can plan their days, minimize distractions, and enhance productivity, enabling them to complete tasks on time with reduced stress. Respondent IR07 cited three benefits: lower stress levels, time to prepare home-cooked meals (which decreases reliance on takeaway food), and achieving adequate rest (a minimum of 8 hours of sleep).

Two respondents reported that the ability to upskill while having more time to focus on their studies was beneficial. IR04 was enrolled in a diploma program at the University of the Witwatersrand during the study, and IR13 noted that a hybrid workplace allowed him to complete his online course. IR13 also mentioned that his speaking and presentation skills have improved due to reliance on online meetings.

Negative Aspects of Hybrid Workplace

The negative aspects of a hybrid workplace that emerged most prominently from the responses were social isolation, long working hours, internet connectivity issues, and poor time management. Social isolation leads to feelings of loneliness and disconnection from others and the organisation as a whole. Most respondents mentioned feeling socially isolated, with respondent IR06 noting that her career growth has been affected by not being able to engage and share ideas with colleagues regularly. Similarly, IR04, who has three years of experience in a hybrid workplace, stated that due to social isolation, he does not know the names of people in his office and organisation.

Extended working hours, often linked to poor time management, are a widespread issue in remote and hybrid workplaces. Employees frequently find themselves logging extra hours, typically due to heightened work demands or ineffective time management. IR03 noted that while working from home, she feels a sense of inadequacy, which motivates her to extend her hours. Unfortunately, this has led to health issues such as burnout and

fatigue, along with a negative effect on personal relationships due to her difficulty in separating work from personal time. IR08, who has extensive experience in hybrid workplaces (15 years), believes that individuals who work from home often put in longer hours than those in the office. He also mentioned that his work frequently spills into weekends, blurring the lines between work and family time. Self-discipline and time management are crucial skills for ensuring that a hybrid setup is beneficial for both employees and organisations.

What also came through strongly in the feedback were issues related to people management. Some respondents noted challenges with colleagues who were unresponsive and often unreachable by phone or online during working hours. IR10 expressed frustrations about struggling to obtain information from those working from home and observed that some people perceive their remote workdays as time off.

From a manager's perspective, IR14 noted that not everyone has the skill of self-discipline or the ability to work unsupervised, which is critical in hybrid workplaces. Sometimes, she finds it necessary to micromanage her team to achieve results, which ultimately frustrates her and takes a mental toll. From a subordinate's perspective, IR13 highlights how micromanagement affected him, as it suggested he was unproductive when out of sight. His calendar was overwhelmed with scheduled online meetings, which he perceived as tactics to micromanage employees, resulting in undefined working hours. IR12 characterised the frequent unproductive meetings as a way for employees to demonstrate they are working, which sometimes led to her missing family time.

On days when hybrid employees work from home, they are responsible for ensuring they have a conducive workspace with adequate resources. Some employees find themselves lacking the necessary tools to perform their tasks. Load shedding, a long-standing issue in South Africa, often results in unstable internet connectivity. There is a significant reliance on the internet and Wi-Fi for online meetings and accessing intranet and work platforms. IR07 identified load shedding and reduction as sources of lost productivity in a hybrid workplace.

It seems that the positive aspects of hybrid workplaces outweigh the negatives. The respondent IR05, who works remotely 60% of the time, reported no negative aspects of his hybrid work arrangement.

4.4 *The Challenges of Hybrid Workplaces*

The interview questions aimed to uncover the challenges of hybrid workplaces were two-fold. The first part focused on what the respondents identified as challenges, which, in some cases, mirrored the negatives of hybrid workplaces. The second part sought the respondents' perspective on what their employer or organisation finds challenging in establishing effective hybrid workplaces.

Similar to the drawbacks of hybrid workplaces, the prominently emerged challenges included a lack of resources, social isolation, and personnel management. The lack of resources encompassed not having access to printers and experiencing network connectivity issues on days spent working from home. The issue of electricity (load shedding) was also cited as a hindrance to productivity. Social isolation and loneliness affect not only individuals but also the communication and collaboration among team members. IR14 suggested that strained cross-functional relationships could stem from the challenges mentioned by IR11: ineffective communication and collaboration.

Some employees seem to lack commitment, as shown by their non-attendance at meetings. An interesting perspective from IR12 is that this non-attendance often stems from short notice and insufficient prior discussions when scheduling meetings. IR04 noted that the sudden demand for online meetings offers little time for task execution, which IR05 described as inadequate time for site inspections and verifications.

Challenges Organisations Face to Establish a Good Hybrid Workplace

Employers and organisations encounter challenges in establishing effective hybrid workplaces with their employees. The new norm of creating remote and hybrid workplaces became a reality for most organisations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although these organisations were unprepared, they had to adapt their work setup to remain operational during these difficult times. The elements identified in the interview responses included people management, performance management, security, and organisational culture.

A hybrid workplace requires dedication, independence, and self-discipline from employees. It can be challenging for organisations to ensure that all employees contribute to a safe and productive work environment. IR01 highlights how organisations struggle to ensure employees work the hours stipulated in their contracts and are available for calls and meetings. The challenge of maintaining a hybrid work schedule, where employees

need to balance time working from home and in the office, complicates matters further. Some organisations pay their employees based on the hours worked, and with hybrid working, tracking these hours might pose a challenge that could impact remuneration structures, as described by IR04. IR09 and IR12 emphasize that absenteeism is a problem, often resulting in delayed responses and attendance to tasks at hand.

Cybersecurity breaches are among the most significant risks for organisations, and hybrid workplaces have made them even more vulnerable. On days when employees work remotely, they operate outside the organisation's robust IT infrastructure. Employees must ensure they are connected to a secure and reliable network, which is not always guaranteed. IR10 highlights that a lack of stable network connections can reduce efficiency. IR05 identified a challenge organisations face: poor meeting attendance due to unreliable network connections.

Every organisation wants its employees to align with its objectives and strategies. This includes fostering a culture that promotes a positive working environment in line with the organisational strategy. IR07 believes that the challenge of hybrid workplaces is that organisational culture and employee engagement can suffer. IR14 suggested that insufficient interactions between employees, specifically between managers and subordinates, can lead to a disconnect from the organisation.

4.5 The Future of Hybrid Workplaces in the Mining Sector

The respondents were asked whether they would choose a hybrid workplace when seeking new job opportunities. Approximately 86% of the responses indicated a positive answer, supporting the previously mentioned advantages, such as flexibility, fuel cost savings, increased productivity, and improved work-life balance. The remaining 14% (2 out of 14) of respondents preferred the traditional full-time office-based workplace. IR11 justified his answer: *"I prefer the traditional working environment of clocking in at the office. I am more productive in that kind of setup"*. IR06 stated, *"I thrive on the healthy in-office competition and random conversations at the coffee machines. The lunch discussions encouraged me to enrol in a short course"*.

Additional questions were included to understand the type of support, organisational culture, and skills suited for a hybrid workplace. The respondents highlighted several areas where they need assistance, often mentioning the importance of a reliable internet connection. IR07 noted the following elements: hybrid workplace performance metrics,

clear policies and expectations, dependable IT support, regular team alignment meetings, and continuous learning programs. IR08 added that appropriate support structures are necessary from both the line manager and family, ensuring no disturbances during working hours.

As explained in the conceptual framework that an organisation's culture sets its tone. The respondents were asked to describe their expectations for an organisational culture that aligns with a hybrid workplace. The emerging elements included inclusiveness, embracing diversity, support, trust, collaboration, strong work ethics, self-sufficiency, and adaptability to change. IR04 emphasised trust by stating: *“A culture that is based on trust, where employees trust that others will produce quality work, regardless of location”*. IR03 echoed the sentiments of IR04 while also noting that it is the responsibility of employees to ensure their deliverables are completed on time. She underscored the importance of aligning employees with the company's strategy, mission, and vision, which needs to be part of their daily work life.

Lastly, the skills and/or training required for an effective hybrid workplace in the mining industry were identified as per the list below:

- Self-discipline
- Mental agility
- Ability to work independently
- Time management
- Effective communication
- Collaboration
- Computer literacy
- Technological savviness
- Working effectively in a team
- Planning and scheduling ability

It is recommended that both employees and employers within the mining industry ensure that there is a conducive hybrid workplace in order to yield positive results. Based on the research findings, it is clear that the hybrid workplace in the mining industry is becoming common, with most of the respondents indicating that they would opt for a hybrid workplace over going to the office all the time. It is well noted that every workplace arrangement is subject to both positive and negative aspects. The negative and /or challenges faced by

both the employee and the employer have been identified and can be addressed to ensure the success of hybrid workplaces in the mining industry. With technology becoming prevalent within the mining industry, we might start seeing non-administrative roles also allowing for hybrid arrangements. By the time the mining industry gets to that point, there needs to have been a well-set-out hybrid workplace structure which allows for continuity and productivity.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Remote workplaces, and to some extent, hybrid workplaces, have long been the norm in Europe and the United States (Sullivan, 2012). However, they became a reality for much of the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. This marked a new way of working for the South African mining industry. The literature review section also looks into theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are aligned with hybrid workplace models. The theoretical frameworks used for the study are the spillover theory and the pyramid of intersecting domains within the work-home interface. The conceptual framework is based on the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs, together with the impact of employee wellness and organisational culture on a hybrid workplace

A qualitative method was used for this study, which included narrative and phenomenological approaches with a focus on individual stories and lived experiences. The data was collected through interviews of mining professionals who have experience and/or are currently working in hybrid workplaces. The research methodology included three propositions, which are:

- **Proposition 1:** Hybrid workplaces in the mining industry produce positive outcomes when employees receive sufficient support and training.
- **Proposition 2:** Hybrid workplaces in the mining industry produce negative outcomes and challenges when employees do not receive adequate support and training.
- **Proposition 3:** Most employees within the mining industry prefer hybrid workplaces compared to full-time onsite arrangements.

According to the responses, only 21% of the participants had prior experience with a hybrid workplace in the mining sector. The target audience included administrative and

support personnel working in hybrid arrangements, but the results showed that respondents from technical roles also participated, allowing for a diversification of the data collected.

According to Choo et al. (2016), hybrid workplace settings are believed to enhance employee job satisfaction, commitment, and motivation. The responses indicate that hybrid workplaces possess more positive attributes than negative ones. The most prominent positive qualities identified include flexibility, cost savings, work-life balance, stress management, and productivity. The majority of respondents emphasised flexibility as a key benefit. According to the two-dimensional model presented in Figure 1, the flexibility of a hybrid workplace comprises “*anytime, anywhere*” (unconstrained) and “*in the office anytime*” (constrained).

The third proposition was that hybrid workplaces appear more attractive (i.e., 86% of respondents agreed) than traditional full-time in-office environments. Only 2 out of the 14 respondents preferred working full-time at the office, underscoring the benefits of healthy competition, casual conversations over coffee, and increased productivity. However, those favouring a hybrid workplace also highlighted productivity as a positive aspect. This suggests that the factors influencing productivity vary for each individual, which organisations must consider when developing work arrangements. According to Choo et al. (2016) and Walentek (2019), productivity is driven by a high level of psychophysical fitness (mental and physical health), which is achieved through a work-life balance.

The negative aspects of hybrid work can be summarised as social isolation, long working hours, internet connectivity issues, load shedding and poor time management. Some of these aspects have also been identified as challenges. The consequences of some of these negative aspects include health problems such as burnout and fatigue, along with a detrimental impact on personal relationships due to the difficulty in separating work from personal time.

The first two hypotheses linking support and its absence to outcomes in a hybrid workplace have been tested. Respondents indicate that strong support structures from their employer are vital for an effective hybrid workplace. They also emphasised the importance of family support, especially when working from home. Employer support can include effective communication, checking in on employees’ well-being, and providing adequate training and resources to enable high performance.

The research question RQ3, which seeks to understand why certain mining companies shifted from remote to hybrid work post-COVID-19 pandemic, could not be answered. The feedback regarding some challenges organisations face in hybrid workplaces focused more on the days employees worked away from the office. These challenges could have been more severe in a remote setting, leading the mining companies to opt for a more balanced approach (hybrid). The challenges raised included the risk of compromising people management, performance management, security, and organisational culture. Security concerns mainly focus on cybersecurity breaches, vulnerable to unauthorised and unsafe internet connections or Wi-Fi.

In conclusion, the positives, negatives, and challenges of a hybrid mining industry mirror those of any other industry. The interview responses were similar, if not identical, to the themes drawn from various literature on the experiences of remote and hybrid workplaces. Both employees and organisations share the responsibility of fostering an effective hybrid workplace in the mining sector. Trust and discipline are essential for this work environment to thrive.

There are still numerous opportunities to investigate remote and hybrid working models from a South African perspective, as this was not a prevalent phenomenon before the COVID-19 pandemic. Future studies could also look into the employer's perspective in the mining industry since there is not much data available looking at the South African mining industry.

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7 Appendices

Appendix 1: Illustrates the number of respondents with scheduled and unscheduled hybrid work arrangements.

