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Examining the impact of hybrid work environments on employee wellness post-COVID-19 in South Africa

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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 research examines how hybrid work environments have affected employee well-being in South Africa following COVID-19. The pandemic prompted a swift move to remote work, introducing new challenges for employee wellness. While some organisations may favour hybrid models over a full return to office, limited post-pandemic research exists in the South African context. International studies have identified factors influencing work-life balance, such as network connectivity, travel demands, flexible hours, and collaboration difficulties. In South Africa, research on the pandemic found that work-home conflict reduced well-being, whereas job autonomy, social support, and communication had positive effects.

This study uses the Job Characteristics Model and the Job Demands-Resources Model as a basis to investigate factors like skill variety, autonomy, and social support through qualitative interviews with employees from various sectors that continue in hybrid environments. The findings confirm that skill variety enhances engagement, autonomy lowers stress, and support from colleagues and supervisors improves satisfaction and mental health, though deliberate action is needed to foster these connections in hybrid settings. Adapted feedback mechanisms are vital for performance and wellness in remote work. The research affirms the JDR and JCM and informs policy, recommending training for the remote management of teams, investment in digital collaboration tools, encouraging mentorship, and regular feedback loops to support well-being in hybrid environments and guide effective organisational practice.

Keywords - Employee Wellness; Hybrid Work; Post-COVID-19; South Africa

Declaration

I declare that this thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Management is my own work supervised by Dr. Bongani Munkuli and this thesis was not previously submitted by me for any other degree to any institution.

Ashraf Rajah

Johannesburg

31 July 2025

Dedication

I dedicate this work to Natasha, Imaan, Aaisha, Rehana, Abdul Samad, Eleanor, Cassim, Hawa, Suleiman, Zarah, Mathew, Josh and Ahmed.

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of Purpose

The study explores the impact of hybrid work environments on employee well-being in South Africa post-COVID-19. The results inform how job design characteristics related to wellbeing are experienced by employees in three different organizations in South Africa engaged in various hybrid work environments and identifies potential moderators.

This introduction proceeds with the statement of purpose, Section 1.1, which is followed by the background of the study in Section 1.2. The research problem is then defined in Section 1.3 and research questions tabled thereafter in Section 1.4. The research significance is discussed in Section 1.5 then the delimitations in Section 1.6 and assumptions in Section 1.7 followed by the conclusion in Section 1.8 of the chapter.

1.2 Background

The COVID-19 outbreak altered work methods, causing more businesses to embrace remote work. Data from the American Community Survey shows that industries (professional, scientific and technical services, information, finance and insurance and management of companies and enterprises industries) experienced a remote work increase from 17 percent to 39 percent pre and post pandemic (Pabilonia & Redmond, 2024). Studies on the impact of the pandemic work arrangements on employee wellness is still however in its infancy (Mcphail et al., 2024).

Lamovsek A. et al., (2025) report that job structuring, incorporating aspects such as skill diversity, independence, social backing, and critique, is vital in affecting employee experiences within blended work settings (Lamovsek A. et al., 2025). The pandemic has introduced challenges like health concerns, increased

workloads, social isolation, and burnout. Investigating job design in hybrid models provides insights for supporting employee well-being (Lamovsek A. et al., 2025).

Although there is growing research on hybrid work and well-being, studies specific to South Africa are limited, an EBSCO search yielded no equivalent study using “remote work, job design, employee wellness, post COVID-19, South Africa” search criteria. Related studies have been conducted in larger countries; research was conducted on American companies examining mental health in hybrid work (Brecheisen, 2023), while a Stanford study showed hybrid work boosts productivity, careers, and satisfaction at Trip.com in China (Crawford, 2024). This study aims to address the current research gap by examining the impact of hybrid work on employee wellness in South Africa.

1.3 Problem

Botha & Coetzee (2022) found employee wellness was impacted by hybrid work arrangements during the pandemic. The study was conducted on a single organisation in South Africa. Workers were found to be negatively impacted by increased hours of work and increased quantities of work. They struggled due to the remote setup and insufficient remote work infrastructure during the COVID-19 pandemic (Botha & Coetzee, 2022). Mahomed (2023) researched pandemic remote work in South Africa, finding that work-home conflict reduced employee wellbeing, however, job autonomy, social support and good communication increased employee well-being (Mahomed et al., 2023). Research by Jaimee et al., (2025) finds that employees in the Philippines post pandemic still struggle with accessing the work network remotely. The employees find home and office logistics burdensome and have issues when changing between remote and in-office environments in hybrid work settings. Irregular work hours and collaboration issues also impact work life balance (Jaimee et al., 2025). There is a lack of research to inform companies in South Africa about the current hybrid work experience and consequently on how best to improve wellbeing for those still engaging in hybrid work arrangements post pandemic. South African companies who continue with mixed work arrangements, should be informed how to improve employee wellness in hybrid work settings. The research aims to

contribute to the current knowledge informing how South African employees from multiple organisations have experienced combined remote and office work environments post pandemic and to provide recommendations for future study and practical recommendations for organisations engaged in hybrid work arrangements to improve worker wellbeing.

1.4 Questions

These research questions pertain to blended employment setups in South Africa and aim to get a granular understanding of the hybrid work impact, examining core characteristics of job design in relation to well-being. The objectives are to confirm the employee experience in hybrid work arrangements post COVID-19 in South Africa in relation to the Job Characteristics Model and Job Demands-Resources Theory. This approach is informed by the literature review. The specific questions to be addresses are below with previous study findings.

1.4.1 How does skill variety influence worker well-being *in a South African Pharmaceutical company, a Professional Services company and a Services, Trading and Distribution company*?

1.4.2 What is the impact of autonomy on employee wellness *in a South African Pharmaceutical company, a Professional Services company and a Services, Trading and Distribution company*?

1.4.3 What is the impact of support on staff welfare *in a South African Pharmaceutical company, a Professional Services company and a Services, Trading and Distribution company*?

1.4.4 What is the impact of feedback on staff welfare *in a South African Pharmaceutical company, a Professional Services company and a Services, Trading and Distribution company*?

1.5 Significance

Owing to the COVID-19 outbreak, South African entities have adopted mixed work models combining telecommuting and office-based work, which has posed difficulties for personnel wellness. Despite the rapid adoption, little research exists on how employee well-being is impacted by post-pandemic hybrid environments. South African studies by Gauche et al. (2017) and Govender and Bussin (2020) did not include hybrid or remote work (Gauche et al., 2017; Govender & Bussin, 2020).

This research found that skill variety is associated with increased job satisfaction, lower stress levels, and improved mental health by involving employees in a range of activities. However, hybrid work arrangements may introduce communication barriers and isolation, which in turn reduce the effects of skill variety. This finding contributes to the body of knowledge on job redesign in that it affirms skill variety increases key psychological states that drive employee motivation, satisfaction and performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) at the place of work whether remote or at the office.

Autonomy is identified as a significant predictor of employee well-being according to the research result. Higher levels of autonomy are linked to greater job contentment, lower anxiety, and improved psychological well-being. In hybrid work environments, autonomy may require enhanced self-discipline and can create uncertainties regarding work-life boundaries. This finding contributes to the body of knowledge on job redesign in that it affirms autonomy increases key psychological states that drive employee motivation, satisfaction and performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) at the place of work whether remote or at the office.

Social support is seen to correlate with higher job satisfaction and reduced strain and psychological health concerns. For individuals working remotely, supportive interactions can positively affect motivation, sense of belonging, and resilience. The effectiveness of social support is related to the quality of communication, and inadequate communication may diminish these benefits or contribute to feelings of isolation. This finding contributes to the body of knowledge and literature on

job redesign in that it affirms that social support is indispensable for wellbeing (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006) especially when working remotely and acts as a job resource that drives motivation, satisfaction and performance.

This research aims to address the research gap, contributing to literature on employee wellness, work design and hybrid work in South Africa. Empirical insights help formulate policies to improve employee well-being and productivity. Employees' perception and experience of work is influenced by job design (Oerlemans & Bakker, 2018). Job design characteristics include autonomy, skill variety, task identity, task significance, social support and feedback. Misalignment of the degree required in the hybrid setting could impact employee wellness and ultimately job performance. This study evaluates through qualitative interviews in multiple industries in South Africa, the employee experience and explores whether job design can be updated to improve wellness by reducing stress, boosting job satisfaction, and fostering a positive work culture.

1.6 Delimitations

The scope of this study is limited to specific areas within South Africa, intentionally excluding rural regions. Data collection was conducted between December 2024 and February 2025, focusing solely on employees from a South African Pharmaceutical company, a South African Professional Services company, and a South African Services, Trading and Distribution company. The research concentrates exclusively on employee wellbeing as it relates to job design in mixed work models, deliberately omitting other possible influencing factors such as leadership style. Furthermore, the methodological approach is restricted to qualitative interviews, with quantitative surveys and mixed-method strategies not included in the study.

1.7 Assumptions

In conducting this study on employee well-being in post-COVID-19 hybrid work environments within South Africa, several key assumptions were made. Firstly, it is assumed that South African organisations have substantially adjusted their

work settings in response to the pandemic, adopting mixed models that vary in adaptability, technical support, and workplace culture. The research further presumes that job design; particularly dimensions such as skill variety, autonomy, social support, and feedback mechanisms; plays a crucial role in shaping employee experiences in these hybrid arrangements, as Hackman and Oldham (1976) emphasised (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Another important assumption is that employee well-being remains a primary concern for firms aiming to sustain satisfaction, health, and productivity during ongoing workplace changes. In addition, it is presumed that organisations have adequate access to technological infrastructure and support systems necessary for hybrid work, such as reliable internet, communication tools, and digital collaboration platforms, and that employees possess the requisite skills to utilise them effectively. Finally, the study assumes that socio-economic factors; including earnings, educational background, and access to resources; influence employees' experiences in hybrid environments, with existing inequalities potentially affecting individuals' ability to work remotely or benefit from flexible arrangements.

1.8 Outline of the report

This report has five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research and discusses the importance of addressing the knowledge gap in South Africa. Chapter 2 follows providing a critical literature review on job design models, theories and empirical studies, and proposes the conceptual framework. Chapter 3 details the research methodology, including philosophy, strategy, design, methods, trustworthiness, pilot and ethics. Chapter 4 presents the thematic analyses results. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of key findings and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

There are three focused objectives in the section beginning with the outline of the problem identified then to discuss the gap in knowledge and lastly to establish a structure for understanding the findings. Section 2.2 introduces key concepts that assists in understanding the problem and research gap, Section 2.3 discusses the theoretical framework to understand, analyse and interpret the impact of hybrid work on employee wellbeing. Section 2.4 provides empirical studies that provide insights from observations in relation to employee wellness. Section 2.5 describes the conceptual framework that is used to understand and interpret the research objectives and result in Chapter 4.

2.2 Terms

2.2.1 **Hybrid Work**

Hybrid work is a flexible system combining physical, virtual, social, and time-based aspects of work. Its adaptability helps organizations and people customise work setups. Beyond simply mixing onsite and remote tasks, hybrid work coordinates location, technology, interaction, and timing in different ways (Vartiainen & Vanharanta, 2024). Many companies in South Africa opted to use a hybrid model during the COVID-19 pandemic once restrictions on people gatherings were relaxed with 0.9 work from home days per week on average in 2023 according to a report (Aksoy et al., 2023), 25.6% of workers worked in a hybrid setup globally. The model is still employed in some organisations post pandemic.

2.2.2 **Employee Well-being**

Employee wellbeing refers to an employee's overall happiness, sense of purpose, job satisfaction, and stress levels at work. Employee wellbeing encompasses not only emotional factors such as happiness and stress, but also

employees' sense of purpose in their roles and their overall satisfaction with their jobs (De Neve et al., 2023). These elements are central to subjective wellbeing at work and is a central focus in for this research.

2.2.3 **Job Design**

Job design is "the content and organization of one's work tasks, activities, relationships, and responsibilities". Job design involves the study, creation, and modification of the composition, structure, and environment within which jobs and roles are enacted. Job design is about allocating tasks as well as shaping the way work is experienced, enabling flexibility, motivation, and improved outcomes for individuals and organizations (Johns et al., 2017). Central elements considered when designing jobs were changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, like the work environment, resources, management methods, supervision and tasks. The existing jobs were forced to continue in a changed environment which brought about stress and job design misalignment. Parker morg johns

2.2.4 **Skill Variety**

Skill variety is included as a core job characteristic in the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), and is a job resource in Job Demands-Resources Theory. Skill variety is the extent to which a role necessitates engagement in diverse activities and the utilisation of multiple skills. This dimension contributes significantly to an employee's sense of meaningfulness at work by requiring the application of various competencies. According to Parker, Morgeson, and Johns (2017), elevated levels of skill variety are associated with enhanced motivation and job satisfaction, as they render occupational tasks more stimulating and rewarding (Johns et al., 2017).

2.2.5 **Autonomy**

Autonomy is a core job characteristic in the Job Characteristic Model and is considered a job resource in Job Demands-Resources Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). It is the psychological need to feel in control of one's actions

and to act out of personal choice, not external pressure. Unlike independence, autonomy is about self-endorsement and supports motivation, well-being, and effective functioning. Along with competence and relatedness, it is a basic human need essential for motivation and growth. Experiencing autonomy leads to greater engagement and satisfaction, as actions reflect personal values and interests (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

2.2.6 **Social Support**

The Work Design Questionnaire recognises social support as an important external characteristic of job design (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Social support at work is employees' sense of being valued and having access to help from supervisors, colleagues, and the organization. This includes emotional (appreciation), instrumental (practical help), and informational (guidance) support. Social support helps employees manage stress, strengthens resilience, and improves well-being (Viswesvaran et al., 1999).

2.2.7 **Feedback Mechanisms**

Feedback mechanisms in organizations are structured communication processes that give employees timely, clear information to support learning and improvement. They help individuals assess their performance against goals and make necessary adjustments. Effective feedback depends on trust, clarity, the credibility of the source, and meaningful context. It plays both diagnostic and developmental roles in supporting individual growth and organizational adaptation (Ashford & Cummings, 1983)

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 **Theory**

Hackman & Oldham (1976) developed the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), identifying five core job attributes skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback that influence employee motivation and satisfaction.

Later models, such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory, distinguished between job demands and resources, while the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) further expanded job characteristics to include social support and contextual factors (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

This study uses the JCM, JD-R model, and WDQ to select and define job design elements relevant to hybrid work in South Africa. The JCM links specific job attributes to psychological outcomes like satisfaction and performance, with evidence supporting direct relationships between skill variety, autonomy, and satisfaction. The WDQ assesses a broader range of job features, including knowledge, social, and context aspects, noting that social support, skill variety, and feedback all impact employee wellbeing. The JD-R theory categorizes workplace factors as stressors or supports, relating them to outcomes like burnout, development, and job contentment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001). Key theories and models are detailed in Appendix B.

2.3.1.1 How does skill variety influence worker well-being in a South African Pharmaceutical company, Professional Services company and a Services, Trading and Distribution company?

Hackman & Oldham (1976) found that higher skill variety boosts motivation, job satisfaction, and meaningfulness. Employees in these sectors who take on diverse roles should be more engaged and report greater well-being. The JCM suggests that skill variety directly increases employee satisfaction. Jobs perceived as varied are seen as more meaningful, reducing monotony and supporting growth (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Oerlemans & Bakker, 2018). This effect is particularly notable in hybrid work settings, where autonomy and flexibility heighten these motivational benefits.

The JD-R theory states that resources like skill variety enhance motivation and reduce job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In demanding sectors such as pharmaceuticals and professional services, diverse tasks improve adaptability, decrease burnout, and increase satisfaction. The model shows that varied jobs provide psychological support for well-being and performance.

The Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) empirically links skill variety with job satisfaction and well-being (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). By assessing task variety, knowledge needs, and social interactions, it shows that incorporating skill variety in South African job design boosts learning, adaptability, and competence.

Both theory and evidence indicate that adding skill variety to jobs improves worker well-being. South African companies can boost motivation, satisfaction, and resilience by engaging employees in diverse, skill-building tasks.

2.3.1.2 What is the impact of autonomy on employee wellness in a South African Pharmaceutical company, a Professional Services company and a Services, Trading and Distribution company?

The relationship between autonomy and employee wellness can be analysed using frameworks such as the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), Job Demands-Resources Theory (JD-R), and the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ). According to the JCM, autonomy may affect intrinsic motivation, which could be linked to satisfaction and well-being (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Employees with increased autonomy may view their work as more meaningful and demonstrate higher levels of engagement and commitment.

According to the JD-R theory, autonomy is a vital job resource that helps counteract job demands like heavy workloads and time pressure. Granting employees decision-making power reduces burnout risk and supports well-being, especially in high-pressure industries where autonomy encourages resilience and adaptive coping (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

The WDQ is an effective tool for measuring autonomy and its impact on employees. Research shows that greater autonomy leads to higher job satisfaction, better psychological health, and stronger organisational commitment (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). In South African organisations, promoting autonomy in job design benefits staff wellness and supports flexibility during change.

Thus, the integration of JCM, JD-R, and WDQ theory and evidence highlights the pivotal role of autonomy in promoting positive employee outcomes. Organisations can meaningfully enhance staff wellness by prioritising autonomy in job design, thereby reducing strain and cultivating a healthier, more engaged workforce

2.3.1.3 What is the impact of support on staff welfare in a South African Pharmaceutical company, a Professional Services company and a Services, Trading and Distribution company?

Social and organisational support is essential for staff welfare. According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, such support helps offset job demands like workload and stress, promoting resilience and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Employees who feel supported experience less stress and greater satisfaction at work.

The Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) reinforces the importance of support by measuring social interactions and feedback mechanisms. Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) highlight that higher levels of social support are consistently linked to improved job satisfaction, lower burnout rates, and increased organisational commitment. Effective support systems, including open communication with colleagues and supervisors as well as a strong sense of community, are shown to buffer the impact of demanding work environments commonly found in these sectors.

Drawing on JD-R theory and WDQ research, fostering a supportive work environment is essential for maintaining staff well-being. Prioritising support in job design and culture can enhance employee psychological health, satisfaction, and resilience (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

2.3.1.4 What is the impact of feedback on staff welfare in a South African Pharmaceutical company, a Professional Services company and a Trading and Distribution company?

Feedback is a critical job characteristic that significantly affects staff welfare across these sectors. According to the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, regular and constructive feedback serves as both a motivational factor and a key resource that can enhance employee engagement, clarify expectations, and reduce ambiguity in the workplace (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

The Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) measures the extent to which employees receive information about their performance from their role or from others (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Research suggests that timely and specific feedback is associated with job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and organisational commitment. In high-demand settings, feedback systems may mitigate the negative impact of stress and workload and support ongoing improvement and learning.

Feedback is instrumental in supporting hybrid and flexible work arrangements, as it helps maintain alignment, fosters connection, and mitigates the isolation often reported in remote work settings (Allen et al., 2015). This is especially pertinent in the context of post-COVID-19 work models, where regular feedback can guide employees through transitions, reinforce adaptive behaviours, and sustain morale. By systematically integrating feedback into job design and organisational practices, companies can substantially enhance staff welfare, resulting in a more resilient and productive workforce (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Assessing job characteristics helps measure employee wellbeing, as seen in the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ), which brings together elements from the Job Demands-Resources Theory and Job Characteristics Model to form a comprehensive tool (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). The WDQ is widely used for evaluating job design and employee wellbeing. This study uses the WDQ with a

focus on three key job characteristics to examine hybrid workers' experiences in South Africa, addressing an identified knowledge gap.

2.4 Empirical literature

2.4.1 The Effect of Skill Variety on Worker Health in post-COVID-19 Mixed Work Models

Lamovsek A. et al., (2025) confirmed that for on-site, hybrid and remote work environments task performance was positively impacted by task identity, but on-site work requires more skill variety, remote work requires additional information processing and social support. The hybrid model requires higher skill variety, information processing and social support (Lamovsek A. et al., 2025). This research used the interpretive philosophy, and mixed methods were employed to understand how to optimize performance and well-being.

A pragmatic and interpretive study revealed that skill diversity boosts employee interest, drive, and mental health. Employees with diverse skills report greater job satisfaction and mental well-being than those in repetitive positions (Grant & Parker, 2009; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). This qualtitative study was conducted to understand how proactive work design strategies improve worker outcomes.

Allen et al., (2015) investigated telecommuting's impact, noting factors like skill variety, autonomy, and social support in enhancing remote work satisfaction (Allen et al., 2015). The study used quantitative surveys with descriptive and correlational analysis, assessing key job characteristics' role in remote work effectiveness.

Pragmatic and constructivist research by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) led to measures of evaluating job design, highlighting skill variety, independence, and feedback systems to examine worker experiences in hybrid work settings (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). The study highlighted that social support increased job satisfaction beyond motivational work characteristics; task and knowledge work characteristics also contributed to job satisfaction.

2.4.2 The impact of work autonomy on staff wellness in post-COVID-19 hybrid employment settings

Yang et al., (2023) employed mixed methods to research the effects of flexible work arrangements on employee wellness and productivity and found that work-life balance improved during the pandemic, but the workplace encroached on the home, reducing work life balance and wellness. Work-place flexibility, home office setup and firm support impact positively on productivity and satisfaction (Yang et al., 2023).

Golden, Veiga, and Dino (2008) concluded occupational seclusion adversely affects job effectiveness but results in decreased desire to resign among remote employees. More teleworking increases its negative effects, but face-to-face interactions and communication technology help mitigate them. The positivist and interpretive mixed method study was conducted to understand the impact of isolation in telework (Golden et al., 2008).

Kelliher and Anderson (2010) studied the benefits and drawbacks of hybrid work using qualitative interviews and survey data analysis and found that employees with flexible arrangements experience greater job contentment and loyalty to the organisation. However, this benefit comes at the cost of work intensification, which may occur through enforced, facilitated, or mutual processes in exchange for increased flexibility (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

Grant and Parker (2009) developed concepts regarding job structuring, emphasising relational and proactive strategies to enhance well-being and efficiency in knowledge-based workplaces (Grant & Parker, 2009). The study was conducted to investigate multilevel influences on job design and employee wellbeing using literature reviews, conceptual analyses and empirical studies.

Quantitative survey studies by Parker et al. (2010) and constructivist studies by Morgeson & Humphrey (2006) discovered that job independence boosts worker well-being, leading to greater contentment, lowered anxiety, and better overall health (Parker et al., 2010; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

2.4.3 The Influence of support on Staff Wellness in post-COVID-19 Blended Work Setups

Hodzic et al., (2024) interpretive study found that telework impacted worker productivity negatively during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teleworkers were increasingly isolated during the pandemic. They found that knowledge sharing in the form of supervisor support moderated the negative impact (Hodzic et al., 2024). Qualitative interviews were used as well as surveys to conduct the research.

Garcia-Salirrosas et al. (2023), in their research on job contentment in remote work settings, concluded that Family-Supportive Supervisory Behaviours (FSSBs) positively impact job satisfaction. FSSBs underscore the constructive role supervisors play in improving work enrichment and facilitating family benefits by providing emotional support, enabling flexible work arrangements, recognizing family duties, and encouraging employees to prioritize family obligations (Garcia-Salirrosas et al., 2023). They studied how supervisor behaviours impact job satisfaction in remote work by using mixed methods, surveys and qualitative interviews.

Bakker & Demerouti (2017) wanted to clarify how job resources buffer high job demands and foster motivation, they used meta-analyses and field surveys to conduct positivist research. They posit job resources such as self-governance, social assistance, performance feedback, and chances for professional growth, particularly influence motivation when work demands are high (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This underscores the importance of social support for employee wellbeing.

Wiesenfeld, Garud and Raghuram (2001) found that virtual work can increase both isolation and independence, enhancing workers' need for social support and organizational identification. Their interpretive, qualitative study shows the importance of social support in virtual workplaces (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). They were interested in the balancing effects of isolation and autonomy in remote work.

Grant and Parker (2009) and Wiesenfeld et al. (2001) highlight the need to understand the interaction between individual preferences, organizational structures, and technology in job design, aiming to improve well-being and productivity (Grant & Parker, 2009; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). They conducted literature reviews, conceptual analysis and used empirical studies in their pragmatic investigation.

2.4.4 The impact of feedback on staff welfare in post-COVID-19 Blended Work Setups

Feedback is especially important in the context of post-COVID-19 blended work environments. According to Bakker & Demerouti (2017), feedback serves as a key job resource, particularly within the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, by fostering motivation and alleviating the adverse effects of high job demands. Their meta-analytical and field survey research demonstrates that regular, constructive feedback not only enhances performance but also acts as a buffer against workplace stress, contributing to improved employee well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Moreover, the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), identifies feedback as a core job characteristic that influences critical psychological states, such as experienced meaningfulness and responsibility. These, in turn, underpin work motivation, job satisfaction, and general well-being. Empirical findings by Morgeson & Humphrey (2006) further corroborate that feedback from both supervisors and peers increases engagement and satisfaction in knowledge-based and hybrid work settings (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

The transition to hybrid and remote work settings has intensified the need for deliberate feedback mechanisms. Studies such as Wiesenfeld, Garud, and Raghuram (2001) highlight that in virtual work environments, the absence of regular feedback can exacerbate employee isolation and diminish organizational identification. Conversely, constructive feedback and social support serve to

mitigate these negative effects, fostering a sense of inclusion and psychological safety (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001).

Additionally, the research by Garcia-Salirrosas et al. (2023) on remote work confirms that supportive supervisory practices, including timely and empathetic feedback, positively impact job satisfaction and overall wellness. Their mixed-methods study underscores the importance of feedback as a channel for recognizing employee contributions and addressing well-being concerns in flexible work arrangements (Garcia-Salirrosas et al., 2023).

Feedback emerges as a pivotal factor in the welfare of staff within post-pandemic blended work environments. By serving as both a motivational tool and a source of social support, feedback contributes to improved satisfaction, reduced stress, and enhanced psychological well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001; Garcia-Salirrosas et al., 2023).

Research on hybrid work in South Africa post-COVID-19 is scarce. Global studies, however, underscore the impact of job structure and support on staff wellness.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in combined work models, integrating remote and on-site work (Pabilonia & Redmond, 2024). This setup allows South African companies to maintain business continuity, safety, and adaptability. Assessing post-pandemic mixed work setups is essential for comprehending employee health (Lamovsek A. et al., 2025). This analysis explores studies on combined work, wellness, and job design to formulate research goals and conjectures (refer to Figure 1). The approach is informed by research into employee wellness and how job design relates to employee wellness. The framework is based on amended Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), amended Job Demands Resources Theory (JD-R) (Demerouti et al., 2001) and the Work Design Questionnaire (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006) which includes social support as a job characteristic, as well as the studies included in

the empirical literature are employed to evaluate hybrid work experiences and well-being. The theory and models relate job characteristics to psychological states, generally grouped under employee wellness outcomes. The scope of job characteristics investigated was ultimately reduced to four characteristics to allow for timeous data capture and analysis. Using the framework as per the illustration (refer to Figure 1), office work directs more focus on task identity for job satisfaction, whereas working from home needs higher autonomy, social support and Feedback to increase job satisfaction and improved mental health. Additionally, increasing autonomy alone for remote work could negatively impact mental health due to isolation, social support and robust feedback is needed to buffer the negative impact of isolation.

Building on the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1, research indicates that traditional office-based work often relies on task identity to promote job satisfaction, while remote work demands elevated levels of autonomy, social support, and feedback to enhance satisfaction and safeguard mental health (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). Notably, an increase in autonomy within remote settings—if unsupported by effective feedback and social support mechanisms—can intensify feelings of isolation and negatively affect psychological well-being (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001; Garcia-Salirrosas et al., 2023). Therefore, fostering robust social support and feedback channels is essential to counteract the potential drawbacks of increased autonomy in hybrid and remote work environments.

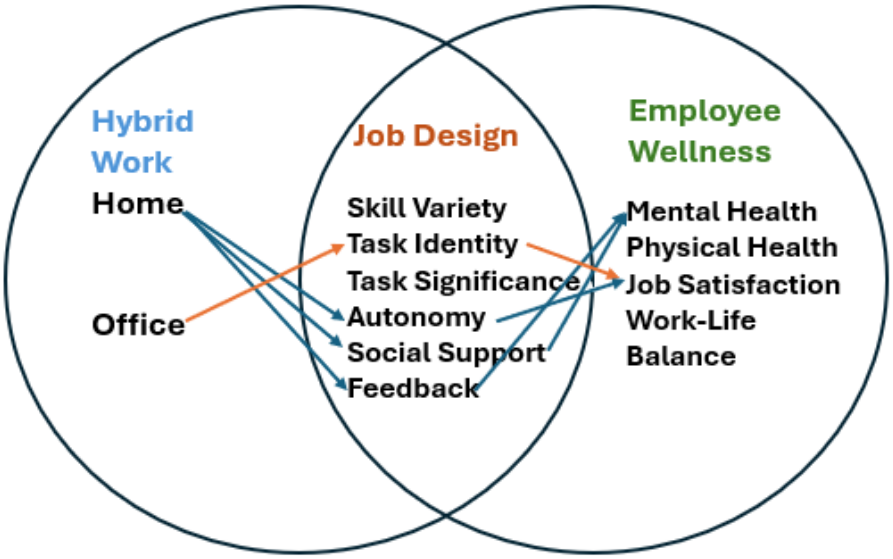


Figure 1 Hybrid Work and Job Design impacts Employee Wellness concept

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methodology, which included the philosophical framework, research strategies, and qualitative designs (such as interpretivism and case studies). Section 3.2 discussed research philosophy and the interpretivist philosophy that guided the study of job design's impact on employee well-being in South Africa post-COVID-19. Section 3.3 explained the qualitative research strategy. Section 3.4 detailed the research design for exploring knowledge workers' hybrid work experiences post-COVID-19. Section 3.5 covered data collection. Section 3.6 summarised the chapter and set the stage for further analysis. These sections provided the approach for investigating hybrid work well-being post-COVID-19 in South Africa.

CHAPTER 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology by section. Section 3.1 introduces the chapter's scope. Section 3.2 discusses the philosophical approach underpinning the study. Section 3.3 outlines the qualitative research strategy and rationale for the chosen methods. Section 3.4 details the research design, including the cross-sectional and comparative features. Section 3.5 describes data collection methods, while Section 3.6 concludes the chapter and sets up the analysis to follow.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy describes a framework of beliefs and assumptions regarding knowledge creation. It provides a perspective that directs research activities and outlines the assumptions about reality. These assumptions influence the selection of research questions, methodologies, and the interpretation of results (Saunders et al., 2023). Interpretivism is suitable for studying hybrid work's impact on employee wellness in South Africa post-COVID-19. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2023) argue that interpretivism explores subjective experiences, to inform modern valuable understandings and interpretations of societal contexts (Saunders et al., 2023). This is essential for understanding job design's subjective impact on wellness.

Unlike positivism, which relies on objective measurement, interpretivism focuses on human experiences and individual meanings. Positivists seek a single reality through quantitative techniques, while interpretivists view reality as context-dependent and socially constructed (Saunders et al., 2023).

Van Belle (2005) used interpretivism to analyse a rural telecentre in South Africa. This was done by employing hermeneutics and actor-network theory to study technological and social interactions (Van Belle & Trusler, 2005).

For this study, interpretivism provides rich feedback and context-driven recommendations to enhance employee wellness in hybrid work arrangements.

3.3 Strategy

Study strategies include experiment, survey, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, archival research, case study and action research (Saunders et al., 2023). This study employs a multi case study strategy, to provide rich subjective information and to allow for replicability. This inductive study uses qualitative data collection and analyses to understand employee experiences in hybrid work contexts through job design. While the quantitative approach defines phenomena's details, the qualitative method explores opinions on issues (Saunders et al., 2023). Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) previously examined job crafting qualitatively, using conversations, to study how employees construct significant work experiences (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

3.4 Design

Design applies theoretical models to real-world scenarios, Bryman (2021) highlights Cross-Sectional, Longitudinal, Case Study, Comparative, and Experimental designs (Bryman, 2012). This research employs a cross-sectional study to determine patterns at a point in time with data collection, measurement, and assessment through qualitative methods exclusively and not quantitative, or mixed methods. The study is comparative; the sample includes three different industries. Job design and employee satisfaction was also previously researched at Kampala International University, providing qualitative data on hybrid work settings (Saleh, 2018).

3.5 Data Collection

Section 3.5 details the data collection process, outlining the steps taken and their significance to the study. Section 3.5.1 specifically defines the research population relevant to hybrid work. Section 3.5.2 discusses the data capture

methods, focusing on the exclusive use of interviews to obtain in-depth perspectives. Section 3.5.3 covers data preparation, describing how information was organised for subsequent analysis. Section 3.5.4 addresses the sample, explaining the rationale behind participant selection and ensuring representativeness. Section 3.5.5 considers demographics, providing context for the diversity and characteristics of respondents. Section 3.5.6 explains the qualitative analysis approach, specifically the use of Saldana's thematic method to extract meaningful patterns. Section 3.5.7 details the data collection instrument, with emphasis on the use of researcher-led interviews via MS Teams. Section 3.5.8 elaborates on thematic data processing and analysis. Section 3.5.9 discusses measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of findings, including reliability and validity checks. Section 3.5.10 describes the pilot study, which informed and refined the research process. Finally, Section 3.5.11 outlines the ethical considerations applied throughout the research. Together, these sections ensure a methodical, transparent, and ethical approach to capturing and analysing qualitative data on employee wellness in hybrid work environments.

3.5.1 ***Population***

This study includes senior leaders, supervisors, and employees in Distribution and Services, Pharmaceuticals, and Professional Services industries in South Africa. The different companies and diverse population allow for a deeper understanding of the nuances of experience by employees and increases generalizability of the findings. The companies were included due to their size, reach, technology (remote work capability) and different industries. The companies were all large corporations and were in operation for longer than 10 years. The corporation's footprints stretched across South Africa.

3.5.2 ***Sampling and Sample size***

A sampling strategy selects participants to represent a population using probability and non-probability methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study on pandemic hybrid work used purposive non-probability sampling.

The appropriate sample size is determined by the desired confidence level, acceptable margin of error, target population size, and the statistical methods to be employed in the analysis (Saunders et al., 2023). Qualitative research aims for saturation, where no new information emerges. This study includes 16 participants: executives, senior managers, and workers to balance diversity and manageability. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) established that saturation was reached within 12 interviews in West Africa (Guest et al., 2006). The proposed sample will enable detailed discussions on job design and hybrid work's impact on employee wellness in South Africa.

3.5.3 ***Data Capture***

Research data collection captures information to respond to questions and weigh outcomes for valid results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study used interviews and did not use observations, experiments, focus groups, document reviews, online databases, or meta-analyses. Mixed methods were originally envisioned but the pilot phase using online surveys did not meet the intended responses. It was prudent to continue with the interviews only, as the participation acceptance via email meeting invites for the MS Teams meetings was positive. This focus allowed for more time allocation to the interviews and for deeper discussions and insights into the experience of hybrid work and the impact on wellbeing. The meetings were scheduled via electronic calendar and MS Teams meeting links included in the invites. These were only arranged once approval was received from the relevant bodies and participation forms, and authorization was provided. The meetings proceeded with voice recording and transcription turned on. The meetings were between 30 to 60 minutes long. Demographic information was first captured and then questions were posed to initiate the discussions. The questions posed were categorized under demographic information, experience with hybrid work, balancing work and life, communication and collaboration, support and resources, reflections and recommendations. The full list can be found in Appendix A. The questions posed were designed to generate data that could be used to inform the four research questions.

3.5.3.1 How does skill variety influence worker well-being?

Empirical studies have found that enhanced task diversity will correlate positively with elevated employee wellness. Participating in varied activities likely improves job contentment and general wellness (Grant & Parker, 2009). It is expected that the research findings will not deviate from the prior finding.

3.5.3.2 What is the impact of autonomy on employee wellness?

Mohamed et al., (2023) found recently that elevated job independence is anticipated to boost worker welfare in South Africa's post-COVID-19 blended work settings, as increased control over timelines, assignments, and choices might enhance well-being (Mahomed et al., 2023). The findings should match this research result.

3.5.3.3 What is the impact of support on staff welfare?

Demerouti et al., (2001) found that enhanced social backing from coworkers and managers will boost employee welfare, resulting in greater job satisfaction, decreased stress, and improved mental health, (Demerouti et al., 2001). It is expected that the research findings will match.

3.5.3.4 What is the impact of feedback on staff welfare?

Research shows that constructive feedback positively influences employee well-being. As found by Demerouti et al. (2001), effective feedback increases job satisfaction, reduces stress, and improves psychological health. It is anticipated that this study will reflect similar outcomes, with regular, supportive feedback enhancing staff welfare in hybrid work settings.

Once the interviews were completed, the recordings were downloaded from MS Teams and stored on an encrypted hard drive on an enterprise level pc with robust security. The data retention complies to data protection guidelines for this study. The questions posed would

3.5.4 *Data cleaning and preparation*

Data was gathered via Microsoft Teams from nineteen South African participants. Transcriptions were done automatically, then cleaned in Word. Errors were corrected and aligned with research questions. Participants 14 to 17 were excluded due to anomalies and transcription errors, with insufficient time for revalidation.

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 *Data Processing and Analysis*

The data processing turns raw data into insights through collection, cleaning, organization, analysis, and visualization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research interprets non-numerical data to identify patterns and themes, using methods like content and thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is used for this research. Thematic analysis reveals deeper meanings, such as participants' motivations and feelings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Saldana (2013) employs several cycles of coding, the utilization of analytical notes, and continuous self-reflection as essential components, making thematic analysis cyclical, interpretative and iterative (Saldana, 2013). This method was employed for this study because it provides a vigorous, adaptable, and rich coding structure providing rich findings in qualitative case studies. It ensures thoughtful, credible, and context-sensitive results.

3.6.2 *Data Collection Instrument*

Qualitative research collects non-numerical data through interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, offering insights into concepts, opinions, or experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study uses interviews recorded with MS Tools. Data collection tools can be structured (surveys), unstructured (observation), or semi-structured (mixed questions). Hackman and Oldham (1976) used semi-structured interviews to study job characteristics' effects on motivation, satisfaction, and performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976).

This study uses semi-structured interviews. The interview questions, based on theoretical and empirical findings, cover:

A. Demographics
B. Hybrid work
C. Job design
D. Skill variety and wellbeing
E. Autonomy and wellbeing
F. Support and wellbeing
G. Feedback and wellbeing
H. Work-life balance
I. Communication
J. Resources
K. Reflections on hybrid work

The interview questions are included in the appendix and administered by the researcher as the instrument.

3.6.3 ***Thematic Analysis***

Microsoft Word scripts were imported into ATLAS.ti Version 25 for analysis. Data coding followed Saldana's thematic process, including labelling data, creating categories, and identifying themes (Saldana, 2013).

Saldana (2013) thematic analysis involves progressive and interpretive cycles of coding that contribute to theme identification and interpretation. The method is described below.

3.6.3.1 Data Familiarization and Initial Impression

The data is engaged through repeated reading or listening, making notes and memos to capture initial observations, patterns, and potential meanings.

3.6.3.2 First Cycle Coding

Initial codes are applied to segments of data, which may include descriptive, in vivo (using participants' terms), emotion, or process codes depending on the research focus. This stage segments data into meaningful parts.

3.6.3.3 Second Cycle Coding (Pattern Coding or Thematic Coding)

First cycle codes are reviewed to identify broader patterns, categories, or possible themes. Codes are grouped, consolidated, or refined into conceptual thematic categories.

3.6.3.4 Theme Development and Refinement

Themes are developed to reflect recurring patterns relevant to the research questions. These themes are checked against the data for consistency and distinction from one another.

3.6.3.5 Interpretation and Conceptualization

Themes are interpreted within the context of the research, theoretical frameworks, and researcher reflexivity.

3.6.3.6 Presentation and Reporting

Themes are reported with detailed descriptions, supported by participant quotes and analytical commentary linked to the research aims and literature (Saldana, 2013).

3.6.3.7 Interpretive Approach for Interviews

The interpretive approach to interviews is a qualitative method that prioritizes participants' subjective meanings and experiences. It focuses on context and the social construction of reality, examining individuals' perceptions and assigned meanings (Saunders et al., 2023).This case study uses the interpretive approach.

3.6.4 ***Trustworthiness***

Trustworthiness is crucial for credible and reliable qualitative research findings. It is a function of external validation, reliability and objectivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.6.4.1 Reliability and Validity

Reliability ensures consistent results, while validity confirms accurate representation of participants' perspectives. Methods to improve reliability include creating good-quality recordings and transcribing and coders to analyse transcript data as was the case for this research. There are various methods to ensure validity of which at least two procedures are recommended at minimum including generating a rich, thick description, enabling external audits, prolonged engagement in the field and member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.6.4.2 Ensuring Dependability

Reliability improves with triangulation, which uses multiple data sources, methods, or researchers. It also involves keeping detailed records of the research process. Member checking, where findings are shared with participants for increased accuracy, is used as well as audit trails (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.6.4.3 Ensuring Legitimacy

To achieve validity, research must accurately reflect participants' views through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and member checking for credibility. Detail and context provide transferability, while a logical, documented process ensures dependability. Triangulation and reflexivity minimize researcher bias for confirmability. Three different organizations were included in this research. Using Interpretive Approach and Thematic Analysis, systematic coding, and peer review increases validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.6.5 ***Pilot Study***

A pilot study was initiated. It used Microsoft Forms Surveys before the qualitative interviews were scheduled. The intent was to capture the responses to the questions and gauge the quality of the feedback. The intent was also to check the depth or richness of responses received via editable fields in the electronic form. The survey was opened for 2 months. Only 16 responses were received from the population. The level of detail in the editable fields was negligible. The responses were more suitable for quantitative research. The responses, however, were aligned in general to the feedback received from the interviews. The result of the pilot informed the sole use of MS Teams interviews only for Data Capture and the use of a smaller purposive non-probability sample size.

3.6.6 ***Ethics in Data Collection***

Ethical considerations are vital in data collection for research integrity and participant protection. Key principles include informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, minimizing harm, and ethical approval (Bhandari, 2021).

3.6.6.1 Consent and Participation

Informed consent means participants understand the study before joining. Voluntary participation means they join freely and that there is no risk (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants are provided a consent form for active consent.

3.6.6.2 Data Protection and Security

Personal data must be legally protected. This includes any information about an individual that can identify them. Secure storage and safeguarding of personal data are essential (Saunders et al., 2023). The PC has enterprise-level security, encryption and automatic updates, following Wits Business School regulations.

3.6.6.3 Respect for Privacy

Respecting privacy in research means protecting participants' personal data and ensuring confidentiality. Key aspects are confidentiality, anonymity, data security, and informed consent (Saunders et al., 2023). Interviews will be scheduled via MS Teams without video, with recording and transcription. Questions will be semi-structured, with additional questions asked only with participant consent. Confidentiality secures participants' data from unauthorized access. Researchers secure data through storage, restricted access, and anonymization. Anonymity ensures identities remain unknown, with no identifiable information collected. Interview data will use pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and anonymity (Saunders et al., 2023).

3.6.6.4 Avoidance of Harm and ensuring safety

Research ethics concerning human participants are based on four key principles: autonomy, informed consent, voluntary participation, and avoiding harm (Dahal, 2024). Interviews are conducted via MS Teams to avoid physical risk. Participants could withdraw or skip questions anytime. The Participant Information Sheet provides an interview overview and available support. This was provided in advance of the interviews.

3.6.6.5 Permission and Ethical Approval

Research permission requires participant consent and ethics committee approval. Research approval was granted by the institution committees and participating organisations and participants. Participants must be informed about the research's aim, methods, hazards, and advantages (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was achieved through provision of the participant information sheet, research authorization forms and adhering to the guidance and standards required to conduct this research.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter was framed by an interpretivist philosophy to investigate the impact of job design on employee well-being in South Africa after the COVID-19 pandemic. Section 3.3 described the qualitative research strategy employed in the study. Section 3.4 outlined the research design for examining hybrid work experiences among knowledge workers. Section 3.5 detailed the data collection process. Finally, Section 3.6 summarised the key points of the chapter and established the foundation for the subsequent analysis. Together, these sections provided a comprehensive approach for exploring hybrid work and employee well-being in the South African context.

CHAPTER 4. Research Results Presentations and Interpretation

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the qualitative interview findings on the impact of job design on employee well-being in South Africa. Section 4.2 presents the demographic profiles of participants, highlighting their backgrounds and organisational roles. Section 4.3 identifies and explores the core themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis, particularly those related to hybrid work and job design. Section 4.4 offers an interpretation of the results considering the research questions and broader concepts of employee well-being. Finally, Section 4.5 summarises the chapter's main findings and sets the stage for further discussion and analysis. Together, these sections build a comprehensive narrative that illuminates the complexities of hybrid work and its implications for knowledge workers' well-being in the post-pandemic South African workplace.

4.2 Demographics

Table 1 presents the summary of interview contributors, indicating their age, gender, education level, and their respective job roles.

Table 1: Interviewees profile

Participants	Age	Gender	Education level	Job role	Years of service at current company
P1					
P2	37	Male	Honour's degree	Marketing Manager	12
P3	32	Male	Bachelor's degree	Product Manager	3
P4	48	Female	Diploma	Inventory and Demand Planning Assistant	7
P5	50	Female	Diploma	Payroll	16
P6	51	Female	Certificate	Administrator	26
P7	28	Female	Bachelor's degree	Business Development	5
P8	41	Male	Honour's degree	Chief Financial Officer	11
P9	38	Female	Matric	Executive Assistant	10
P10	35	Female	Honour's degree	Group Financial Manager	2
P11	45	Female	Matric	Chief Executive Officer	3

P12	34	Male	Matric	Head of finance	10
P13	59	Female	Nursing degree	Chief Financial Officer	3
P14	52	Female	Honour's degree	Associate Director	6
P15	44	Male	Bachelor's degree	Project Manager	9
P16	40	Female	Bachelor's degree	Senior manager	6
P17	26	Male	Postgraduate Diploma	Trainee Accountant	3
P18	37	Male	Masters	Senior manager	3
P19	39	Male	Bachelor's degree	Audit Manager	6

Data presented in Table 1 shows that all participants are above the age of 18 years with a computed average experience of 9.5 years. Furthermore, the job role of interview participants is diverse as demonstrated in Table 1.

Figure 2 shows that 57% of interviewees are female and the remaining 42% are males.

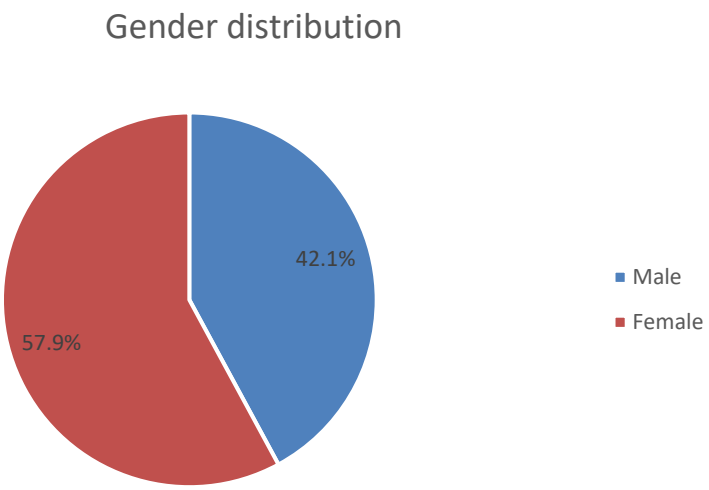


Figure 2 Participants' gender distribution

The educational background of the interview participants is displayed in Figure 3. The result indicates that 22% of the interviewees hold an honours degree, 27% hold a bachelor's degree and another 16% have a diploma. Participants with certificates represent 5% of the group and those with only matric account for 16%

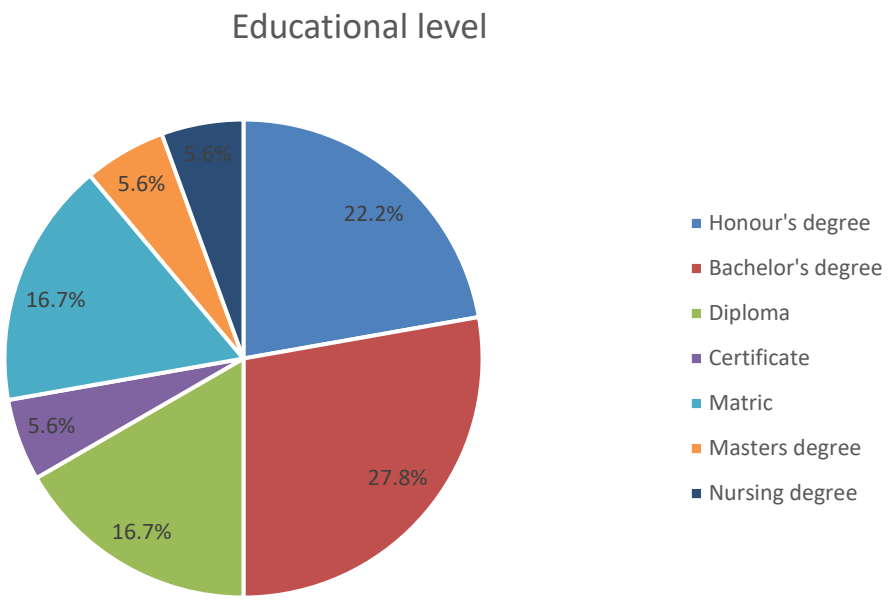


Figure 3 Participants' educational level

4.3 Presentation and Discussion of research results

Section 4.3 serves to bridge the identified code results with the central research question of the study. Its primary purpose is to present and analyse how the emerging codes and categories, drawn from participants' experiences, inform or illuminate the research questions, beginning with Research Question 1 regarding the influence of skill variety on worker well-being. By systematically discussing the code summaries within the context of the research objectives, section 4.3 demonstrates the connection between qualitative findings, and the overarching aims of the investigation, providing a foundation for deeper interpretation and discussion in subsequent sections.

4.3.1 *Research Question 1: "How does skill variety influence worker well-being?"*

Following the thematic method, codes are provided and categorized from the participant feedback on the research question "How does skill variety influence worker well-being?" Participants shared their perceptions of job design,

communication and collaboration, support and resources since COVID-19, providing their responses to the questions posed. Table 2 illustrates the results.

Table 2: Code summaries related to "How does skill variety influence worker well-being?"

Code group	*Category*	*Code example*	*Verbatim excerpt sample*
Perceptions of Job Design	Job role and responsibilities (2.1)	Multi-tasking	*You have to, you know, juggle quite a lot (Participant 3)*
	Changes since transitioning to hybrid (2.3)	Increased responsibilities and expectation	*So, so I think they would be taking on more responsibilities. And the reason why I say that is because now that you're working from home, that assumption was you have more time. (Participant 12)*
	Role clarity and responsibility (2.4)	Unclear role	*I'd say it's not always. It wouldn't have been clear because like I said, you take on more roles and responsibilities when you're working from home. (Participant 12)*
Communication and collaboration	Maintaining a sense of connection (4.3)	Use of messaging Apps for social and work	*You know, and then your work friends besties you can send the teams meme or something just to have that sense of you know, that connection to people. (Participant 4)*
Support and resources	Additional support and resources (5.3)	Training on hybrid work	*Potentially we should have had a bit of a crash course in terms of how to manage staff in a hybrid environment, you know the do's and don'ts and things like that (Participant 11)*

Responses to "how does skill variety influence worker well-being?" suggest that remote work requires new skills and added responsibilities, impacting job satisfaction and mental health. Participants noted increased multitasking (Participant 3), expanded roles (Participant 12), and the adoption of digital communication methods like memes (Participant 4), which positively influenced skill development. Participant 11 highlighted a need for training in managing hybrid teams, emphasizing that additional skills are necessary. The findings

presented align closely with established theories and prior empirical work on work design, such as the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), the Job Demands-Resources (J D-R) model, and the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ).

The increased skill variety and the expansion of responsibilities highlighted by participants needing to take on new roles and adapt to digital communication tools directly reflect the core JCM dimensions of skill variety, autonomy, and task identity (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). The expressed need for additional support and training aligns with the J D-R model, which posits that adequate resources (such as training) are essential to buffer against job demands and prevent strain or burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017)

Moreover, the shift toward digital communication and the importance of maintaining social connection, as described by participants, corresponds to the social characteristics measured by the WDQ (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006) specifically in terms of social support, feedback from others, and interdependence.

4.3.2 *Research Question 2: "What is the impact of autonomy on employee wellness?"*

Themes are developed from the participant feedback on the research question "What is the impact of autonomy on employee wellness?" Participants shared their perceptions of hybrid work, job design, work life balance and reflections of hybrid work since COVID-19, providing their responses to the questions posed. Table 3 illustrates the results.

Table 3 Code summaries related to "What is the impact of autonomy on employee wellness?"

Code group	*Category*	*Code example*	*Verbatim excerpt sample*
Experience with Hybrid Work	General experience with hybrid work arrangements (1.1)	Experience less interruption	*I prefer home for less distractions than being in an office where everybody walks in asking for proof of payment, asking for this and that*

			and that as opposed to being home, where I can focus (Participant 10)
		Visibility anxiety and guilt	*However, sometimes when I'm working from home you get this guilty feeling that because nobody can see you, you feel like they think you're not doing the work. (Participant 9)*
	Benefits of hybrid work (1.2)	Improved productivity	*And then also you are more productive when you're working from home (Participant 6)*
		Reduced distraction	*You don't get interrupted. You don't get people coming in and then you have to drop all your stuff and attend to them. (Participant 5)*
	Challenges with hybrid working (1.3)	Connectivity challenges	*At that time, there was maybe the only little bit of challenge, is every now and then with your Wi-Fi. You know your connectivity (Participant 6)*
		Isolation and disconnection	*I think for me. I thrive better in a team environment, being around work colleagues, coming to an office, being together, kind of soldiering together. (Participant 11)*
	Hybrid work is not beneficial (1.4)	Hybrid work is not beneficial	*From my personal perspective. Again, I don't because I don't like hybrid work. I don't like hybrid work. It's not beneficial in my opinion. (Participant 11)*
Perceptions of Job Design	Element of effective job design (2.2)	Autonomy and flexibility	*Autonomy, this will talk to how much independence the employee has in dictating. And the way the job is run in terms of the activities during the day. (Participant 19)*
Balancing Work and Life	Balancing work and personal commitments (3.1)	Setting of boundaries	*It is about setting boundaries. So I'd give myself a time where I need to switch off and when I switch off, it's basically putting my laptop off and into my bag. (Participant 12)*
		Challenging disconnecting from work	*I think on that, like this work life balance is mostly theoretical when you are in an auditing space. It doesn't really exist if I have to be frank. Like I was saying yesterday I*

			had back-to-back meetings. (Participant 19)
	Impact of hybrid on work-life balance (3.2)	Increased autonomy and flexibility	*Yes, I definitely do. I think it's been positive. I think it gives me the flexibility of my day and it allows me to be able to structure myself depending on what my needs are (Participant 1)*
		Pressure to be always available	*You wanna respond immediately so they can see that you're online and you are on the ball. (Participant 9)*

Participant feedback regarding autonomy indicates that most participants identified flexibility as a benefit, along with increased productivity and fewer distractions. Participant 10 noted experiencing fewer distractions at home, while participant 6 reported higher productivity when working from home. Participant 19 highlighted autonomy as important for job design. Challenges reported include network connectivity issues (participant 6), individual preferences (participant 11), work-life balance concerns related to remote work (participant 12), and the expectation of constant availability (participant 9).

The thematic feedback in Table 2 reveals notable alignments and some conflict with established theoretical frameworks such as the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), Job Demands-Resources model (J D-R), Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ), as well as the broader empirical literature on hybrid work.

First, the increased autonomy and flexibility identified by participants (e.g., Participant 1 citing the ability to structure the day around personal needs) strongly reflects the core JCM dimension of autonomy. According to JCM, autonomy enhances experienced responsibility and is positively linked to work motivation, satisfaction, and perceived meaningfulness. Similarly, the WDQ, which operationalizes autonomy in greater detail, also predicts positive outcomes when employees can determine scheduling and methods. The J D-R model supports this; autonomy is frequently cited as a job resource that can buffer the negative effects of high job demands. This result is therefore expected and in line with prior

empirical studies, which consistently show that greater flexibility conferred by hybrid arrangements is associated with improved well-being, satisfaction, and sometimes even productivity (Allen et al., 2015).

However, the feedback also highlights ongoing challenges, such as difficulty disconnecting from work and increased pressure to be always available (e.g., Participant 9: "You wanna respond immediately so they can see that you're online and you are on the ball"). Such findings resonate with the "always-on" culture described in recent empirical literature on remote and hybrid work (Mazmanian et al., 2013). Within the J D-R framework, these can be understood as increased job demands that risk outweighing the benefits of autonomy if not managed carefully. This is also supported by WDQ results showing that high information processing and psychological demands can undermine the positive effects of autonomy if boundaries are not respected.

The challenge of setting boundaries, as described by Participants 12 and 19, further corroborates the mixed findings in the literature. While the potential for autonomy exists, the effectiveness of boundary-setting is highly individual and context-dependent. JCM and WDQ both highlight the importance of feedback and support systems to help employees manage demands; when these are lacking, as is sometimes the case in hybrid environments, employees can experience strain or even burnout, outcomes also documented empirically in recent studies (Grant & Parker, 2009).

Moreover, the contrasting experiences noted such as enjoying fewer interruptions at home (Participant 10, in the subsequent section) versus the anxiety of constant visibility, mirror the dual-edge nature of hybrid work arrangements described in both JCM and J D-R literature. While some resources increase (flexibility, autonomy), others may decrease (social support, clear feedback), and demands may shift (from physical interruptions to digital ones and the expectation of perpetual availability).

The results presented are largely expected based on JCM, J D-R, WDQ, and empirical literature. Autonomy and flexibility are typically associated with positive outcomes, but only when balanced with adequate resources and manageable

demands. The persistent challenges of boundary management and visibility pressure in hybrid contexts are well-documented in the literature and underscore the importance of organizational support and clear expectations. The dualities observed in participants' feedback exemplify the nuanced impacts of hybrid work on well-being and performance, as anticipated by leading work design theories.

4.3.3 *Research Question 3: "What is the impact of support on employee wellbeing?"*

Participant feedback is analysed thematically, and codes are presented to respond to the research question "What is the impact of support on wellbeing?" Participants detailed the experience they have with support in hybrid environments and in terms of hybrid work, job design, work life balance and communication and collaboration since COVID-19. Table 4 illustrates the results.

Table 4 Code summaries related to "What is the impact of support on employee wellbeing?"

Code group	*Category*	*Code example*	*Verbatim excerpt sample*
Experience with Hybrid Work	Challenges with hybrid working (1.3)	Isolation and disconnection	*I think for me. I thrive better in a team environment, being around work colleagues, coming to an office, being together, kind of soldiering together. (Participant 11)*
Perceptions of Job Design	Element of effective job design (2.2)	Communication and feedback	*I really love my job and attributed the positive experience to supportive managers and a conducive work environment (Participant 9)*
Communication and collaboration	Communication challenges (4.2)	Communication delays	*I think that one of the challenges to me is, is sometimes there's a delay in getting response or hold of somebody (Participant 13)*
		Reduced accessibility to people	*So yes, because when you're working in an office with everyone, it just as easy as walking to them to get the information required. Whereas if someone is working from home or in hybrid, what do*

			you call it? They either have to answer your Teams call or they have to respond to the mail so you don't actually have control of how urgent you could receive whatever it is that you need in that time. (Participant 12)
Support and resources	Organisational support (5.1)	Employees are supported	*Absolutely. I will say yes and one of the things that the organization did as soon as COVID hit and that they're still doing even now is that they provided us, if you did not have a monitor, you did not have basically an office of Home Office equipment that was provided to us (Participant 7)*
		Feeling of distrust in management	*I think yes, they have supported us. They do understand because I think it works for them as well. You know, for management they also come in when they want to as well. I do feel that they do want to see us more. I don't know if it's a trust thing, but yeah, I think there is that. Sometimes they want all the cameras on or they think we not working (Participant 4)*
	Training received (5.2)	No formal training provided	*No, I think we just navigated to the waters with that one. (Participant 1)*
		The company provided training	*Yes, yeah. From time to time our firm does provide us with the training. (Participant 19)*
Support and resources	Additional support and resources (5.3)	Company-sponsored data and airtime	*I think it would have been nice to get like you know, a similar setup that you have in your office to your home, Phone cell phones or data. No data or minutes to communicate with other people because we tend to spend a lot of our own money to buy these minutes in order to call other people (Participant 10)*
		Training on hybrid work	*Potentially we should have had a bit of a crash course in terms of how to manage staff in a hybrid environment, you know the do's and don'ts and things like that (Participant 11)*

The analysis confirms the importance of support in hybrid work environments and the responses were comprehensive. Participants have recommended the need for clear policies and expectations to ensure consistency across teams. For example, Participant 19 commented, *"I think the roles need to be explicit in terms of what one needs to do and what one is not supposed to be doing. So also in terms of work from home arrangements".* Participant 18 echoed this concern, highlighting inconsistency in policy application: *"Also, for me is just inconsistent application of our policies. It's, that's I would just like consistency and everyone, every specific person in the firm does the same thing".* Thematic analysis of Table 4 further reinforces the significance of support and resource provision within hybrid work environments, echoing core tenets of both the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) and the Job Demands-Resources (J D-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Participants expressed a clear need for explicit policies and consistent expectations to mitigate ambiguity and promote fairness, as illustrated by Participant 19's emphasis on defining roles and Participant 18's call for consistent policy application. These findings align with the JCM dimension of "task identity" and the need for clarity in job roles, as well as with the J D-R perspective that organizational resources like such clear guidelines, buffer against job stressors and foster engagement (Parker et al., 2010).

Support for training and material resources, including company-sponsored data and appropriate home office setups, aligns closely with the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) constructs of "work context" and "social support" (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Participant 10's concerns about paying for data underscore the importance of material support for effective hybrid working, consistent with previous empirical findings that access to technology and support are essential enablers of remote job performance (Wang et al., 2020). Similarly, the recommendation for additional training, particularly in managing hybrid teams resonates with research highlighting the necessity of managerial upskilling during transitions to flexible work (Parker et al., 2010).

Empirical comparisons confirm that participants' experiences with hybrid work matched expected benefits and challenges from the literature. Clear communication and resources proved essential, supporting (Allen et al., 2015), while inconsistent policy application echoed previous concerns about equity in hybrid models (Wang et al., 2020).

The results show that theoretical models align well with practical experiences of hybrid work, as supported by participants' feedback. The findings highlight clear needs for clarity, support, and resources, confirming the relevance of established frameworks to this research.

4.3.4 *Research Question 4: "What is the impact of feedback on employee wellbeing?"*

The result of the thematic analyses is provided to respond to the research question "What is the impact of feedback on welfare?". Participants discussed their views regarding feedback in hybrid environments in terms of hybrid work, job design, communication and collaboration, work life balance and support and resources since COVID-19. Table 5 illustrates the results.

Table 5 Code summaries related to "What is the impact of feedback on employee wellbeing?"

Code group	*Category*	*Code example*	*Verbatim excerpt sample*
Experience with Hybrid Work	General experience with hybrid work arrangements (1.1)	Visibility anxiety and guilt	*However, sometimes when I'm working from home you get this guilty feeling that because nobody can see you, you feel like they think you're not doing the work. (Participant 9)*
	Challenges with hybrid working (1.3)	Connectivity challenges	*At that time, there was maybe the only little bit of challenge, is every now and then with your Wi-Fi. You know your connectivity (Participant 6)*

		Isolation and disconnection	*I think for me. I thrive better in a team environment, being around work colleagues, coming to an office, being together, kind of soldiering together. (Participant 11)*
Perceptions of Job Design	Job role and responsibilities (2.1)	High demanding role	*It's very demanding because it's on a senior level where there's a lot of interaction with leadership as well as, regional managers, as well as sales representatives and everybody's concerns are priority. (Participant 1)*
	Element of effective job design (2.2)	Communication and feedback	*Communication and continuous feedback, whether it's good or bad. Constructive on non-constructive it's very important for me (Participant 10)*
Communication and collaboration	Communication challenges (4.2)	Communication delays	*I think that one of the challenges to me is, is sometimes there's a delay in getting response or hold of somebody (Participant 13)*
		Reduced accessibility to people	*So yes, because when you're working in an office with everyone, it just as easy as walking to them to get the information required. Whereas if someone is working from home or in hybrid, what do you call it? They either have to answer your Teams call or they have to respond to the mail so you don't actually have control of how urgent you could receive whatever it is that you need in that time. (Participant 12)*
	Maintaining a sense of connection (4.3)	Use of messaging Apps for social and work	*You know, and then your work friends besties you can send the teams meme or something just to have that sense of you know, that connection to people. (Participant 4)*
Support and resources	Organisational support (5.1)	*Feeling of distrust in management*	*I think yes, they have supported us. They do understand because I think it works for them as well. You know, for management they also come in when they want to as well. I do feel that they do want to see us more. I don't know if it's a trust thing, but yeah, I think there is that. Sometimes they want all the*

			cameras on or they think we not working (Participant 4)
Support and resources	Additional support and resources (5.3)	Company-sponsored data and airtime	*I think it would have been nice to get like you know, a similar setup that you have in your office to your home, Phone cell phones or data. No data or minutes to communicate with other people because we tend to spend a lot of our own money to buy these minutes in order to call other people (Participant 10)*

A review of the thematic analysis results presented in Table 5, reveals detailed dynamics in the impact of feedback on wellness within hybrid work contexts. Several participants highlighted both the presence and limitations of organisational support. For example, Participant 4 referenced a "feeling of distrust in management," with management's desire for camera use and in-person attendance interpreted as manifestations of visibility anxiety. This aligns with the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), which identifies feedback as a core job dimension that should foster a sense of meaningfulness and responsibility (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). However, empirical studies (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) emphasise that feedback is only effective when accompanied by trust and perceived organisational support.

Participant 10's remarks on the lack of material resources, especially company-sponsored data and airtime, underscore how inadequate infrastructural support can blunt the positive effects of feedback mechanisms. The Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) framework, as discussed in the literature, posits that the provision of resources and clarity of communication are integral to staff wellness (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Bakker & Demerouti, (2017) further demonstrate that while feedback is generally associated with increased engagement and wellbeing, its effectiveness is conditional on an environment that fosters psychological safety and addresses practical work needs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) feedback is most effective in environments with psychological safety and organisational support.

While some expected results regarding feedback's positive impact on wellness were observed, such as participants valuing peer connection and informal feedback channels (e.g. sending memes, maintaining team spirit), the full potential of feedback to promote staff wellness was not universally realised. This is primarily due to ongoing concerns around trust, resource provision, and perceived surveillance, as highlighted in both participant feedback and the literature (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

In line with JCM, J D-R, and WDQ, feedback can enhance staff wellness in hybrid settings, but only when embedded in a context of trust and adequate organisational support. Where such conditions are lacking, feedback may be insufficient or even counterproductive, echoing findings from the literature review and empirical studies.

4.4 Reflections and recommendations

During the final interviews, participants described their experiences with hybrid work and job design and provided recommendations for potential improvements.

4.4.1 **Reflection on hybrid work**

The responses show a mainly positive sentiment toward hybrid work. Figure 4 illustrates the analysis of participants' views, with higher numbers indicating stronger opinions and lower numbers indicating weaker ones.

	Reflections on hybrid work (6.1) 16
Reflections on hybrid work (6.1): Cost and time savings 1	1
Reflections on hybrid work (6.1): Flexibility and work-life balance 6	6
Reflections on hybrid work (6.1): Hybrid is not ideal 1	1
Reflections on hybrid work (6.1): Job satisfaction and autonomy 1	1
Reflections on hybrid work (6.1): Mixed feelings 2	2
Reflections on hybrid work (6.1): Negative overall experience 1	1
Reflections on hybrid work (6.1): Positive overall experience 3	3
Reflections on hybrid work (6.1): Prefers working at the office 1	1

Figure 4 Code occurrence analysis of participants' reflections on hybrid

Numerous individuals value hybrid work for assisting in juggling personal and occupational duties. For example, Participant 1 remarked, *"My experience with hybrid work is I love it. I thoroughly enjoy it. I wish we had more flexibility in terms of how many days we can hybrid work "*. This sentiment was echoed by others who stressed the significance of having the option to choose their workdays, with Participant 9 stating, *"You know if I could have it two days in the office, 3 days at home, that would be ideal"*.

Furthermore, Participant 3 stated, *" I actually prefer it at this stage. I think definitely because it gives us the opportunity to really have some sort of balance between the office and working from home. I think that's really important".* Similarly, Participant 4 noted how hybrid work allowed for personal control over their time and tasks, adding, *" So yeah, I realized that working from home might give me more control over my time and finishing my tasks and focusing better."*

Some participants expressed concerns about collaboration and information-sharing challenges with hybrid work. Participant 12 remarked, *"I think there are pros and cons. The pros are you get to be at home, you go at your own pace, and you get more done without distractions. The con is you basically don't get the information from the individual that's usually 2 meters away from you, or in the next office as quick and as efficient as you would normally get it"*. Consistently,

Participant 11's view is that hybrid work is not beneficial, specifically in the services industry and stated:

"I reiterate the answer for this one for me is I understand that it can work in certain environments in certain industries. I do see the benefit of it. I see the savings. You know you don't have to have; your office space can be reduced. You know, there are definitely financial savings for businesses and things like that where it can be done. You know, advertising companies, design companies, guys sit at home and design. I understand and I get it, in my personal experience and in the service industry that I'm in, it's not ideal" (Participant 11)

Participant 10 mentioned *"Terrible. It was terrible",* however, did not elaborate further. Whereas, Participant 13 is a proponent of an office environment but acknowledged that hybrid may be beneficial to others and stated: *"I prefer personally on a personal level, I prefer being in the office and I prefer the people that work with me to be in the office, but I do acknowledge the fact because I have a lot of friends and family who work in hybrid and I think especially the generations who have children at school, or people who you know, spend a lot of time in traffic".*

Overall, the hybrid experience is positive, as shown in Figure 4. Attendees emphasized the necessity for adaptability and a healthy work-life equilibrium.

4.4.2 **Recommendations to improve hybrid work**

Figure 8 shows code occurrences from participant responses. Higher numbers indicate dominant views, while lower numbers indicate fewer dominant views. The most common code is clear policies and expectations, followed by flexibility, trust, and reduced micromanagement.

		Recommendations for improving hybrid (6.2) 16
Recommendations for improving hybrid (6.2)	16	
Recommendations for improving hybrid (6.2): Consideration of financial benefits by comp...	1	1
Recommendations for improving hybrid (6.2): Develop clear policies and expectations	5	5
Recommendations for improving hybrid (6.2): Development of consequences management	1	1
Recommendations for improving hybrid (6.2): Development of employees wellness program	1	1
Recommendations for improving hybrid (6.2): Improve flexibility	3	3
Recommendations for improving hybrid (6.2): Provision for adequate resources	1	1
Recommendations for improving hybrid (6.2): Setting of clear boundaries	1	1
Recommendations for improving hybrid (6.2): Trust and reduced micromanagement	3	3

Figure 8: Code occurrence analysis of recommendations.

Development of clear policies and expectations

Participants have recommended the need for clear policies and expectations to ensure consistency across teams. For example, Participant 19 commented, *"I think the roles need to be explicit in terms of what one needs to do and what one is not supposed to be doing. So also in terms of work from home arrangements"*

Participant 18 echoed this concern, highlighting inconsistency in policy application: *"Also, for me is just inconsistent application of our policies. It's, that's I would just like consistency and everyone, every specific person in the firm does the same thing".*

Improve flexibility

Participants suggested enhancing schedule flexibility in a hybrid work model. The primary recommendation was to permit employees to select specific days for remote work and to offer flexible hours. Participant 4 suggested, *"So I don't see the need for us to be in the office and our office is an open plan…..If they could just let us come in once a week or once a month...I would definitely think that would make it more hybrid".* Similarly, Participant 2 commented, *"No one should actually be, worried about where you actually are whether I was sitting on the beach and doing my work if my work is done and I'm getting the results then does it really matter?"*

Trust and reduced micromanagement

Trust and decreased micromanagement were identified as key areas for enhancement. It was noted that employees should handle their tasks independently without continuous oversight. Participant 10 stated, *"They need to stop policing people. Man, you need to trust that your employees know what to do and how, when they expected to do it. This thing of constantly calling them and seeing if they are green or amber or offline on Teams. I'm not for it"*.

The sentiment by Participant 10 is further reinforced by Participant 8, who argued, *"In terms of letting people know that you know you're working at home, you're working remotely doesn't mean that you're not allowed to have a cup of coffee or take your lunch".*

Participants recommended resources for hybrid work, such as better technology, wellness programs, and clear boundaries. Financial benefits like reduced office space costs were noted by Participant 7.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter summarised the qualitative interview findings regarding the impact of job design on employee well-being in South Africa. Section 4.2 presented the demographic profiles of participants, outlining their backgrounds and organisational roles. Section 4.3 identified and explored the core themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis, especially those concerning hybrid work and job design. Section 4.4 interpreted these results in relation to the research questions and broader concepts of employee well-being. Finally, Section 4.5 encapsulated the chapter's main findings and prepared the ground for further discussion and analysis. Collectively, these sections constructed a comprehensive narrative that illuminated the complexities of hybrid work and its implications for knowledge workers' well-being in the post-pandemic South African workplace.

CHAPTER 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter opens with a summary of the study's main aims and approach, before outlining the principal findings and recommendations. Section 5.1 reviews the research framework and its foundation in job design models, while Section 5.2 presents the consolidated results in relation to the core research questions. Section 5.3 discusses the implications of these findings for employees' well-being in hybrid work environments, specifically within the post-COVID-19 South African context. Section 5.4 provides practical recommendations for organizations and policymakers seeking to optimize hybrid work practices, and Section 5.5 suggests directions for future research to further explore this evolving field.

5.2 Summary of findings

5.2.1 *Findings from literature*

5.2.1.1 How does skill variety influence worker well-being?

Research consistently shows that skill variety enhances employee motivation, job satisfaction, and psychological health (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Grant & Parker, 2009; Parker et al., 2010; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In hybrid work settings, however, its benefits may be constrained by decreased structured interaction, which can lead to feelings of isolation or diminished support (Wang et al., 2021; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001; Yang et al., 2023). Golden et al. (2008) and Kelliher & Anderson (2010) also highlight the importance of effective communication and collaboration in such contexts, as studies suggest these elements are crucial for maximising the positive impact of skill variety and avoiding potential overload or ambiguity (Garcia-Salirrosas et al., 2023; Hodzic et al., 2024). Organisational support remains essential for fully realising these

advantages within hybrid environments (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Wang et al., 2021).

5.2.1.2 What is the impact of autonomy on employee wellness?

Empirical studies consistently identify job autonomy as a key factor in employee well-being, especially in flexible work settings (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Golden et al., 2008; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Research shows that autonomy enhances job satisfaction and reduces psychological strain by allowing individuals control over their work (Grant & Parker, 2009; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Yang et al., 2023). In hybrid and remote environments, autonomy can mitigate work-related stress if supported by strong organizational communication and resources (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001; Parker et al., 2010; Hodzic et al., 2024). Without such support, employees may face decision fatigue and work-life balance issues, limiting autonomy's positive effects (Garcia-Salirrosas et al., 2023; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Overall, autonomy benefits wellness most when combined with robust organizational structures (Parker et al., 2010).

5.2.1.3 What is the impact of support on staff welfare?

Chapter 2's review indicates that effective organizational and social support systems are fundamental to the well-being of employees in hybrid work environments (Yang et al., 2023; Hodzic et al., 2024). Research by Morgeson & Humphrey (2006), Golden et al. (2008), and Kelliher & Anderson (2010) underscores that accessible management and peer collaboration play key roles in lowering workplace stress and enhancing job satisfaction. Furthermore, robust communication channels and supportive leadership help sustain employees' sense of belonging and overall welfare (Grant & Parker, 2009; Parker et al., 2010; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). While hybrid work models provide greater flexibility (Garcia-Salirrosas et al., 2023), maintaining employee well-being relies heavily on strong support networks (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001).

5.2.1.4 What is the impact of feedback on staff welfare?

The empirical literature reviewed in Chapter 2 demonstrates that regular, constructive feedback plays a vital role in enhancing staff welfare, especially within hybrid work environments. Studies consistently show that timely and meaningful feedback increases job satisfaction, performance, and engagement by clarifying expectations and providing guidance for improvement (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Grant & Parker, 2009; Parker et al., 2010). Yang et al. (2023) and Hodzic et al. (2024) highlight that in flexible or remote contexts, structured feedback mechanisms help mitigate feelings of isolation and ambiguity, fostering a stronger sense of belonging among employees. Feedback also facilitates learning and adaptation, which are essential for employee well-being and resilience, particularly when work patterns are less predictable (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Golden et al., 2008; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Wiesenfeld et al. (2001) and Garcia-Salirrosas et al. (2023) further emphasise that supportive feedback from both supervisors and peers not only reduces stress but also strengthens social ties and organisational commitment. The expected result, therefore, is that robust feedback systems in hybrid work setups will significantly contribute to improved staff welfare by enhancing clarity, motivation, and social connection, thus counteracting the potential downsides of reduced in-person interaction.

5.2.2 ***Findings from the primary study***

5.2.2.1 Influence of Skill Variety on Worker Well-Being

The literature robustly highlights that skill variety acts as a cornerstone of employee motivation, job satisfaction, and psychological health (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Grant & Parker, 2009; Parker et al., 2010; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Within the context of hybrid work, these benefits are nuanced by the risk of isolation and the reduction of structured in-person interaction (Wang et al., 2021; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001; Yang et al., 2023). The thematic analysis corroborates these findings: participants described how diverse tasks kept them engaged and fostered a sense of accomplishment. However, some also reported

that without adequate organisational support and communication, the positive effects of skill variety diminished, as predicted by Golden et al. (2008) and Kelliher & Anderson (2010). This resonates with the literature's caution about potential overload or ambiguity when collaborative structures are weak (Garcia-Salirrosas et al., 2023; Hodzic et al., 2024). Therefore, the thematic analysis supports the dual role of skill variety in hybrid environments, it can enhance well-being, but only when strengthened by intentional communication and support systems.

5.2.2.2 The Impact of Autonomy on Employee Wellness

The empirical literature has consistently found job autonomy to be a primary driver of employee well-being, particularly in flexible or hybrid settings (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Golden et al., 2008; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Autonomy enables employees to control their work schedules and methodologies, mitigating psychological strain and increasing job satisfaction (Grant & Parker, 2009; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Yang et al., 2023). The thematic analysis results echo these observations, with employees frequently citing autonomy as critical to their sense of balance and wellness. Nevertheless, the analysis also brings to the fore challenges less explored in the literature, specifically, that autonomy without robust organisational support can result in decision fatigue and heightened work-life conflict (Parker et al., 2010; Garcia-Salirrosas et al., 2023). This aligns with Wiesenfeld et al. (2001) and Hodzic et al. (2024), who note that the benefits of autonomy are compromised when organisational communication and clear boundaries are lacking (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001; Hodzic et al., 2024). Thus, the thematic results reinforce the literature's position that autonomy is most beneficial when paired with structured organisational resources and reliable support networks.

5.2.2.3 Organisational and Social Support in Staff Welfare

The literature review, especially in Chapter 2, establishes that both organisational and social support systems are fundamental to the well-being of employees in hybrid contexts (Yang et al., 2023; Hodzic et al., 2024). Morgeson & Humphrey

(2006), Golden et al. (2008), and Kelliher & Anderson (2010) all underscore the impact of accessible management and peer collaboration in reducing workplace stress and bolstering job satisfaction (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Golden et al., 2008; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). The thematic analysis results are strongly aligned with these empirical expectations: participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of both formal and informal support. Specifically, peer mentorship and management accessibility were cited as vital to preventing isolation and facilitating engagement, echoing findings by Grant & Parker (2009), Parker et al. (2010), and Bakker & Demerouti (2017). The analysis also identifies that the mere presence of support structures is inadequate; their effectiveness hinges on consistent, transparent communication (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). In summary, the results reinforce the prevailing view that the efficacy of hybrid models in promoting well-being is inextricably linked to the strength and accessibility of support networks.

5.2.2.4 The Impact of Feedback on Staff Welfare

The role of regular, constructive feedback in staff welfare is well established in the literature (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Grant & Parker, 2009; Parker et al., 2010). Studies show that such feedback enhances job satisfaction, performance, and engagement by clarifying expectations and offering growth opportunities (Yang et al., 2023; Hodzic et al., 2024). The thematic analysis substantiates these points: employees valued ongoing feedback mechanisms, noting that timely, meaningful feedback mitigated uncertainty and reinforced a sense of connection in the hybrid context. Importantly, the findings also align with Bakker & Demerouti (2017), Golden et al. (2008), and Kelliher & Anderson (2010), who suggest that feedback fosters adaptation and resilience in less predictable environments. Wiesenfeld et al. (2001) and Garcia-Salirrosas et al. (2023) further emphasise that feedback from both supervisors and peers is essential in reducing stress and strengthening organisational commitment. The thematic data thus confirm that feedback is a cornerstone of well-being in hybrid work, especially when in-person interaction is limited.

5.3 Conclusions of the study

The aim of this study was to explore how hybrid environments impact employee wellbeing as determined by key job characteristics i.e., skill variety, autonomy, social support, and feedback, with a specific focus on post-pandemic South Africa. Drawing together the main findings, the research demonstrated that skill variety remains a vital driver of motivation and psychological health, but its benefits are contingent upon strong communication and organisational backing. When such support is lacking, the potential for overload or ambiguity increases, diminishing the positive effects that skill diversity might otherwise provide.

Similarly, the findings confirmed that autonomy greatly enhances employee wellness by affording flexibility and reducing psychological strain. However, this benefit is not unconditional. Autonomy, when unsupported by clear organisational boundaries and resources, can inadvertently result in decision fatigue and greater work-life conflict reinforcing concerns found both in the literature and participant discussion. This suggests that autonomy, to be genuinely advantageous, must be paired with robust institutional support.

Consistent with the literature, the value of organisational and social support was reaffirmed. Employees attributed much of their well-being to the presence of accessible management and peer mentorship, which helped to counteract the isolation intrinsic to hybrid setups. Yet, the analysis revealed that it is not merely the presence but the effectiveness, rooted in transparent, consistent communication of these support structures that determines their impact.

Finally, regular, constructive feedback emerged as a cornerstone of staff welfare in hybrid work. Employees highly valued feedback mechanisms that clarified expectations and fostered a sense of connection, and such feedback proved instrumental in strengthening adaptability and engagement, particularly where in-person interaction was limited.

When these findings are viewed in relation to the research objectives, several patterns emerge. Each job characteristic examined operates not in isolation, but as part of an interconnected system that shapes employee well-being. The

positive effects of autonomy and skill variety are most pronounced when embedded within networks of support and open communication. Conversely, the absence of these foundational structures can transform otherwise advantageous conditions into sources of stress or disconnection. A clear trend throughout the data is the critical importance of intentional, structured organisational strategies that integrate autonomy, variety, support, and feedback. These elements, when harmonised, cultivate resilience, engagement, and satisfaction within hybrid settings.

Overall, the study's objectives were reached, and questions were answered, insights underscore the necessity for organisations to move beyond piecemeal interventions and instead adopt holistic approaches that reinforce each aspect of the work experience. Employees thrive when there is a dynamic balance between flexibility and support, diversity of tasks and clarity of expectations, and when feedback is both regular and meaningful. These findings provide a nuanced understanding of what underpins well-being in hybrid work and offer actionable guidance for organisations seeking to sustain employee welfare and high performance in evolving workplace landscapes.

5.4 Contributions and Practical Implications

The present study advances both theoretical understanding and practical approaches for institutions, bodies, and companies grappling with hybrid work arrangements. Theoretically, it refines current models by illuminating the complex interrelations among skill variety, autonomy, support, and feedback within hybrid environments (Yang et al., 2023; Hodzic et al., 2024; Garcia-Salirrosas et al., 2023). Practically, this research offers actionable guidance for organisations aiming to structure work environments that foster employee well-being and operational resilience, particularly in contexts such as South Africa where hybrid models are implemented.

In discussing the practical application of these findings, several implications emerge. First, organisations should implement comprehensive support frameworks that facilitate both formal and informal communication, thereby

mitigating risks associated with isolation and ambiguity (Yang et al., 2023; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Garcia-Salirrosas et al., 2023). Investment in robust technological infrastructure is critical to enable seamless collaboration across distributed teams and should be accompanied by explicit policies delineating the objectives and parameters of hybrid work (Golden et al., 2008; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

A point highlighted by the analysis is the necessity of fostering inclusive workplace cultures that encourage regular, constructive feedback, enhancing engagement and satisfaction (Parker et al., 2010; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Managers can play a pivotal role by balancing flexibility with clear guidance and immediate feedback, thus helping employees navigate the demands of autonomy without succumbing to overload or isolation (Grant & Parker, 2009; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001).

Practical mechanisms such as continuous pulse surveys and routine check-in allow early detection and resolution of potential challenges like work-life conflict and decision fatigue (Hodzic et al., 2024; Parker et al., 2010). Additionally, mentorship programmes and peer support structures strengthen team cohesion and individual resilience, supporting sustainable performance outcomes (Garcia-Salirrosas et al., 2023; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Employees are advised to engage proactively with support networks and take advantage of ongoing professional development opportunities provided by their organisations (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

Finally, promoting diverse tasks and open communication channels enables employees to fully realise the positive aspects of autonomy and skill variety while reducing adverse effects such as overload and feelings of disconnection (Golden et al., 2008; Grant & Parker, 2009). Through participation in structured feedback processes, staff can advocate effectively for their needs within the evolving hybrid work landscape, further contributing to well-being and organisational success (Yang et al., 2023).

In sum, this research reinforces the critical role of intentional strategies integrating communication, support, autonomy, and feedback. These elements, underpinned

by solid organisational resources, are indispensable for maintaining employee well-being and ensuring high levels of performance in modern hybrid work settings.

5.5 Suggestion for Future Research

Qualitative research explored how hybrid work influences employee well-being in post-COVID-19 South Africa. For broader insight, a mixed-methods quantitative approach is recommended, as it combines data for a fuller perspective, validates findings through triangulation, allows flexibility to explore various factors, provides rich insights, and enhances validity by covering multiple dimensions (Burke & Schoonenboom, 2004).

Given these advantages, future studies should use this approach to test hypotheses about job design's role in employee well-being and to optimize strategies for hybrid work environments. By merging qualitative and quantitative methods, researchers will be better equipped to confirm hybrid work's effects and support evidence-based practices aimed at improving satisfaction and productivity.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter began by summarising the study's main aims and methodological approach, before detailing the principal findings and recommendations. The research framework, grounded in established job design models, was reviewed, and the consolidated results were presented in relation to the core questions. The implications of these findings for employee well-being in hybrid work environments particularly in post-COVID-19 South Africa were discussed in depth. Practical recommendations were provided for organisations and policymakers seeking to optimise hybrid work practices, and suggestions for future research were offered to further advance understanding in this evolving field.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Guide: Exploring Hybrid Work and Job Design

Introduction:

Hello,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this conversation is to gain a deeper understanding of your experiences, challenges, and perceptions related to hybrid work arrangements and job design. Your insights will be invaluable in helping to improve the well-being of employees in the post-COVID-19 workplace.

Before we begin, I want to assure you that your responses will remain confidential, and you are free to skip any questions or stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we start?

1. **Demographic info**
Age:

Gender:

Education:

Job role:

Years of experience:

2. **Experience with Hybrid Work**:
Can you describe your experience with hybrid work arrangements since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?

What aspects of hybrid work do you find most beneficial?

Conversely, what challenges have you encountered while working in a hybrid environment?

3. **Perceptions of Job Design:**
How would you describe your current job role and its responsibilities?

In your opinion, what elements contribute to effective job design?

Have you noticed any changes in your job design since transitioning to hybrid work? If so, what are they?

How do you feel about the clarity of your role expectations and responsibilities in a hybrid work setting?

4. Balancing Work and Life:

How do you manage to balance your work commitments with personal or family responsibilities while working in a hybrid setup?

Do you feel that hybrid work arrangements have had an impact on your work-life balance? If so, how?

5. **Communication and Collaboration:**
How do you communicate and collaborate with colleagues while working remotely?

Have you experienced any communication challenges or opportunities in a hybrid work environment?

How do you maintain a sense of connection and teamwork with your colleagues, especially those who work remotely?

6. **Support and Resources:**
Do you feel adequately supported by your organization in adapting to hybrid work arrangements?

Have you received any training or resources to help you navigate the challenges of hybrid work?

What additional support or resources would you like to see from your organization to improve your hybrid work experience?

7. **Reflections and Recommendations:**
Looking back, what are your overall reflections on your experience with hybrid work and job design?

Based on your experiences, what recommendations would you offer to improve hybrid work arrangements and job design in your organization?

Closing:
Thank you once again for sharing your insights and experiences today. Your input is invaluable in shaping the understanding and approach to hybrid work and job design. If you have any further thoughts or feedback after the interview, please feel free to reach out. Your time and contribution are appreciated.

Is there anything else you would like to add before we conclude?

Appendix B

Main theories and models employed to understand Hybrid Work and Job Design

Model/Theory	Theory and findings	Skill variety, autonomy and social support impact on wellbeing
Job Characteristics Model (JCM) (Hackman & Oldham, 1976)	The model finds five core job characteristics: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback which shape key psychological states that drive employee motivation, satisfaction, and performance. Enhancing core characteristics will boost engagement and reduce turnover. There is however a moderation affect by the individuals need for growth. Autonomy, skill variety, performance feedback are categorized as job resources in Job Demands-Resources Theory.	JCM predicts increased skill variety will increase experienced meaningfulness at work, which is personal achievement, that incentivises the worker to replicate and contributes to high satisfaction with work. JCM predicts increased autonomy increases experienced responsibility of the work contributing to high satisfaction. JCM does not regard social support in the model, only feedback.
Job Demands-Resources Theory (JD-R)	Job characteristics include demands, which cause stress and harm health, and resources, which boost motivation. Demands lead to	Skill variety and autonomy are considered job resources which reduce job demands or stimulate personal growth, learning and development and trigger a

(Demerouti et al., 2001)	burnout, while resources increase engagement and satisfaction. Sufficient resources can offset high demands, and challenging demands may have positive outcomes.	motivational process. JD-R does not include the social support characteristic.
Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006)	The questionnaire is a self-report tool that assesses 77 job characteristics across various dimensions, integrating elements from previous job design theories. It has been found to be reliable and valid, and it addresses social support and contextual factors in addition to traditional job characteristics.	WDQ predicts increased task characteristics increases satisfaction. Skill variety increases satisfaction as well as Autonomy (Decision Autonomy has a stronger effect on satisfaction.) The social support characteristic scores highly and is directly related to satisfaction.