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Hybrid working and organisational commitment: the role of perceived organisational support

A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Organisational Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities/Science, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 15 March 2023

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Declaration

I, Miguel Tresidder-Angelo, declare that this research report is my own work. It is submitted for the Master of Arts in Organisational Psychology degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

Signed: MRT
Date: 05/02/23

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Introduction

Within the space of 3 years, organisations have had to change their organisational structure drastically, to cope with the environmental demands brought about by Covid-19. The two major dramatic shifts organisations found themselves having to implement were a fully remote work structure at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to curb the spread of the virus and now organisations are having to consider changing their structures once more to a hybrid working structure (Wontorczyk & Rożnowski, 2022). Before Covid-19, remote and hybrid work was seen to be a luxury and not possible for anyone besides high-income employees (Desilver, 2020). Therefore, previous research into hybrid working has had a selection bias conception as the data gathered in previous research was not gathered from the entire workforce, it was gathered from the small minority who engaged in hybrid work. However, Covid-19 has not only changed access to remote work, it is also shaping access to hybrid work for the future. Remote working did not only provide employees the opportunity to work from home it gave employees a flexible schedule, greater job autonomy, and increased work-life balance, which resulted in increased productivity and performance (Wontorczyk & Rożnowski, 2022). Studies like the one conducted by Dowling et al. (2021) found that in a post-pandemic world, most employees are not willing to give up the advantages that came with remote work. Therefore, by trying to accommodate the needs of their employees most organisations are shifting to a hybrid form of work (Dowling et al., 2021). Within the South African context, Microsoft's (2020) research found that almost 9 out of 10 leaders at large enterprises within South Africa will adopt a more hybrid approach to work permanently.

Although many organisations within South Africa and globally are focused on a shift to hybrid work, very little research has been done on how it will affect organisational performance and employees, with even fewer studies within the South African context. Studies where research aimed at South African organisations came from multi-national corporations that created a holistic global perspective. Therefore, it is crucial that this study be conducted within a context that focuses solely on the South African context, as South African organisations are having to create conclusions from Westernised studies and samples.

This is problematic as South Africa has vastly different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds than employees within a western context, which may skew the perception of a hybrid working structure within the South African context.

Chapter 1- Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review will begin with a discussion on telework, because this form the basis of flexible working schedules and will allow for a picture to be created of the type of work hybrid work is. This will then allow for the review to breakdown and analyse the concept of hybrid work into its simplest parts, remote work and in-office work. From this an analysis of the potential employee attitudes that could potentially be affected by hybrid work, being job stress, organisational commitment, and perceived job stress will be provided and will be linked to the concept of hybrid work.

Telework

Covid-19 may have a caused new discourse of how flexible working schedules should be conducted within the workplace (Gratton, 2020; Deal & Levenson, 2021; Kokt & Chipunza, 2022), however flexible working schedules is not something new to organisations. Telework can be synonymously linked to terms such as "e-work, flexible work, home-based telecommuting, mobile work, home office, and virtual workplace" (Lebopo et al, 2020). Telework is a concept that has been researched since the late 1980s and early 1990s (Herra et al., 2022). These early studies came about during the initial incorporation of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) within organisations and focused on this new interaction between employees and technology and how this may alter organisational practices in the future (Herra et al., 2022). With the onset of Covid-19, this caused a shift in the traditional focus of telework from a future focus to a present focus, as workplace strategies needed to be altered to maintain key business functions during the pandemic, this alteration came in the form of the term 'remote work' (Sokolic, 2022). Due to the change of discourse brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, one might consider that 'remote work' is a completely new form of work, however, the term 'remote work' may also be used

interchangeably with the term telework (Sokolic, 2022) Furthermore, traditional conceptualisations that arose during the 1980's, years before Covid-19 became a catalyst also spoke to this discourse of remote work (Grzelczak, 2021), as traditional literature outlined some of the known remote working arrangements such as flexible work arrangements, and Work-at-Home (Olson, 1983) and concepts that never gained traction such as satellite work centres and neighbourhood work centres (Olson, 1983). To understand why this is the case, one needs to analyse the definition of telework. There have been many definitions of telework that have arisen in past decades, however, the most well-known and accepted definition within modern literature comes from Allen et al. (2015) where they stated that telework in terms of telecommuting "is a work practice that involves members of an organization substituting a portion of their typical work hours (ranging from a few hours per week to nearly full-time) to work away from a central workplace typically principally from home using technology to interact with others as needed to conduct work tasks."(Allen et al., 2015, p. 44).

Telework from its initial conceptualisation has been seen as a positive initiative (Allen et al., 2015; Bélanger, 1999; Bloom et al., 2014; Crandall & Gao, 2005). Years before Covid-19 these positive results for telework were supported by organisational studies such as the one conducted by Bloom et al. 2014, where they found that employees within the particular organisation that they studied were able to show a 13% increase in job performance after just 9 months of telecommuting. With these promising results, one would have that may have been expected that organisations would have adopted telework strategies more widely. At the time Bloom et al. (2014), conducted their study major corporations such as Yahoo and HP were considering the adoption of telework strategies (Boell, 2016; Lebopo et al 2020). However, they decided to continue conducting in-office work (Lebopo et al 2020). This was due to the fact they believed that after a period of time and through a lack of monitoring employees were taking work for granted and not prioritised (Boell, 2016). This created a poor outlook for the future adoption of telework strategies within organisations, hence remaining a workplace initiative that was only open to those who were fortunate enough to be able to engage with these initiatives such as upper management and on a voluntary basis (Herra et al 2022; Lebopo et al 2020). However, due to the unprecedented change brought about by Covid-19, telework in the form of remote work was for the first time open to everyone and

not just those who were fortunate enough to be able to volunteer (Grzelczak, 2021; Stoian et al, 2022). This did not only change the work paradigm for the employees of global and South African organisations (Stoian et al 2022, Lebepo et al, 2020), but it has changed the future outlook of work far beyond what organisations like HP and Yahoo were predicting during the initial phases of their telework initiatives. The Covid-19 pandemic expanded the adoption of telework within the global workforce at its inception through 'remote work' (Deal & Levenson 2021; Kokt & Chipunza 2022; Stoian et al 2022). and is now creating a different form of telework. As Covid-19 ends its hold on the global community, its impact on work arrangements remains through the increased adoption of 'hybrid work' (Bloom 2021; Kokt & Chipunza 2022; Sokilic, 2022).

Hybrid workplace.

A hybrid structure/workplace is when organisations adopt a blended approach between remote work and in-office work (SAP Insights, 2021). Within this organisational structure, employees can remain at home for a few days a week and come into the office a few days a week (SAP insights, 2021). This approach to work, allows organisations to differentiate what tasks can be done through remote working or in-office work (Trevor & Holweg, 2023). This can be in the forms of that tasks that can be done alone like administration to be done remotely and tasks that involve social interaction and creativity to be done at the office (Trevor & Holweg, 2023). This allows employees to break away from the traditional business model and affords them the opportunity to balance the benefits of remote work, such as increased flexibility, flexible schedule, greater job autonomy, and cost savings, with the benefits of in-person work, such as collaboration and social interaction (SAP insights, 2021; Wontorczyk & Rożnowski, 2022).

In 2021, 68% of those surveyed in a Cisco study were already engaging in hybrid work activities (Cisco, 2022). The popularity and desire for hybrid work amongst employees is highly consistent across several studies (Cisco, 2022; Kirkham, 2022; Lund et al., 2021) It is such a popular topic amongst employees that a large proportion of employees globally would be willing to look for another job if they weren't afforded the hybrid option. Kirkham (2022) found that 47% of employees within their sample felt this way, Cisco (2022) found that 57% of the employees within their sample felt that if they were unable to engage in hybrid work they would find another job.

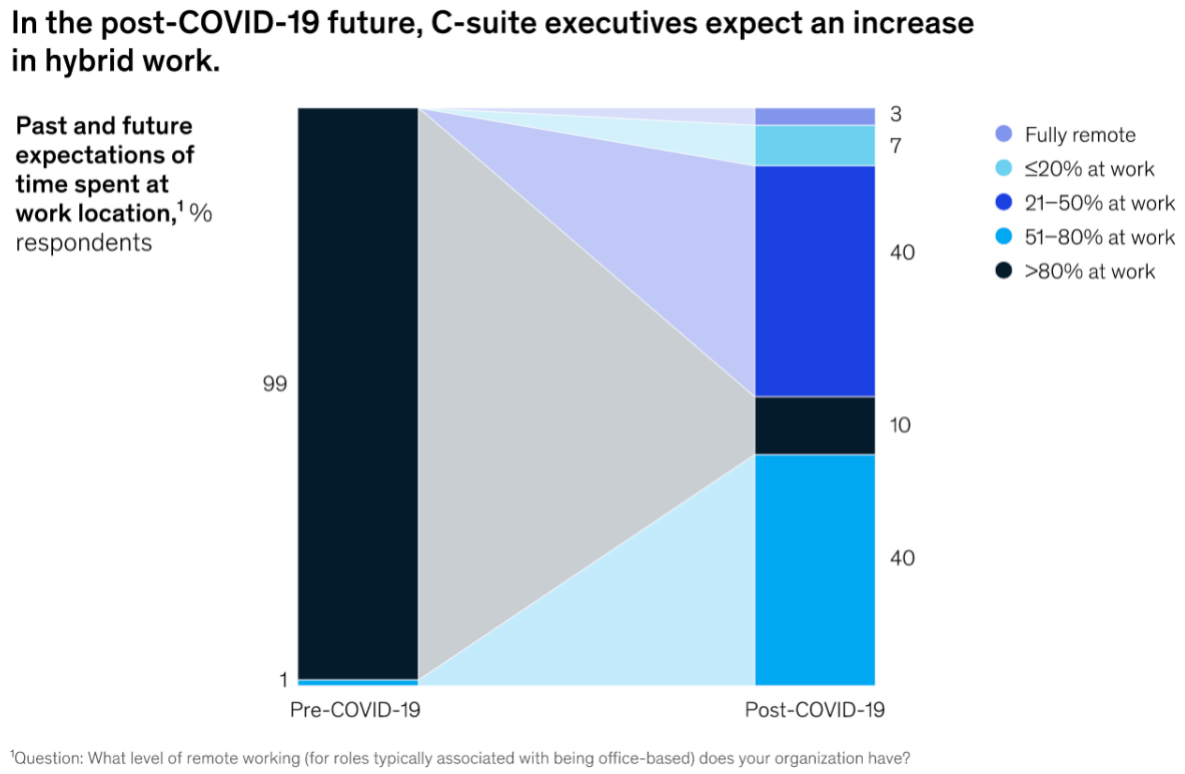


Figure 1. *The future will be more hybrid (McKinsey 2021*)

Such sentiments are leading a large number of organisations to engage in hybrid work in order to not lose their top talent (Dowling et al., 2021) For the first time, we are seeing an employee-led future of work (Newman, 2022). Due to the increased flexibility caused by the remote working component of hybrid work, there is a shift in reliance away from the employee relying on the employer to the employer relying on the employee (Dowling et al., 2021; Trevor & Holweg, 2023). This is not only causing a shift in the location of where an employee can conduct their work, but it is causing an ideological shift within organisations through acts as organisations looking at potentially changing their office design to ensure that when employees do come to the office that they feel it is a meaningful place to do their work (Trevor & Holweg, 2023).

As stated, Covid-19 had caused a vast increase in employees using technology to aid them to complete their specific work tasks without engaging in person with their workmates,

managers, customers, suppliers, etc. (Wontorczyk & Rożnowski, 2022). Although employees have been working with technology for a few decades now, Covid-19 brought forth technology use that had only ever been seen by a minority previously and therefore became a major influential actor in altering the sociotechnical systems in which employees operate globally (Wontorczyk & Rożnowski, 2022).

The evolution of workplace sociotechnical systems

A socio-technical system comprises of the interaction between 'social' (human actor) and 'technical' (technology) (Walker et al., 2008). When looking at an organisation it can be defined as a complex socio-technical system, this is because small changes in the initial task conditions lead to nonlinear and unpredictable outcomes (Karwowski, 2012). This was evident when Covid-19 arose. No one could predict that the world of work was to change in the way it did, through the alteration of the work processes (task conditions) such as using virtual meeting platforms instead of in-person meetings and cloud-based monitoring instead of weekly in-person meetings. From this we can see that this required a behavioural adjustment from the employees during the Covid-19 era. These forms of behavioural adjustments that arise from a situation or circumstance such as a pandemic, that an individual is exposed to are stressful (Lazarus, 2000). This is not limited to only negative change, positive change can also be stressful to an individual (Lazarus, 2000). Therefore, from this and keeping the theory of complex socio-technical although it is not possible to predict that when organisations shift from remote working to hybrid working, the employees will encounter some form of stress whether this change is welcomed or not. However, it is inherent that organisations will still try to have some form of prediction or contingencies in place, to mitigate potential unwanted consequences (Karwowski, 2012). This makes it fundamentally important to understand the human component and its intricacies within a socio-technical system, in order to get some sort of indication as to how their staff might react to the change. Therefore, a study such as this one, which is analysing a sample that is engaged in hybrid work, may be able to able to provide this indication to organisations who have not shifted to hybrid work yet, on how the employees are coping with job stress and if these employees are remaining committed within a hybrid working context.

Although this study seeks to understand the relationship between employee behaviours within a hybrid working context. It is important to include the potential advantages and

disadvantages of this work structure. These advantages and disadvantages aren't discussed with the aim to use these to create causal conclusions, they are simply listed to create a holistic picture of hybrid work.

Potential Benefits of Hybrid Work

Increased flexibility

Hybrid work provides employees with the flexibility to work from home or a traditional office setting, depending on their preferences and job requirements (Trevor & Holweg, 2023 Wigert & White, 2022). This is important as a recent survey by CNBC and Catalyst (2021) found that 76% of the respondents within the sample say that they want their organisation to make their work permanently flexible in terms of hours and location. This flexibility can improve work-life balance and reduce commuting time, leading to increased job satisfaction and productivity (Trevor & Holweg, 2023).

Increased flexibility within hybrid work also stems from the rapid change and acceptance of modern-day technology within the workplace (Markowski, 2023). ICT technology such as cloud computing, collaboration tools, and communication platforms such as Microsoft Teams, etc., has all had great success during the remote working era of Covid-19 (Markowski, 2023). This has allowed this success to correlate to the hybrid working model and therefore, make it easier for employees to choose if they want to come into the office or not, due to the fact that a lot of work can be done at home using these ICT technologies (Markowski, 2023). This, therefore, increases the hybrid working employees' flexibility in deciding what location to work. However, the increased flexibility should not solely be focused on work location, but as stated earlier there is a great emphasis on the work-life balance that hybrid work brings (Baker et al, 2020; Markowski, 2023). With an increase in flexibility, previous research (Charalampous et al., 2021; Iqbal et al 2022; Wang et al., 2020) on remote suggests that these employees may be experiencing less stress and more organisational commitment, however, this is done within a completely remote working environment.

Improved collaboration

Hybrid work allows employees to collaborate both in person and remotely, which can lead to improved communication and collaboration (Bloom et al., 2021). By allowing employees to work from home on certain days, organisations can reduce the number of employees in the office, making it easier for those who are in the office to collaborate and work together (Baker, 2021). This collaboration is beneficial to the organisation especially knowledge workers as it has been found that when these particular employees collaborate intentionally, they are 3 times more likely to reach high team innovation (Bloom et al., 2021). When employees are able to return to the office it creates more opportunities for individuals to collaborate (Bloom et al., 2021). This is due to the fact that it increases the employee's ability to implement the "when, where, and how" phenomenon (Baker, 2021; Bloom et al., 2021).

Cost savings

Hybrid work can help organizations save on costs associated with office space, utilities, and other expenses (Mirosiavov, 2023). By allowing employees to work from home on certain days, organizations can reduce the amount of office space required, leading to cost savings in the forms of lower utility bills, reduced cleaning services, and reduced cost of office supplies (Mirosiavov, 2023). PWC (2021) found that 87% of executives as of the time of the study, were considering making alterations to their real estate strategy. This would come in the form of opening more satellite locations and focusing their office resources on their premier locations (PWC, 2021). It was also found that over the next 3 years from the date of the study that numerous executives intend to reduce their office space drastically (PWC,2021).

Potential Drawbacks of Hybrid Work

Technological challenges

Hybrid work requires reliable and secure technology, which can be challenging for some organizations (Wigert & White, 2022). Employees may struggle with technical issues when working from home, and organizations may need to invest in additional technology to support remote work (Nguyen, 2021). Therefore, this is indicating that organisations who are engaging in remote work need to ensure that their employees remote working employees home offices need to be fully functional to handle the demands of the job, and offices within their buildings need to be able to have the technology needed to cater for remote work

(Wigert & White, 2022). Hybrid working is therefore, increasing the cost and difficulty of coordinating resources both at home and in the office (Wigert & White, 2022).

Difficulties in managing remote workers

Managing remote workers can be challenging for managers, and the hybrid work model can compound these challenges (Carruthers, 2021). Managers may struggle to provide feedback and support to remote workers, leading to a decline in productivity (Nash & Churchill, 2020). This may also lead to remote workers having feelings of disconnection with the organisation, as they may feel as if the in-office employees are favoured over them (Carruthers, 2021). This disconnect from the organisation can be further exaggerated by the fact that if managers do not manage their remote workers adequately, they may cause these employees to have a lack of promotional opportunities (Carruthers, 2021).

Having two forms of work to manage can be inherently difficult for managers, as this will involve two different forms of monitoring to ensure employees are doing their work. This will take the forms of acts such as in-office meetings to make sure the office employees are up to date and acts such as tracking task completion on teams to ensure the remote working employees are up to date (Carruthers, 2021). Therefore, the research aims to identify if this phenomenon will result in an increase in stress and a decrease in organisational commitment.

As previously stated, hybrid work is a ‘blended’ approach between remote working and in-office work. Therefore, in order to attain a deeper understanding of hybrid work these two forms of work will be outlined along with their advantages and challenges that a hybrid worker may face, to try and detect potentialities for these employees to experience the variables of job stress and organisational commitment.

Therefore, from this holistic picture, it can be seen that not only are employees being exposed to advantages that they were seeking both in the period of in-office working and remote work, but they are also acquiring a blend of disadvantages from in-office and remote work that could potentially lead to an increase in stressors. These potential increases in stressors may result in employees experiencing psychological strain that could manifest into job stress.

Therefore, it is important that the study investigates the concept of stress and job stress, as this is one of the variables that will form the basis of this study.

What is stress?

To fully understand how stress affects employees within the workplace, it is important to understand what the concept of stress is. Stress has various definitions within the literature, but the most common definition of stress is when an individual change their physical or mental state in response to situations (stressors) that may challenge or threaten the individual (Colligan & Higgins, 2006). According to Lazarus (2000) stress comes in three types, those being acute, episodic, and chronic. Acute stress is when individuals are exposed to new stimulants that exceed there available physical and psychological resources (Colligan & Higgins, 2006; Lazarus, 2000). This form of stress only lasts a short period of time and can arise through acts such as unrealistic work demands and unexpected meetings (Colligan & Higgins, 2006; Lazarus, 2000). This form of stress may lead to the individual experiencing anxiety, worry, frustration, etc. (Colligan & Higgins, 2006; Lazarus, 2000). Episodic stress relates closely to acute stress; however, the individuals experience the form of stress on a more regular basis, hence the term 'episodic' (Colligan & Higgins, 2006; Lazarus, 2000). Symptoms of someone experiencing this form of stress are aggressiveness, impatience, etc. (Colligan & Higgins, 2006; Lazarus, 2000). Chronic stress is when an individual experiences stressor for a prolonged period of time (Colligan & Higgins, 2006; Lazarus, 2000). This type of stress often stems from family problems, poverty, and job strain (Colligan & Higgins, 2006).

Job stress

From the conceptualisation of stress, for the purposes of this study, there will be a concentration on job stress. Job stress is when employees perceive their demands from any aspect of their work role exceed their perceived ability to cope with these work demands (Gupta & Beehr, 1979). These types of demands can be characterized through the following examples: work overload, heavy lifting, interpersonal conflict, lack of autonomy, and job insecurity (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). If an individual does not have the ability to cope with these demands it may lead to negative consequences or behavoiurs such as a decrease in job

satisfaction, organisational citizenship behavoiurs, organizational commitment, performance, and physical and mental wellbeing and an increase in absenteeism and turnover intention, hostile behaviour and actual turnover (Gupta & Beehr, 1979; Nicholson et al., 1976; Robbins et al., 2016). Therefore, due to the increased opinions from employees that hybrid working is the future and organisations should break away from the traditions around work (Lund et al., 2021), it paves the way for this study to analyse if these traditional negative employee outcomes that relate to stress are still prevalent within the hybrid working context. Employees have stated that they are willing to remain committed to their organisations even if they have to decrease their salaries (Measatas, 2018; Barrero et al., 2021). Now, this is a deviation from the norm of traditional employee attitudes pre-Covid-19 (Kumasey et al., 2014; Jorgensen & Rothmann, 2008), therefore it will be interesting to see whether or not the relationship between job stress and organisational commitment, still provides the same outcomes within a hybrid working context.

Organisational commitment

Therefore, when we look at organisational commitment, it often has been one of the most widely researched topics in organisational behaviour literature (Aggarwal-Gupta et al, 2010; Meyer & Herscivitch, 2001). It can often be seen as a state whereby the employees are committed and willing to assist the organisation in achieving its goals, through the employees' levels of identification, involvement and loyalty (Singh & Onahring, 2019). From this analogy it can be seen that an organisation acts as a form membership between themselves and their employees, and just like any membership an individual needs to align with that institution's goals and directives (Singh & Onahrig, 2019). Building on this, organisational commitment has often been described as the behaviour of an individual that ensures an individual will remain within a particular course of action (Aggarwal-Gupta et al, 2010). Organisational commitment can be seen as being at the forefront for an organisation to succeed, as when employees are committed, they tend to be more productive, they have an increase in organisational citizenship behaviour and have more job satisfaction which increases their performance (Jaros, 1997; Saadeh & Suifan, 2019; Shore et al., 1993; Tett & Meyer, 1993). From these positive employee behavoiurs that's brought about by organisational commitment, it is not only crucial to the organisation but it's crucial to the employees' physical and psychological well-being (Jaros, 1997). Organisational commitment is not a straight-forward exchange between the employee and organisation, although most

employees tend to have an innate initial commitment to their organisation, the concept takes on various different forms (Saadeh & Suifan, 2019). Meyer and Allen (1991) devised a model to define these different forms of commitment and they argued that commitment within the organisation takes on three different forms, being affective, normative and continuance commitment. This model has been supported by numerous studies (Adzeh, 2013; Mahembe, 2010; Mahembe & Engelbrecht, 2013), and that is why it is important for this study to conceptualise the model devised by Meyer and Allen (1991), in order to provide a more holistic view into the intricacies of organisational commitment.

Affective commitment

Affective commitment is the employee's emotional attachment to the organisation (González & Guillén, 2007; Jaros, 1997). This is a type of commitment that stems from a deeper emotional bond between the employee and the organisation and can be characterised by emotions such as loyalty, belonginess, and fondness (Coetzee et al., 2019). It was found that if employees experience these positive work experiences, it will foster growth within the employee, as well as increasing the employees perceived organisational support through mutual obligation and constructive interaction with individuals (Coetzee et al., 2019; Tumwesigye, 2010). Therefore, the employee may feel as if their individual needs have been met through the support of the organisation (Coetzee et al., 2019). This will increase an employee's affective commitment as they will have a strong emotional attachment to the organisation, therefore decreasing an employee's turnover intention (Jaros, 1997).

Normative commitment

Normative commitment is when an employee feels as if he/she has to remain or is obligated to remain committed to the organisation (Saadeh & Suifan, 2019). This can often be seen as a sense of moral obligation towards the organisation (Masud et al, 2018). One way in which this type of commitment originates is from societal or social pressures that 'force' the employee to remain at the organisation (Saadeh & Suifan, 2019), an example of this would be if an employee's mother or father has worked at the organisation for a number of years and has stressed the importance to the employee of showing loyalty to the organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Another way in which an individual may be normatively committed to their organisation is by being exposed to the organisations values and norms (Garg, 2018). This

can be done through in-person behavoiurs within the workplace that allows an employee to become associated with the organisation they are working for (Garg, 2018). This relates highly closely to a conceptualisation of commitment outlined by Wiener (1982) where commitment was defined as the "totality of behavoiurs and normative pressures to act in a way in which meets organisational goals and interests" (p.418) and went further on to state that "they believe it is the 'right' and moral thing to do" (p. 421). It has been found that employees who are able to produce normative commitment, are more likely to make a positive contribution to the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 2000; Garg, 2018). This can further be supported by the fact that Gellatly et al. (2006) found that employees who show high levels of normative commitment are less likely to turnover and are more likely to show citizenship behaviour.

Continuance commitment

Lastly, continuance commitment is when the employee remains at the organisation because the perceived trade-off (cost) of leaving the organisation is too high (Coetzee et al., 2019; Jaros, 1997; Saadeh & Suifan, 2019). This type of commitment stems from when employees experience high social and economic costs, if they had to leave the organisation they are working for (Allen et al., 1990; Coetzee et al., 2019). For example, this may have been quite apparent during the initial phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, as due to the economic effect it had on the country employees may have remained with their organisation due to a lack of jobs or employment uncertainty (Fana et al., 2020; González & Guillén, 2007), which in affect would contribute to the social costs especially if that employee was the bread-winner of the family, they could not risk losing their jobs (Allen et al., 1990; Coetzee et al., 2019). Economic costs that may cause the employee to remain committed to the organisation is aspects such as pay, tenure, pension, health benefits, as these aspects allow the employee to have a sense of security (Allen et al., 1990; Coetzee et al., 2019). The employees may also want to retain their medical benefits from the organisation, in case medical treatment is required if he/she contracts Covid-19 or one of their immediate family members (Coetzee et al., 2019).

Now although all three forms of commitment are inherently different, what is certain is that when an organisation is going through a change like implementing hybrid forms of work, it is

inherently important that the staff remain committed to the organisation (Dowling et al., 2021). When an employee remains committed to an organisation they identify with the organisation they are working for, along with the organisation's values and goals (Robbins et al 2016). These two types of situations that were outlined coincides with the meta-analytic reviews of Mathieu & Zajac (1990) and Meyer, et al. (2002), where it can be seen that organisational commitment is influenced by situational and dispositional factors. Employees that are committed will be able to drive the change forward from an individual standpoint and from a collectivist standpoint by having an influence on their colleagues that aren't committed. Therefore, it's important to understand the relationship a dispositional factor like job stress within a changing and adapting time where there is an increased situational stressor such as implementation of hybrid work has on organisational commitment.

Job stress and organisational commitment

As stated, earlier organisational commitment is a highly intricate concept, and stress that arises from the job can influence the different types of commitment outlined by Meyer and Allen (2002) in different ways:

Affective commitment

It is found that individuals who have high levels of stress are less likely to experience high levels of affective commitment (Namasivayam & Zhao, 2007; Ruzungunde et al., 2016). When an individual is experiencing high levels of affective commitment, they are so engaged in the organisations activities and the aspects of their job, that even if there are stressful aspects to their job, they are less likely to experience this stress (Ruzungunde et al., 2016). However, individuals with low levels of affective commitment are more susceptible to being exposed to high levels of stress from work (Ruzungunde et al., 2016).

Continuance commitment

With this type of commitment, outlining a "I can't leave because there is no other option" approach from employees (Meyer & Allen, 2002), these individuals are found to experience quite high levels of stress (Ruzungunde et al., 2016). This is due to the fact that individuals who have high levels of continuance commitment are more likely to express negative

behaviours such as resentment and dissatisfaction, which makes them more susceptible to higher levels of job stress.

Normative commitment

Due to the fact that individuals who have high levels of normative commitment feel as if they have an obligation to stay their organisation (Masud et al, 2018), these types of individuals are less likely to pay attention to the stressors within the workplace, as they have a focus on the benefits (Ruzungunde et al., 2016). Therefore, these individuals are less likely to experience job stress.

Job stress has an immensely negative affect on organisational commitment, as those who are encountering high levels of job stress show a decrease in performance, and often no longer comply with an organisation's values, goals, guidelines, etc. (Wongsuwan et al., 2023). With the shift from remote work to hybrid work as stated earlier, employees may encounter some forms of stress, due to stressors such as a loss of autonomy, change in workload, technological demands, commuting, etc. (Visagie & Steyn, 2011). Furthermore, what has not been outlined is that within a country like South Africa that is plagued by crime, lack of service delivery, inequality, etc. Traditionally employees have been seen to be experiencing moderate to high levels of latent stress (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008; Simmons et al, 2019), Demerouti et al (2001), outlined that this has the potential to increase these employees' psychological demands which may affect their commitment to their organisation, as they may run out of psychological resources. Therefore, this leads to the first research question of the study as to whether or not this relationship between job stress and organisational commitment exists within a hybrid working context, where employees are seeming to be provided with more psychological resources

H1- *There will be a significant negative relationship between hybrid work stress and organisational commitment.*

Job-Demands Resources Model (JD-R)

The JD-R model was first formulated by Demerouti et al. (2001), and within this proposition the model aimed at analysing the causes or antecedents of employee burnout. The JD-R

model broke an employee's work up into two specific categories: Job demands and Job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Demerouti et al. (2001) stated that when an employee experienced excessive job demands such as work pressures, emotional demands, work-home conflict, etc., he/she needed an equal or excessive amount of job resources such as autonomy, social support, coaching, etc., in order to cope with the job demands if there were insufficient job resources the employee will experience a decrease in performance and therefore experience burnout. Although the theory is premised around job performance (Bakker & Heuven, 2006), it has been used to various constructs within an organisational context such as: presenteeism (Demerouti et al., 2009), work-home interference (Bakker et al., 2011), organisational commitment (Bakker et al., 2010) and many more.

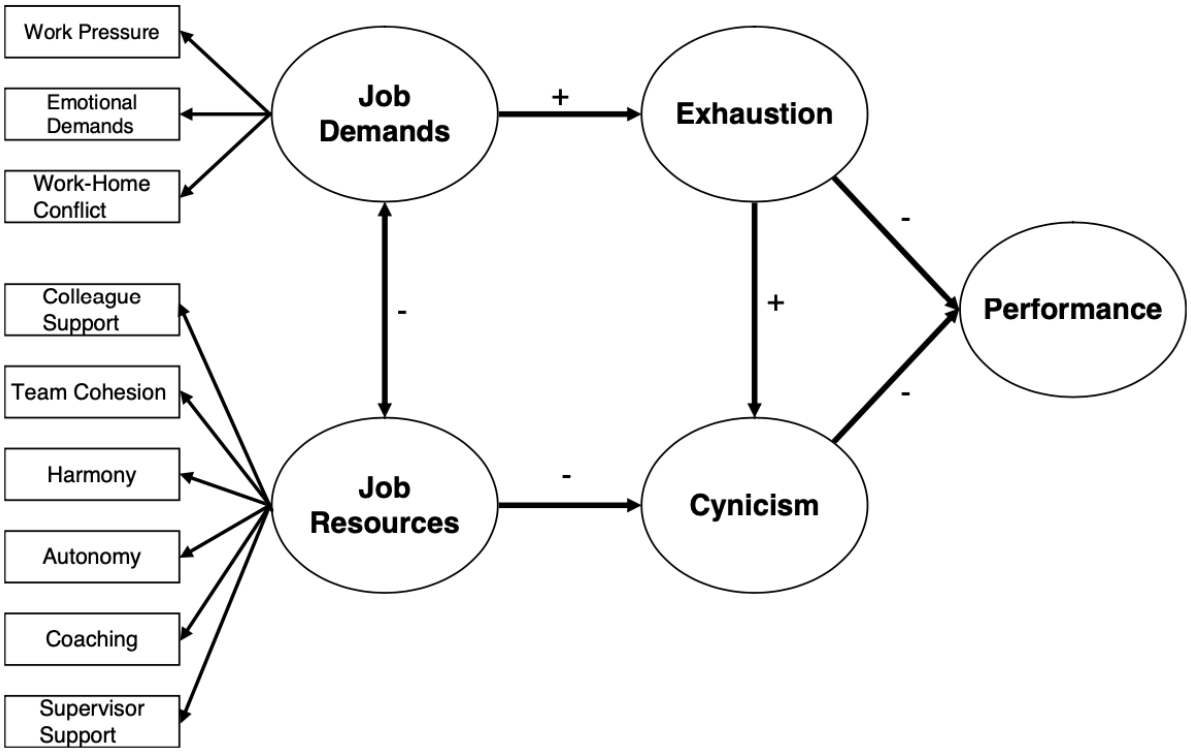


Figure 2. *The Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker et al., 2008).*

When looking at the JD-R model and its effects on organisational commitment there has been a few studies that have denoted its effects: Giesler et al. (2019) this study assessed the constructs that can be most related to hybrid work, as Giesler et al. (2019) found that job demands such as role conflict and work-family conflict had a negative effect on organisational commitment. Furthermore, Bakker et al. (2010) found that an employee's organisational commitment is negatively affected by job demands such as workload and

emotional demands. Finally, Kuusio et al. (2010) found that high job demands, low control, and poor support from colleagues, seem to decrease organisational commitment.

Hence, this model has the potential to shed light on the adaptability of hybrid workers in the face of heightened psychological pressures. These challenges include the delicate balance of work-home conflict, escalating workloads, growing isolation, and the evolving struggle to delineate work boundaries, to name a few. It may also give insight as to whether the significant boost in job autonomy and flexibility is sufficient to equip hybrid workers with the necessary resources to effectively manage these demands. It also allows the study to investigate whether an external factor, such as perceived organizational support, could moderate the relationship between job demands and job resources amongst hybrid workers.

Perceived organisational Support

Therefore, in order to cope with these increased work demands, employees often lean on support structures within the organisation and these perceptions of support may help to alleviate some of these demands (Robbins et al., 2016), this is called Perceived Organisational Support (POS). POS is the perception an employee has as to what degree the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Robbins et al., 2016; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Satardien et al., 2019). Perceived organisational support is important for employees within an organisation, as employees tend to attach a human like personification to the organisation they work for (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This influences how employees perceive the favourable and unfavourable treatment of an organisation, which they tend to see it as a personal attack on them (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Due to this it can be deduced that perceived organisational support has a strong connection to the employee's commitment towards the organisation (Eisenberger et al., 1990). POS can be highly beneficial to the organisation, as if the employee perceives there to be support from the organisation according to the social exchange theory they are likely to reciprocate in loyalty and effort (Levinson, 1965). So, it's important to research whether this traditional conceptaulisation of POS that can be explained by the social exchange theory, is still evident within the hybrid workplace. As Levinson (1965) and Eisenberger et al's (1990) theories suggest that they were synthesised in a period were in-office working was the norm, it would be interesting to find whether or not the modern day worker still reciprocates those attitudes outlined by Levinson's (1965) social exchange theory within a hybrid workplace.

The majority of the time employees interact with their organisation through their supervisor (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Therefore, supervisors become the agents for the organisation, through employee personification when it comes to providing support to the employees of the organisation (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Levinson, 1965). This constitutes the importance of organisations having supervisors that support their subordinates as this could affect the employees' job satisfaction, performance, physical and psychological well-being and commitment to the organisation (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Although there is a strong focus on supervisor support within the POS literature, it is not the only factor that may influence an employee's POS. Acts such as job security (Allen et al 1999), autonomy (Eisenberger et al., 1999), and role stressors (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) all pay a role in whether or not the employee has high levels of POS.

Therefore, by having employees that show high perceptions of organisational support it creates a sense of obligation to care for the organisation's welfare and to help the organisation reach its objectives (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This could be particularly useful in times where the organisation undergoes change, like the incorporation of hybrid work. Due to the POS the employee has it may mitigate the negative attitudes that accompany job stress as it may give the employee more resources in order to cope with the new demands of hybrid work (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). High levels of POS as the employee's strong emotional obligation to the organisation may cause them to remain committed to the organisation. Therefore, the current research will seek to understand if the increased autonomy and flexibility brought about by hybrid work, may influence the traditional literature understanding and outcomes of POS within the workplace, particularly in terms of its relationship to job stress and organisational commitment.

Perceived organisational support and job stress

A vast consensus among employees is that many stressors that arise within the workday such as work overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, etc., can be controlled by the organisation (Xu & Yang, 2021). This creates a negative emotion within the employees in an organisation whereby, they believe that these stressors are a result of a lack of support from the organisation (Xu & Yang, 2021). This suggests that job stress has a negative relationship with POS and therefore, as job stress rises POS decreases amongst employees (Xu & Yang,

2021). Studies such as Ghasemzadeh et al. (2015) and Saadeh & Suifan (2019) support the notion that there is a negative effect between POS and job stress. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found that unfavorable work conditions which increases the presence of stressors has a negative correlation with POS. When looking at this within a hybrid working environment there could be aspects such as technological issues, work-life imbalance, isolation, etc. and therefore, it's important to study this relationship within this working environment.

Perceived organisational support and organisational commitment

Traditionally these two variables are often used together to study employee behavoiurs within an organisation however, they are not the same empirically (Aube´ et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2005; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Shore and Tetrick, 1991). What is interesting about the relationship between these variables is that POS has a has been found to have a relationship between all three forms of organisational commitment (Aube´ et al., 2007). Pack et al. (2007) found that POS had a significant relationship with affective commitment with 46.2% of the variance being explained by POS, and with normative commitment with 39% of the variance being explained by POS. Further studies such as Casper et al. (2002) and Shore & Wayne, (1993) found that POS is associated with affective commitment. Previous research is therefore, indicating that employees who experience POS are more inclined to show an obligation to stay in the organisation, as well as having a positive emotional commitment to the organisation. What has become evident through the analysis of previous research (Casper etal., 2002; Kim et al, 2016; Pack et al 2007; Shore & Wayne, 1993), is that most research on the relationship between organisational commitment and POS has been focused to the individual factors of organisational commitment (affective, continuance and normative) and not organisational commitment as a whole. Furthermore, all studies have been focused on employees pre-Covid- 19 and with so many situational factors affecting commitment during and post-Covid-19 in a hybrid working era like job stress, it is pertinent that an analysis of POS is conducted, in order to determine if it is able to moderate this relationship for a modern-day worker.

H2- *Perceived organisational support will provide a moderation effect between job stress and organisational commitment. in a hybrid working context.*

Therefore, it is evident that the relationships POS has had with the variables of job stress and organisational commitment in previous research can be found to have had positive effects. Therefore, job stress and organisational commitment having a potentially detrimental effect on each other led the study to question what the role of POS would be in this relationship within a hybrid working context. The hypothesised relationship can be conceptualised by the model below:

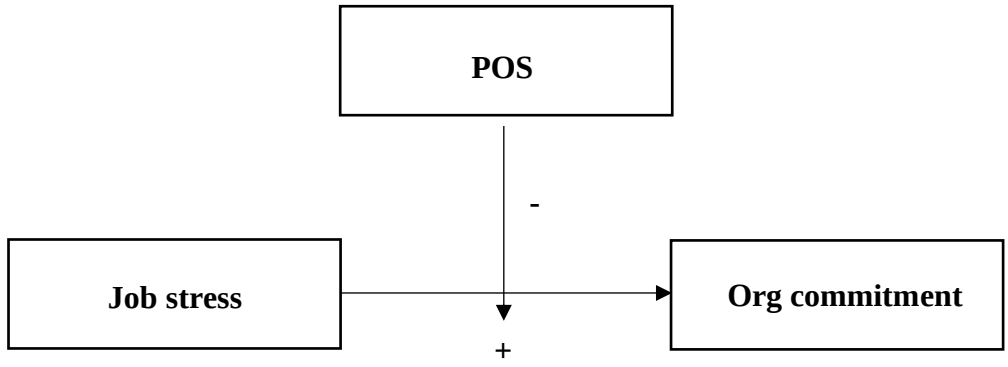


Figure 3. *Conceptual model*

Chapter 2 - Method

Introduction

This chapter will provide an outline of the methodology that was used in this study. This will be done by presenting a discussion of the research design, sample and sampling strategy, instruments, procedure, ethical considerations, and the approach that will encompass the data analysis within the study.

Research design

The study was conducted using a quantitative cross-sectional approach, a correlational design was used in order to measure and describe the relationships between the variables of job stress, organisational commitment and perceived organisational support. This allowed for an understanding of the direct relationship between job stress and organisational commitment

and to establish what influence perceived organisational support has in moderating the relationship. This type of design allowed the data collection process to be relatively cheap and time efficient. The nature of the study meant that there would be no manipulation of the independent variable, no control group and no random assignment.

Sampling and Sampling strategy

The study used non-probability sampling, which takes the form of purposive convenience sampling in order to attain a target population comprised of individuals working within a hybrid workplace in a corporate organisation. This ensured that the study attains data from participants that are the best-fit for the study and does not attain data from participants that could taint and skew the results of the study (employees who aren't engaging in hybrid work). In order to attain this sample, access was obtained through the permission of the organisation's Human Resource Business Partner, this organisation is within the corporate sphere in the data management and IT services sector. The employees were asked to complete an online self-report survey that was dispersed in an email thread by the Human resources Business Partner. From this email thread, the survey was open from the 28th of September 2022 to the 13th of November 2022, where a potential 2000 employees would have the opportunity to answer the self-report online survey. The study was able to obtain 164 responses with 118 completed responses, this indicated a response rate of 8.2%. Within these 118 completed responses, the sample was further refined due to eligibility by allowing those who do not engage in hybrid work to participate; however, they were removed during the data cleaning process. There were some further participants also excluded due to being outliers, which were identified using stem-and-leaf plots and having 2 Eigen values greater than 1 within SPSS. Through the culmination of these methods, the study was left with a final sample size of size of 106 participants. Table 1.1 depicts the demographic details of the sample

Table 1.1 *Demographic characteristics of the sample*

Variable		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	63	59.4
	Female	43	40.6
Age	18-24	0	0

	25-34	14	13.2
	35-44	28	26.4
	45-54	43	40.6
	55-64	18	17.0
	65-74	3	2.8
Race	African	16	15.1
	Coloured	5	4.7
	Indian	7	6.6
	White	76	71.7
	Other	2	1.9
Marital Status	Married	77	72.6
	Widowed	2	1.9
	Separated	1	0.9
	Divorced	9	8.5
	Single	17	16.0
Parents	Yes	78	73.6
	No	28	26.4
Level of position	Entry-Level	6	5.7
	Intermediated/ experienced staff	76	71.7
	First-level management	7	6.6
	Middle management	14	13.2
	Executive/ senior management	3	2.8
Amount of years at the organisation	Less than 3 months	1	0.9
	3 months > 6 months	1	0.9
	6 months > 1 year	2	1.9
	1 year > 3 years	22	20.8
	3 years > 6 years	22	20.8
	6 years > 10 years	21	19.8
	10 years <	37	34.9
Engaging in hybrid work	One day per week	10	9.4
	Two days per week	96	90.6

The demographics in terms of gender were found to be that out of the 106 completed responses, 63 (59.4%) were male and 43 (40.6%) were female. In terms of the age distribution 14 employees (13.2%) were between the ages of 25 to 34, 28 employees (26.4%) were between the ages of 35 to 44, 43 employees (40.6%) were between the ages of 45 to 54, 18 employees (17.0%) were between the ages of 55 to 64, and 3 employees (2.8%) were between the ages of 65 to 74. In terms of race within the sample, 16 individuals (15.1%) were African, 5 individuals (4.7%) were Coloured, 7 individuals (6.6%) were Indian, 76 individuals (71.7%) were White and 2 individuals (1.9%) characterised themselves as Other. The sample contained 77 individuals (72.6%) who were married, 2 individuals (1.9%) who were widowed, 1 individual (0.9%) who was separated, 9 individuals (8.5%) who were divorced, 17 individuals (16%) who were single. Table 1.1 also indicates that 78 individuals (73.6%) had children and 28 individuals (26.4%) indicated that they did not have children. Within table 1.1 it provided information on what the employee's level their position at the organisation was, of the 106 individuals: 6 individuals (5.7%) found themselves within entry-Level positions, 76 individuals (71.7%) found themselves to be intermediated or experienced staff (senior staff), 7 individuals (6.6%) found themselves to be within first-level management, 14 individuals (13.2%) found themselves within middle management, 3 individuals (2.8%) found themselves in executive or senior management positions. In terms of tenure at the organisation the sample was comprised of 1 individual (0.9%) working for less than 3 months at the organisation, 1 individual (0.9%) working for more than 3 months but less than 6 months at the organisation, 2 individuals (1.9%) working for more than 6 months but less than 1 year at the organisation, 22 individuals (20.8%) working for more than 1 year but less than 3 years at the organisation, 22 individuals (20.8%) working for more than 3 years but less than 6 years at the organisation, 21 individuals (21.2%) working for more than 6 years but less than 10 years at the organisation, 41 individuals (34.7%) working for more than 10 years at the organisation. Finally, within table 1.1 the different levels of those engaged in hybrid work was provided. These different levels were identified as at least one day a week and two or more days per week. Therefore, from the 106 participants: 10

individuals (9.4%) were engaging in hybrid work one day per week, and 96 individuals (90.6%) were engaging in hybrid work two days per week.

Measuring Instruments

Within the online self-report surveys that were created and used, there were three scales of measure: the perceived stress scale (PSS), organisational commitment questionnaire (OCQ), and the perceived organisational support scale (POS).

The structure of the scales is as follows:

The PSS

The PSS was developed by Cohen et al (1983) and is a 10-item Likert-type scale that has scoring ranging from 0-4, with 0 = never and 4 = very often. Scoring of the scale ranges from 0-40, with scores between 0-13 indicating low perceived stress, 14-26 indicating moderate perceived stress and 27-40 indicating high perceived stress. Items 4,5,7, and 8 should be reversed scored. The reliability of the scale are as follows: the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the study = 0.60, although the Cronbach alpha just meets the correlation cut-off of 0.6, the scale will still be used in the study as the low but adequate internal consistency could be attributed to the sample size of the study. The reliability and validity of the scale can be further supported by Manzar et al. (2019) were the psychometric properties of the scale was analysed and they were able to conclude that the scale had no major issues of the ceiling/floor effect, it had favorable factorial validity for 2-Factor model, internal consistency, item discrimination, and convergent validity. An example of an item in the scale are as follows: In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

The OCQ

The OCQ was developed by Mowday et al. (1979). It is a 15-item questionnaire that uses a Likert-type scale ranging from 1-7, with 1= strongly disagree and 7= strongly agree. Scoring

of the scale ranges from 15-105, with a high score indicating high organizational commitment and a low score indicating low organizational commitment. Item 3,7, 9, 11,12 and 15 must be reverse scored. The OCQ had a Cronbach alpha coefficient for the study that = 0.91 which indicates high internal consistency. An example of an item in the scale are as follows: I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful. I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for.

The POS

The POS was developed by Eisenberger (1986). It is an 8-item scale that uses a Likert-type scale ranging from 0-6, with 0=strongly disagree and 6= strongly agree. The scoring of the scale ranges from 0-48, with a high score indicating high perceived organizational support and a low score indicating low perceived organizational support. Item 2,3,5, and 7 must be reverse scored. The POS had a Cronbach alpha coefficient that= 0.90 which also indicates high internal consistency. An example of an item in the scale are as follows: The organization values my contribution to its well-being. The organization really cares about my well-being.

Procedure

The study proposal initially needed to obtain ethical approval from the School of Human and Community Development within the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Once ethical approval was obtained an online self-report survey was created using the platform Survey Monkey. Once the online self-report was created, an organisation that was predominantly engaging in hybrid work was approached for permission for the study to be conducted. In the case of this study, the sample that was able to be obtained came from an organisation within the data management and IT services industry. Within the organisation the Human Resources Business Partner (HRBP), was liaised with in order to gain access to the employees. The HRBP then emailed the informed consent form and survey link to the employees within the organisation.

The responses were then automatically recorded and stored on Survey Monkey. Once there was a sufficient amount of responses for the survey the link was then closed. From there the data was then exported to Microsoft Excel, this is where the data was then coded. Following

the coding of the data, it was then exported to SPSS where it was cleaned and analysed. The data was first analysed by conducting a Pearson's correlation in order to test H_1. Furthermore, in order to test H_2, a hierarchical moderated multiple regression was conducted. From this the results were then discussed.

Ethical considerations

In terms of ethical considerations, an informed consent form was attached to the email that contained the link to the self-report survey, which highlighted to the volunteer that their anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and post-study. The volunteer was also informed that they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any given time until they have submitted their response. The participant was also informed that participating in the study will be a form of informed consent, due to the fact that their personal details and signatures will not be gathered. Furthermore, an informed consent screening question needed to first be answered by the participants in order to be able to continue with the online self-report survey. The participants of the study were exposed to minimal/low risk of psychological harm and therefore an ethics clearance certificate was obtained from the School of Human and Community Development. In order to ensure that the data be stored ethically, the participant's non-identifiable responses will be stored on a password-protected laptop for the next five years.

Chapter 3- Results

Introduction

This chapter seeks to explain the results that were obtained within this study. Firstly, the study aimed at quantifying the strength of the relationship between job stress (JS) and organisational commitment (OC) within a hybrid working context, through the use of a correlation analysis. Secondly, the study aimed at determining whether perceived organisational support (POS) was able to provide a moderation effect on the relationship between JS and OC within a hybrid working context. This was determined using a moderated multiple linear regression which gave insight on the potential direction or magnitude change of the relationship.

Descriptive statistics of the variables

Due to the fact that the data was gathered on a Likert-type scale it was assumed that the data is interval and due to the sample size of 106 participants, it was assumed that the Central Limit Theorem can be applied as the sample exceeded the minimum of 30 participants required (Kwak, 2017) to meet parametric assumptions to conduct a Pearson Correlation. This allows the study to assume that the data is normally distributed (Kwak, 2017). Therefore a Pearson Correlation analysis was the appropriate test identify the extent of the relationship between job stress (PSS) and organisational commitment and to determine the degree of strength relationship between the variables (Curtis et al., 2016)

In order to get a better understanding of the distribution of the variables within this study, table 3.1 below was generated in order to display the descriptive statistics of the variables.

*Job Stress (Perceived stress total (*PSS_TOTAL*))*

As found in table 3.1 below, the minimum score was .80 and the maximum score was 2.80. The mean score for PSS was .62 with a standard deviation of .41. This means that the data is tightly grouped around the mean as 68% of the data falls between 1.21 and 2.03, this indicates 1 standard deviation from the mean on either side. When looking at the skewness of .34 and kurtosis values of -.19, this indicates that data is normally distributed as it falls within the skewness threshold of +1 and -1 and the kurtosis threshold of +3 and -3.

Perceived Organisational Support (POS_TOTAL)

As found in table 3.1 below, the minimum score for POS is 1.13 and the maximum score is 6.00. The mean score is 4.01 with a standard deviation of 1.22. This means that the data is tightly grouped around the mean as 68% of the data falls between 2.79 and 5.23, this indicates 1 standard deviation from the mean on either side. When looking at the skewness of -.19 and kurtosis of -.71, due to the fact that the data falls between the skewness and kurtosis cut-off points, we can assume that the data is normally distributed.

Organisational commitment (OC_TOTAL)

As found in table 3.1 below, the minimum score is 2.67 and the maximum statistic is 6.93. The mean score is 5.24 with a standard deviation of .97, yet again this indicates that the data is tightly grouped around the mean as 68% of the data falls between 5.96 and 6.21, this indicates 1 standard deviation from the mean on either side. When looking at the skewness of -.33 and kurtosis of -.58, due to the fact that the data falls between the skewness and kurtosis cut-off points, we can assume that the data is normally distributed

Table 3.1 *Descriptive statistics for the variables within the study*

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
PSS_TOTAL	1.63	.41	.80	2.80	.34	-.19
POS_TOTAL	4.01	1.22	1.13	6.00	-.19	-.71
OC_TOTAL	5.24	.97	2.67	6.93	-.33	-.58

What is the relationship between Job stress and organisational commitment within the hybrid working context?

This relationship between the variables of job stress (dependent) and organisational commitment (independent) was determined using a bivariate Pearson's correlation,. Using Pearson's correlation allowed for the identification of the significance and direction of the relationship between the two variables. There was also an analysis of R^2, which was used to determine the effect size of the association. The level of significance was set at α=.05

Table 3.2 *Relationship between Job stress and organisational commitment within the hybrid working context*

Variable		Perceived Stress Total	OC Total
PSS_T	Pearson Correlation	1	-.196
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.044*
	N	106	106

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

When looking at table 3.2, , it can be seen that there is a statistically significant negative relationship between job stress (PSS) and organisational commitment as p=.04, therefore

p<α. Due to the fact that r(144)=-.196, the correlation coefficient falls in the bracket size of 0.00 to 0.30, therefore it can be deduced that there is a very weak negative correlation between job stress (PSS) and organisational commitment. With R^2 =0.04, it is considered that there is a negligible to weak effect size as only 4% of the variance of Job stress (PSS) (dependent variable) can be explained by the variance of organisational commitment (independent variable).

Is perceived organisational support able to moderate the relationship between job stress and organisational commitment?

To test the hypothesis that perceived organisational support has a moderating effect on the relationship between job stress and organisational commitment, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. In the first step, two variables were included: Job Stress and Perceived Organisational Support. These variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in Organisational Commitment, R^2 = .408, F(2, 103) = 35.422, p = <.001. To avoid potentially problematic high multicollinearity with the interaction term, the variables were centred and an interaction term between Job Stress support and Perceived Organisational Support was created (Aiken & West, 1991). Centring of the variables also aids in the interpretation of the interaction term (Hayes, 2018). Next, the interaction term was added to the regression model, which accounted for a non-significant proportion of the variance in Organisational Commitment, ΔR^2 = .005 ΔF(1, 102) = 23.892, b= .074, t(106) = .949 p = .345. Therefore, due to the fact that the interaction term was not significant a simple slopes analysis was not conducted.

Table 3.3 *Moderation analysis for the interaction between perceived organisational support on the relationship between job stress and organisational commitment*

				95% CI			
Model	Variable	Beta	SE	LL	UL	β	p
1	Constant	5.238	.074	5.093	5.384		<.001*
	Cent_PSS	.040	.190	-.338	.418	.017	.833
	Cent_POS	.514	.064	.387	.641	.644	<.001*
2	Constant	5.263	.078	5.108	5.418		<.001*
	Cent_PSS	.081	.195	-.307	.468	.034	.680
	Cent_POS	.516	.064	.338	.643	.646	<.001*

Interaction	.149	.157	-.163	.461	.074	.345

a. Dependent Variable: OCQ_T

*$p \leq .05$

From the results the study was able to identify a statistically significant moderately negative relationship between job stress and organisational commitment. The study was also able to identify that there was no moderation effect from perceived organisational support on the relationship of job stress and organisational commitment. Therefore, within the next chapter there will be an analysis on as to what these relationships could potentially indicate for the broader working population and the hybrid workforce.

Chapter 4-Discussion

Introduction

Within this chapter, there will be a discussion of the results generated within the study. Within this chapter, the study will also seek to determine whether or not these relationships are in line with existing research or not. This will allow for a conclusion on these results, as well as determining what should be considered for future research and what are the practical limitations of the study.

Discussion

H1- *There will be a significant negative relationship between job stress and organisational commitment within a hybrid working context.*

The results from this study suggest that job stress is moderately negatively related to organisational commitment. Although the effect size is small the findings indicate that the more an employee is exposed to job stress, the less inclined they are to show commitment towards the organisation.

The negative correlation between job stress and organisational commitment suggests that as job stress increases, organisational commitment decreases. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown that job stress can have a negative impact on employee attitudes,commitmet and behaviors (Goswami, 2015; Mojoyinola et al, 2008).

This negative impact of job stress on organisational commitment has been consistently found in previous research (Jamal, 1984; Kahn et al., 1964; Alipour & Monfared, 2015; Bhatti et al., 2016; Haque & Aston; 2016; Jamsen et al, 2022). The majority of the past studies found strong negative relationships with job stress and organisational commitment, however, the moderate negative relationship found within this study coincides with Batti et al (2016) where it was also found the employees within the banking sector in Pakistan have a moderate negative relationship. This could potentially be indicating that employees and organisations within developing countries like Pakistan and South Africa could experience this relationship. Therefore, although the relationship is moderate it may still have the ability to provide insight into important implications for organisations. Organizational commitment is an important construct that has been linked to a variety of positive outcomes, including employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention (Jaros, 1997; Saadeh & Suifan, 2019; Shore et al., 1993; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Therefore, organisations that want to maintain a committed workforce need to be aware of the negative impact that job stress can have on organisational commitment and take steps to reduce job stress.

A novel element of this research is that the study was specifically conducted within a hybrid work context. Overall, the results of this study indicate that the relationship between job stress and organisational commitment within a hybrid working context, is similar to those experienced within traditional forms of office work. An added element of concern with regard to the negative correlation between job stress and organisational commitment in a hybrid work context, is that the ‘always-on approach’ that plagues the remote working aspect of hybrid work, can lead to increased job demands and the blurring of boundaries (Allen et al., 2015; Irawanto, 2021). This may lead to feelings of burnout and exhaustion (Finney et al., 2013) within the context of hybrid work, which can make it difficult for employees to maintain a sense of commitment to their organisation.

H2- *Perceived organisational support will moderate the relationship between work stress and organisational commitment in a hybrid work environment.*

The purpose of this study was to examine the moderating role of perceived organizational support (POS) in the relationship between job stress and organizational commitment in a hybrid work environment. Based on the results, it can be concluded that perceived organizational support was not found in the current study to moderate the relationship between job stress and organisational commitment. This is due to the statistically non-significant result, see table 3.1. Therefore, the results of the study indicate that the null hypothesis will not be rejected.

The finding that perceived organizational support did not moderate the relationship between job stress and organisational commitment suggests that the relationship between job stress and organisational commitment is not dependent on perceived organisational support. This finding is not consistent with previous research that has suggested that perceived organizational support can buffer the negative effects of job stress on employee attitudes and behaviors (Cohen & Willis, 1985). As it has been found that POS was able to moderate relationships that involved job stress, as well as finding that POS is able to provide an effective moderating role (Doef & Maes, 1999) previous research also found the POS was able to moderate the relationship between technostress as well (Xu & Yang, 2021) which would give an indication that this moderation relationship should be present within remote workers in terms of job stress. However, what may account for this lack of moderation may be deduced from Cohen and Wills (1985) research where it was found that support only provides a 'buffering effect' when it matches the coping requirements of the stressors. Therefore, what this potentially suggests that the relationship between job stress and organisational commitment within this sample, may require another form of coping mechanism such as esteem support or informational support (Cohen & Wills, 1985), in order for this relationship to be moderated within a hybrid working context

Another possible explanation for the lack of moderating effect of perceived organisational support in a hybrid work context is that the boundaries between work and home life may be more blurred than in a traditional office-based work environment (Sturges & Guest, 2004; Tasnim et al, 2017; Uddin, 2021). This may make it difficult for employees to perceive the support they receive from their organisation, even if it is present. Essentially when this is

looked at through the hybrid working scope the lack of moderation may be attributed to the fact that due to the increase in family interaction brought about by hybrid working (Trevor & Holweg, 2023), employees' social support structures may be strengthened. Therefore, this has the potential to impede on the ability for perceived organisational support to moderate the relationship between job stress and organisational commitment

Furthermore, the lack of moderating effect is that the level of perceived organisational support may not be high enough to buffer the negative effects of job stress on organisational commitment in a hybrid work context. This suggests that there is a possible need for organisations within the IT & Data management industry in South Africa, to focus on increasing the level of support provided to employees who work remotely or in a hybrid work environment.

Therefore, the results of this study suggest that perceived organisational support may not be an effective buffer against the negative effects of job stress on organisational commitment. Further research is needed to better understand the complex relationships between job stress, perceived organisational support, and organizational commitment within different work arrangements. One possible line of research is to assess whether, as suggested above, the issue is with the difficulty in conveying support to employees in a. hybrid work environment.

Limitations and recommendations for future studies

The first limitation that became apparent within the study is that the study was not demographically representative of the South African population. This was due to the fact that the majority of the sample (71.7%) comprised of white individuals. This has the ability to skew the perceptions of the sample, as statistically on average due to the vastly unequal society within South Africa, white individuals are seen to be the most privileged with the most access to resources. Therefore, this may have an impact as to how these workplace factors that were tested in the study are perceived, as the vast majority of the sample may have the resources to fully benefit from an initiative like hybrid working. Whereas, the vast population of South Africa does not have the means to benefit from initiatives like hybrid working, due to the lack of ICT resources, lack of ICT skills, infrastructure to ensure ICT resources run optimally like WIFI, etc.

The next limitation Is the fact that the data obtained for the study was obtained from one economic sector of the economy being IT and data management, these individuals job tasks are often easily performed in a solitary environment and often easily performed remotely, therefore this could skew the perception and results obtained within the study. As those who are in sectors such as marketing or even manufacturing could experience the relationship between the job attitudes differently. Therefore, I think it is important for future researchers to gather data from multiple economic sectors, as this will not only broaden their understanding of the variables, it will also increase the external validity of the study.

Another limitation of this study was the fact that the study looked at variables such as perceived stress and organisational commitment in their simplest forms without considering the aspects within organisational commitment such as affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment, that could either increase or decrease the variables relationship with perceived stress . For instance, within the variable of organisational commitment future researcher should investigate whether or not attitudinal and behavioral job-related outcomes that effect affective commitment can either strengthen or weaken the relationship with job stress.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has found a negative relationship between job stress and organisational commitment, and no moderation effect of perceived organisational support on this relationship, amongst employees who are engaging in hybrid forms of work within the IT & Data management sector. Although the study did not establish causality due to its non-causal design, the findings still have some potentially important implications for organisations that have implemented or are planning to implement hybrid work arrangements.

Even though the negative relationship between job stress and organisational commitment is not causal it still highlights the importance of addressing employee stress t in the workplace, especially when employees are engaging in different forms of work. Therefore, within the employee-led era, it is important that future organisations consider providing initiatives such

as hybrid work with aspects such as increased flexibility and autonomy, to potentially decrease employee job stress and retain top talent.

The absence of a moderation effect of perceived organizational support suggests that employees' perceptions of support do not necessarily buffer the negative effects of job stress on organizational commitment.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on the impact of hybrid working on employee outcomes. Future research can build on these findings by exploring other factors that may influence the relationship between job stress and organisational commitment in a hybrid working context and by examining the causal relationships between these variables.

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Addendum

Demographic Questions

Gender: How do you identify?

Male

Female

Other

What is your age?

18 to 24

25 to 34

35 to 44

45 to 54

55 to 64

65 to 74

75 or older

What is your marital status?

Married

Widowed

Separated

Divorced

Single

Do you have children?

Yes

No

What is your level of position at your organisation?

Entry-Level

Intermediate or experienced (senior staff)

First-level management

Middle management

Executive or senior management

How long have you worked at your organisation?

Less than 3 months

More 3 months but less than 6 months

More than 6 months but less than 1 year

More than 1 year but less than 3 years

More than 3 years but less than 6 years

More than 6 years but less than 10 years

10 years or more

What is your race?

African

Coloured

Indian

White

Other

How often are you engaging in hybrid work?

Not at all

One day per week

Two or more days per week

Perceived Stress Scale

For each question choose from the following alternatives:

0 - never 1 - almost never 2 - sometimes 3 - fairly often 4 - very often

l. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?

4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?

6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?

7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?

9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?

10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

8-item survey of Perceived Organisational Support

Listed below and on the next several pages are statements that represent possible opinions that YOU may have about working at _____. Please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by filling in the circle on your answer sheet that best represents your point of view about ____. Please choose from the following answers:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

1. The organization values my contribution to its well-being.
2. The organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me. (R)
3. The organization would ignore any complaint from me. (R)
4. The organization really cares about my well-being.
5. Even if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice. (R)
6. The organization cares about my general satisfaction at work.
7. The organization shows very little concern for me. (R)
8. The organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work.

Organisational Commitment Questionnaire

Instructions

Listed below are a series of statements that represent possible feelings that individuals might have about the company or organization for which they work. With respect to your own feelings about the particular organization for which you are now working (company name) please indicate the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by checking one of the seven alternatives below each statement."

1. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful.
2. I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for.
3. I feel very little loyalty to this organization. (R)
4. I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization.
5. I find that my values and the organization's values are very similar.
6. I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization.
7. I could just as well be working for a different organization as long as the type of work was similar. (R)
8. This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way ofjob performance.
9. It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave this organization. (R)
10. I am extremely glad that I chose this organization to work for over others I was considering at the time I joined.
11. There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely. (R)
12. Often. I find it difficult to agree with this organization's policies on important matters relating to its employees. (R)
13. I really care about the fate of this organization.
14. For me this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.
15. Deciding to work for this organization was a definite mistake on my part. (R)

Responses to each item are measured on a 7-point scale with scale point anchors labeled: (I) strongly disagree: (2) moderately disagree; (3) slightly disagree: (4) neither disagree nor agree: (5) slightly agree: (6) moderately agree: (7) strongly agree. An "R" denotes a negatively phrased and reverse scored item.