

**The Hybrid Working Model and Productivity:
Perspectives of South African Knowledge workers.**

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences and perceptions of the Hybrid Working Model (HWM) and its effect on productivity for South African knowledge workers. Through the experiences of twelve knowledge workers from different industries, including some who manage teams, the research explored the positive and negative aspects of the HWM and how the research participants navigated these, as well as their effect on productivity. The flexibility of the model was found to improve work-life integration and autonomy, but these did not motivate the participants in terms of productivity, as the literature suggests. This research proposes that, by planning and self-management within the flexibility of the model, the South African knowledge worker has been able to improve their work-life integration under the HWM, whilst maintaining their productivity in line with deadlines and expectations as a result of their level of commitment, which was facilitated by the sense of responsibility and ownership of work fostered by the model.

KEYWORDS

Hybrid Working Model, work from home, productivity, knowledge worker, flexibility,

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

Phomello Mojapelo

1 November 2022

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ABBREVIATIONS

CC:	Career Commitment
FWA:	Flexible Working Arrangements
HWM:	Hybrid Working Model
JA:	Job Autonomy
JC:	Job Commitment
OC:	Organisational Commitment
SA:	South Africa
US:	Unites States of America
WFH:	Working From Home

Chapter 1: Introduction to Research Problem

1.1. Introduction

The Hybrid Working Model (HWM) has been defined by Iqbal et al. (2021) as a blending of both traditional work at the office and a remote working/work from home arrangement. According to this model, it involves people working from home and people working from their offices. In South Africa, the restrictions imposed by government to address the COVID-19 pandemic, forced many South African workers who were able to do so to work from home. Most of those who could work remotely were knowledge workers. With the end of COVID-19, many companies wanted their people to stop working from home and come into the office. However working from home had benefits for some people, like mothers of young children. It is unclear whether working from home was more productive than working from the office, let alone the combination of the two. This research is intended to establish, in a qualitative manner, from the perspective of South African knowledge workers, whether the Hybrid Working Model has an impact on productivity. Knowledge workers are individuals who perform work through the use of knowledge and not manual physical labour (Reinhardt et al., 2011).

This chapter will introduce a brief background on the research topic, provide a country overview in the context of the study, and discuss the research problem, the benefits of conducting the study and scope of the study.

1.2. Background

A study conducted by Cisco (2020) to assess the technological readiness of South African corporate sector to work remotely reported that 37% of South African companies were digitally ready to pivot to a remote working model. While the rest of the organisations needed to go on a procurement drive for technological devices and experienced periods of non-productivity because of the world wide shut down - importing laptops and other devices was slow and demand high. The report states that 57% of companies reported that all of their employees had been working with laptops prior to the pandemic. According to the study, productivity improved by 70% for companies that were digitally ready to work remotely, while companies that were not reported a 29% improvement in productivity in working remotely. Global spending on information technology was projected to grow by

6% in 2021 compared to 2020 with an estimated amount of \$3.9 trillion due to pandemic (Gartner, 2021). Requiring employees to return to the office on a full time bases may not be justified from a cost perspective.

COVID-19 has just ended, however there will be other epidemics. Having an understanding of what is more productive, and for which workers, will help employers themselves to provide the flexibility necessary to allow people to work in environments where they are most productive. In South Africa particularly, there are issues of transportation: public transport is inadequate and people use cars as a mode of transportation, but we are living in an environment where there is pressure to reduce emissions in the face of increasing climate change. Over and above that, in the South African context, the number of people who can work from home is limited, therefore the HWM can work well.

The 21st century has seen organisations explore new ways to maintain a competitive advantage, cut operating costs, and recruit and maintain talent. One of the avenues organisations have adopted to achieve the aforementioned is the Flexible Working Arrangement (FWA) (Putnam et al., 2014). FWA *"is the liberty to adjust the where and how of work, encompassing the degree to which time, location and task features are adjustable to meet life, family and personal needs"* (Putnam et al., 2014, p. 183). The advancement in technology over recent decades enabled work to be conducted outside the office, and Working from Home (WFH) grew prevalent. WFH is defined as a working arrangement where work is conducted not just outside of the traditional work place but it is conducted from home, with technology as a tool to perform the work and as a communication tool (Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018). Telework, very similar to WFH, is also work conducted outside the office, based on the growth in reliance on technology to perform work from anywhere and specifically from home (Golden, 2009). Although the two terms are used interchangeably in literature, for this research, remote work is used and will be explored in detail in the literature review chapter.

Business disruption forced most businesses to adopt remote working to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus that affected all nations across the world. The limited movement of people that resulted represents a shift in the world of work for many

knowledge workers, who in an instant started working remotely and in most cases at home (Toscano & Zappalà, 2021). Historically, remote working has been referred to as Telework, but this describes a small number of people whose job could be performed out of the office using the technology available at that stage, on such a small scale it was almost at a test phase. Remote work was expedited by the pandemic, where employees at a massive scale globally were forced to work remotely.

For instance, in the financial sector, Standard bank has spent R12 billion on IT infrastructure to migrate to a Hybrid Working Model (Standard Bank Group, 2020). Health benefits, cost-saving, and employee satisfaction propelled banks such as Nedbank to permanently adopt a hybrid and flexible working model (TechCentral, 2021). Nedbank's Human Resource Executive, Deb Fuller, was quoted saying that this was already part of the banks' digitisation strategy prior to the pandemic, and that hybrid working has been on the horizon for them for some time: "*Subsequently, Nedbank has gradually introduced new Ways of Work and incorporated flexible work practices.*" (BusinessTech, 2022). The opportunity has been brought about by technology and the 4th Industrial Revolution. Standard Bank states that 75% of its employees continue working from home; however, unlike Nedbank, precaution measures have been taken into account with the intention of a planned return to the office (Standard Bank Group, 2020) despite the cash injection in IT. In 2021, the Standard Bank CEO affirmed the bank's intention to continue working remotely while saving revenue in floor space.

1.3. South African context

The production, approval and roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine in 2020 in developed countries provided industry with the opportunity to return to the normal way of working in the office, but countries such as Italy, who had lifted movement restriction, found that people continued to work remotely (Toscano & Zappalà, 2021). The South African government granted that corporates could make vaccination mandatory but requested business to accommodate employees who had medical or constitutional reasons for not vaccinating by allowing them to work remotely if possible (Nxesi, 2021). The discovery and approval of improved COVID-19 vaccines facilitated the gradual move from working fully remotely to the HWM. The COVID-19 vaccination roll-out programme in South Africa, started in March 2021 (Cooper et al., 2021), but met with much resistance from the South

African population because it was not mandatory, therefore permitting employees to continue to work remotely.

South Africa is battling an electricity crisis which could have a negative effect on the Hybrid Working Model. The national electricity utility has had to hike tariffs by over 300% in the last decade in order to keep up with its debts due to maladministration and rampant corruption (Bowman, 2020). The load shedding of electricity through rolling power cuts reached stage 6, with businesses and houses having three power outages per day with the longest outage being 4 hours long. Business, households and industry are all under pressure due to the electricity crisis (BusinessTech, 2022). The estimated cost of stage 6 power cuts is R4 billion per day on the economy because power outages occur during core working hours of the day (SME South Africa, 2022).

The loss in production especially when power cuts occur unannounced, requires business to invest in diesel generators. This has had a negative impact on small businesses who are still recovering from losses from the COVID-19 national lockdown. Infrastructure (electronics) damage, loss of connectivity during power outages, payment issues and low network coverage during power cuts have affected business negatively (SME South Africa, 2022). Growthpoint, a South African property company specialising in commercial properties, has been experiencing a shortage of diesel; the company communicated to their clients (mainly corporates) that they do not guarantee business continuity during power cuts and they should secure the integrity of their IT infrastructure and business security (BusinessTech, 2022). Whether working in the office or at home, power-cuts are a concern to the productivity of knowledge workers who rely on technology to perform tasks.

1.4. Research problem

This research is intended to establish whether HWM has an impact on productivity for companies, particularly in a world that is increasingly computerised, in a world where the 4th Industrial Revolution has come to the fore. By understanding the perceptions of the SA knowledge workers on what works for them will help organisations identify what is the best model to apply in their recruitment and also how they deal with their employees because

choosing a model in which employees are most happy will lead to greater job satisfaction and therefore greater productivity.

A quantitative study conducted in the United States of America (US) surveyed 1500 managers on their experience of the hybrid model in companies that were compelled to adopt the Hybrid Working Model due to lockdown restrictions. The study, according to Adam Ozimek (2020), found that for 56% of managers, the remote working experience exceeded their expectations; 40% specifying less distractions from colleagues and saving on commute time as top benefits of remote working. 75% reported an increase in productivity while 25% reported the opposite. Cisco (2022) hybrid working report conducted in both developed and developing countries claims that 69.4% of organisations in developed, versus 64.4% in developing countries, have adopted the Hybrid Working Model. In the South African context, statistics show that 14.1% of organisations in the private sector are fully office based, 13.8% fully remote and 71.1% are hybrid (ITForum, 2022).

Being afforded the opportunity to work from home but with Eskom's stage 6 load-shedding being implemented, which means electricity power cuts for a total of six hours per day with two hour intervals (Majola, 2022), can pose a challenge for knowledge workers while working from home. Going forward, business would need to take such factors into consideration when contemplating whether or not to return to work in the office or continue with the HWM. It is worth noting that the Cisco reports state that remote work had a positive effect on productivity overall. It appears that when people were working remotely, the South African knowledge worker remained productive. It is worth exploring their experiences and assessing whether studies conducted in developed countries that state that working from home has increased productivity have been the experience of South African knowledge workers. It would be useful to assess if working in preferred environments, such as from home, affects productivity, despite the various macro-challenges and individual challenges. As many organisations are contemplating or have implemented the Hybrid Working Model, it would be beneficial to appraise the effect of the model on productivity, in order to guide them when deliberating whether or not to return to the office, to offer a hybrid model, flexible working arrangement options and or remote work.

1.5. Purpose of research

The purpose of the study is to attempt to answer the following overarching question:

In what ways has the hybrid work model affected the productivity of knowledge workers in South Africa?

In order to gain insights on the general experiences of the knowledge workers, sub-questions were formulated to gather positive and negative experiences and perspective by asking the following: What has been your experience adopting the Hybrid Working Model? To expand on this question, the researcher requested that both negative and positive experiences be given and the participants were asked to give the preferred working Model and reasons for their answers. These questions provided the overall experiences, which could provide insights for business as to the manner in which to navigate the HWM in a way that best suits employees

The second sub-questions is as follows: How has the flexibility of the Hybrid Working Model affected the productivity in knowledge workers? Flexibility has been reported as the underlying value proposition of the HWM. The participants were asked about how the flexibility of HWM affected their productivity in terms of planned-to-done ratio, turnaround times and performance targets, in order to learn how the individual participants navigated their work in the HWM. These questions provide insight as to the mechanisms people used to ensure their commitments to their employers were met.

1.6. Benefits of the study

Much of literature on the effects of the HWM is based on studies that have been conducted in developed countries where it has been reported that HWM has positive and negative effects on the productivity (comprehensively covered in chapter 2). Contexts are different, developed countries do not have similar socioeconomic challenges and have developed infrastructure to implement the HWM. To further emphasise on the differences between the developed and developing world, the United States of America have observed the great resignation, an unprecedented number of recent resignations by the US workforce,

mainly knowledge workers in the technology, finance, engineering and healthcare sectors, a phenomenon which some have explained in relation to changes in working models (Serenko, 2022). Microsoft has reported that 41% of the American, European and Canadian workforce are set to resign from their current work (Microsoft, 2021). The reason given for the great number of resignations is resistance to going back to work traditionally in the office with no option to negotiate remote, hybrid or flexible working arrangements (Bloomberg, 2021). Individuals opted for freelance work that would have them work remotely and emigrating from the city to be closer with family (quality of life) (Serenko, 2022). Conducting the study in South Africa on this relatively new reality will contribute to studies conducted on the HWM and productivity elsewhere, bringing a South African (developing country) context to research.

The study would be beneficial for business because the participants provide insights on their preferences, whether or not they prefer the HWM, prefer remote working or returning to the office. The participants provide suggestions as to tailoring the Hybrid Working Model in a way that benefits the employers and employees, which is especially insightful as the Model is relatively new with unclear guidelines. Even if business were considering continuing in the HWM, the perspective of the research would be beneficial to business and productivity, helping to develop a South African HWM that is applicable to the South African knowledge worker, taking into consideration the country context. Business stands to gain insights on the factors that drive productivity in employees, which could inform them to provide that environment for their employees and obtain maximum outputs from them.

1.7. Research scope

An explorative study was conducted to study the perspective and experiences of the South African knowledge worker on the Hybrid Working Model by making use of the qualitative method of collecting data through semi-structured interviews. The study seeks to know the South African context of the HWM from the perspective of the knowledge worker, the manner in which they have been navigating their work in Model, the negative and positive aspects and the HWM's effect on productivity. The Model in itself is fairly new in South Africa, most studies on the topic were conducted in developed countries.

The following chapter reviews literature on the Hybrid Working Model and productivity overarching the study. Relevant theories were reviewed in order to establish what is known and unknown.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter has presented the importance of conducting this study and the benefits thereof to business and academia addressed in chapter 1. It is therefore critical to review literature in order to establish what is known and unknown on the research topic of the Hybrid Working Model in relation to productivity in order that these research findings could either confirm the literature or provide different outcomes and insights that could benefit business in applying the HWM. The following sections will shed light on what the literature states about the Hybrid Working Model, the duality of the model and the context of having just experienced remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. The HWM being a blend between working at the office and working remotely, it presents many characteristics that differ from the model of purely working from home. Following the comprehensive review of the HWM, productivity is then defined as per literature, followed by reviewing what the literature says on productivity in a HWM environment.

2.1. Hybrid Working Model

The geographical aspect of the Hybrid Working Model is stated to be multi-located work, in the office or outside of the office, by use of technology (Halford, 2005). Extending on the geographical aspect of the HWM, Grzegorzczak et al. (2021) claim that the HWM gives employees the choice to perform their contracted duties within contracted working hours remotely or in the office. Similarly, Lenka (2021) expands on the HWM at an organisational level by defining the Hybrid Working Model as organisations giving employees the choice to work physically and traditionally in the office or to work remotely. Both of these sources speak of the choice of employees and the combination of office and remote working.

Extending on the organisational aspect and introducing the benefits of the HWM for business and organisations, Iqbal et al. (2021) claim that the HWM is a blending of both traditional work at the office and remote work from a home arrangement, explaining how this model gives employees the choice to work in the office on certain days and remotely on other days, ensuring a level of flexibility at work, by which the organisation can both save on labour costs and enjoy an increase in employee satisfaction. Flexible work is

understood as the employment arrangement that varies from the traditional working day or week because employees decide, often based on family needs, as to when they perform work in keeping with their respective expected outcomes (MacEachen et al., 2008). Unlike the Grzegorzcyk et al. (2021) definition of the HWM, which speaks of the contracted duties within contracted hours, this definition of flexible work emphasises expected outcomes, implying flexibility or choice not only of location but also of time. Much literature states that working remotely affords employees with flexibility in terms of planning, organising and scheduling their work (Aczel et al., 2021). Since working remotely at least some of the time is characteristic of the HWM, this flexibility must also characterise it to some extent.

Expanding on Lenka, Grzegorzcyk et al. (2021) suggests that the organisation has the responsibility to decide whether they allow 100% remote working or insist on a Hybrid Working Model, in which case they either prescribe days for working remotely and days for working in the office or they give employees the opportunity to negotiate/apply for a preferred working arrangement. They further claim that for the successful implementation of the HWM, organisations need to have the following in place: contractual terms of both remote/office work in terms of flexibility, working hours etc.; frameworks for tracking space and time flexibility; and provisions for work-life balance (specified in working times).

Iqbal et al. (2021) stated that the HWM is an upshot of the technological advancement of the twenty first century, which has been exacerbated by the COVID19 social distancing regulations, but it is not a new phenomenon brought about by the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, organisations were already shifting towards Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA), work arrangements that allowed for flexibility to decide on the amount, timing, and location in which work takes place in order to balance work and life demands through working remotely and at flexible times (Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). Although the HWM addresses the physical aspect of where work takes place, whilst FWA address the flexibility in terms of time, in both cases the choice afforded to employees implies the where and the when of one's work.

The geographical aspect, posited by Halford (2005), refers to remote working as the dislocation of work enabled by technology - work can be performed out of the office space.

Building on the geographical aspect, the historical term for remote working was “telework”, defined as working off-site by use of technology, which, according to Grzegorzczuk et al. (2021), is different from working from home because remote work does not specify where the work takes place. The employee choice dimension of remote working is emphasised by Mostafa (2021), suggesting that remote working gives employees the choice to work where they are productive and that work can be performed from anywhere and not only in the office. According to an article published during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the national lockdowns and restricted movement of people, the remote working arrangement is defined as organisations’ employees, top management included, working remotely (physically out of the office) (Lenka, 2021). It is noted that the HWM, on the other hand, is a blending of traditional work in the office and working outside of the office. The following section seeks to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely and traditionally in the office.

The three constraints stated by Grzegorzczuk et al. (2021) for the delayed adoption of the WFH model are job design (the manner in which the job and tasks are structured); technological infrastructure and market failure in work organisation (an organisational culture of distrust between leadership and employees, and a lack of or stringent policies). Expanding on this, assessing which type of work can be performed remotely or at home is critical if productivity is to be prioritised. Sostero et al. (2020) state that the content of the work or task being performed determines whether or not it can be performed remotely; for instance, for tasks with a high level of sociability, although technology has advanced, loss of quality of the work is experienced when working remotely. Teaching, selling, negotiating, caring and coordinating have been classified by Sostero et al. (2020) as tasks that should not be performed remotely. It is to be noted that coordinating is a critical part of the tasks performed by managers, an area in which managers have been negatively impacted while working remotely (covered in the next section).

Conversely, intellectual tasks can be performed from anywhere without compromising quality. These are the jobs that require a computer; examples include ICT professionals, clerks, journalists (Sostero et al., 2020). Grzegorzczuk et al. (2021), in an article written a year later during the pandemic, argues that more jobs can successfully be performed remotely with technological advancements, highlighting the necessity to change the

method in which work is performed, such as: increasing the levels of autonomy when organising tasks (taking into consideration that individuals will be alone when performing tasks), the level of team work needs be adapt to the technology available to better coordinate work, and a move away from routine work.

2.2. Working from Home

Working from Home (WFH) is referred to as telework, virtual work, remote work, independent working and home office (Aczel et al., 2021). For the purpose of this study, WFH will be employed. Since technology is used to perform work and facilitate the sharing of information between employees and clients, WFH is applicable for knowledge workers (Rupietta & Beckman, 2018). Lippe and Lippényi (2019) introduce the perspective of business by suggesting that WFH gained momentum in the 1980s and 1990 as a cost cutting mechanism for organisations, for employee work-life-balance improvement and as a performance enhancement mechanism.

Working from Home has had a positive impact on employees in that being out of the office and with the absence of colleagues and managers, employees have increased levels of focus without office distractions (Aczel et al., 2021). Lippe and Lippényi (2019) raise the issue of the risk of losing knowledge sharing amongst employees, and social and professional isolation when employees work from home. Both points highlight the relevance of the Hybrid Working Model as it blends both office and remote working. The absence of a manager affords the employee with a level of autonomy in performing tasks or conducting work at their own discretion (Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018) and it is stated that autonomy is associated with an increase in productivity by employees because they are impelled to increase effort when afforded the opportunity to work from home as it is a privilege (Ipsen et al., 2021). This suggests that working from home has an element of employee motivation.

Saving costs and commuting time has added more time for employees, time which could be utilised in work-life integration activities such as conducting house chores, and tending to other family or personal commitments (Rupietta & Beckmann, 2018). Work-life integration has been defined as an organisational strategy that enables employees to

efficiently and effectively manage and perform their work duties and home obligations harmoniously without one taking precedent over another (Morris & Madsen, 2007). The opposite effect of failing to effectively and efficiently integrate work and life may result in work-life conflict which occurs when conflict arises due to a negative spill-over of work into life (Soomro et al., 2018). Work-life conflict is stated to be as a result of the demystification of boundaries between work and home activities by conducting them both in the same space, which may cause conflict between work and family caused by the spill-over work life into family life and vice versa (Clark, 2000). Traditionally, the physical office space is associated with work related tasks and one's home is a space of leisure and family. Giving employees the option to go and work in the office sometimes may be effective in avoiding negative work-life spill-overs.

Flexible work is defined as the employment arrangement that vary from traditional working day or week where employees decide based on family needs as to when they perform work in keeping with their respective expected outcomes (MacEachen et al., 2008). It is important to re-emphasize this definition of flexible work because it speaks to the flexibility that WFH affords to knowledge workers. The time factor for instance: flexibility in the WFH context has affording employees the liberty to choose where and when to work (Ipsen et al., 2021). Flexibility of work poses a balancing act for employees, multitasking work and home duties sometimes resulting in blurred lines between the two, and a decreased productivity on the work front (Aczel et al., 2021). The Border and Boundary theory speaks to boundaries between work-life and home-life (physically being in the office to conduct formal work and being at home to conduct family duties), time boundaries (time set aside for formal work, regardless of location, and time set aside for family activities), and psychological boundaries (employees' perceptions of work activities and home activities and the segmentation thereof) (Clark, 2000).

According to Rupiotta and Beckmann (2017), the increased autonomy of organising and scheduling work, is an intrinsic motivation for employees working from home that results in increased effort from employees. Job Autonomy (JA) is defined as "*the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out*" (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, p. 162). Hackman and Oldham (1976) further state that the

higher the autonomy of the job, the more responsibility the employee feels towards the job, which results in added effort in conducting the job. Autonomy is experienced as having few instructions from a line manager and no step-by-step manual on how to perform a task. The absence of a manager when working from home may be a positive motivation for employees. Suryadi et al. (2022) caution that JA when working from home is not effective for individuals who lack self-discipline. Lippe and Lippényi (2019) state that high levels of autonomy of employees working from home may negatively affect the quality of outputs due to little supervisor and colleague supervision. The above highlights the relevance of and importance of working in the office, especially for employees that require constant monitoring and supervision and lack the discipline to work independently.

Several drawbacks of the WFH model have been identified from a team or departmental perspective. Lippe and Lippényi (2019) posit that team-coordination may be negatively impacted when employees are working from home, which may result in tensions and resistance especially to new ideas or strategies because obtaining buy-in virtually is challenging and time-consuming. The ability of managers to arrange for all team members to be virtually 'in one room' is complex given the time flexibility of the WFH model. This may have a negative impact on performance management, providing feedback and taking remedial actions. This could be mitigated by a Hybrid Working Model, particularly when prescribed, in which there are set days when the whole team is in the office. Shobe (2018) asserts that team collaboration is vital to productivity; the added complexity of managers having to coordinate, organise, control and monitor performance virtually may negatively impact the overall performance of organisations due to lack of visibility and or delayed visibility of productivity and non-performance. Kirchner et al. (2021) further state that the nature of the work of a knowledge worker entails processing, sharing knowledge and information, which may be negatively affected if teams are working remotely. The lack of knowledge and information sharing could result in employees' loss of their intellectual productivity and therefore reduce overall productivity (Bolisani et al., 2020).

Negative social and psychological factors affecting employees working from home compared to office based workers are loneliness and isolation due to reduced social interactions in the office (Grant et al., 2013) which could result in reduced performance and productivity (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2011). Expanding on this, Lippe and Lippényi (2019)

state that professional and social isolation of working remotely, especially for individuals that are extroverts, may have a negative impact on their performance. Working from home may have a negative impact on career progression, due to lack of visibility from both the perspective of the individual and from managers who equate visibility with performance productivity (Xiang et al., 2021).

Remote working is facilitated and extensively dependent on technology and the physical equipment required, such as a desk, appropriate chair and a space to work. Inadequate tools of the trade may be a discouraging factor when working from home (Waizenegger et al., 2020). This highlights the added responsibility on business to ensure that their employees have tools to work from home, which is one negative aspect of technology, according to Allen et al. (2021). While for the employee who is technologically astute but cannot work autonomously, their productivity may be negatively affected when working from home (Kirchner et al., 2021). Overworking can also be a concern as a result of lacking adequate boundary management, because in traditional work in the office, a worker associates work activities with a physical space, specified hours and certain days of the week and non-work activities have their own physical space and specified time. Ashforth and Kreiner (2000) have stated that there are individuals that prefer work-life integration with no boundaries and there are individuals who prefer physical segmentation between work activities and non-work activities. Therefore individuals that prefer clear physical boundaries between work and non-work lives may prefer working traditionally in the office and the individuals that prefer work-life integration may be well suited for having the choice to work from home with the added boundary management factor. This raised the team dynamic concern of individual preferences in the WFH model. It could be a source of friction if a manager prefers integrating work-life with little boundaries while managing individuals that prefer physical boundaries.

The Hybrid Working Model has introduced complexity for managers' ability to measure the productivity of employees without physical visibility in the office (Lippe & Lippényi, 2019). The positive stance stated by Chafi et al. (2022) is that the HWM presents an opportunity for managers with the new way of working with the use of technology. Suryadi et al. (2022), state that technological mechanisms are available to monitor productivity of employees virtually and that this has provided managers with more time to monitor and

facilitate productivity at a glance as opposed to physically walking to check on team members in the office. This may pose a challenge for individuals who require constant physical monitoring, guidance and constant feedback from managers, either when working from home or in the office with their managers not physically in the office with them. A study conducted by Kirchner et al. (2021) found that managers experienced longer working hours, due the formalisation of informal feedback to employees and informal collaborative problem-solving, which could previously be conducted in the office. Managers experienced that managing virtually results in more meetings, resulting in working longer hours to conduct their actual work.

2.3. Productivity

Employee productivity is defined as a measure of employee's efforts to convert inputs into outputs; the amount of time spent with the given resources to complete the desired or prescribed task (Anjum et al., 2018). Khanzadi et al. (2017) posit that productivity is defined according to industry: in the construction sector for example, productivity is defined as a measure between completed projects and the hours spent to complete the project. Employee productivity is referred to as a measurement of efficiency and effectiveness of performance (Bhatti & Qureshi, 2007). Expanding on this, Laura Langbein and Connie Jorstad (2004) state that employee productivity is as a result of the environment i.e. culture, office environment, management style and communication. Anjum et al. (2018) suggest that the level of employee productivity is dependent on individual ability, Human Resource (HR) policies, organisational culture and line manager support. Schroeder et al. (1985), have compared employee productivity measurement to the price of machinery versus the revenue it generates; further stating that productivity measurement for knowledge workers is more focused on outputs such as customer satisfaction. Measuring performance is important for self-development; determining salary and promotion; and feedback and work direction (Schroeder et al., 1985). Shobe (2018) states that productivity is heightened by the physical environment in which work takes place, validating the increase in productivity when working from home, because physically individuals may be more comfortable at home than in the office.

2.4. The Hybrid Working Model and productivity

Iqbal et al. (2021), have stated that employees may feel gratitude towards their employers for affording them the liberty to work from home, making them perceive their employers as thoughtful and caring, and so motivating employees to maximise productivity. Vandelannoitte (2021) posits that the flexibility and convenience afforded by the Hybrid Working Model ensures that employees do not become slack when working out of the office. The conveniences mentioned are the elimination of traffic time and having to physically prepare to go to the office. This may be limited for employees who are not motivated by the organisations they work for to increase their productivity or effort when being afforded the choice to work in the office or at home.

The HWM favours employees who thrive with little monitoring from their line managers, therefore working out of the office eliminates the manager stressor which may result in the employee's increased efficiency and productivity (Iqbal et al., 2021). Monteiro et al. (2019) further state that affording employees the choice to work in the office or remotely gives them the choice to choose to work in places where they are optimally creative and innovative, whether it be the home, office, coffee-shops or the park. That level of flexibility may result in greater effort and an increased level of productivity, however not discounting the nature of the work, since monotonous work may result in a slowdown in productivity out of the office, while stimulating and dynamic work may increase productivity for some individuals. Radonić et al. (2021) highlight that individuals with the ability to perform complex tasks independent of their team and managers achieve a higher level of productivity when working from home. Personality and the demands of the work are factors in determining the individual productivity level in the HWM.

The flexibility afforded by the Hybrid Working Model is stated to be a value proposition for attaining and retaining talent for organisations (Radonić et al., 2021) and to guarantee loyalty and increased productivity (Iqbal et al., 2021) and flexibility has become a requirement among the millennial workforce. Flexibility in a work context entails employees' liberty to choose their work time, the numbers of hours they perform work, and to do their own scheduling. The HWM permits the employee to choose where to perform the work, but does not give complete control over time worked. An extension of Chung and Lippe's (2020) definition is that flexibility in the work context refers to scheduling. That

grants employees work-life authority over where, how much, and how work is performed (Lautsch & Kossek, 2017). Although this definition covers the location aspect of the HWM, the amount of work performed is limiting as the organisation will generally require maximum output from their employees. Putman et al. (2014) define flexibility as the employees having the onus to determine the where and how of work, taking into account the degree to which time, location, and task features are flexible, to attain life, family and personal needs. This is the appropriate definition, taking into account that for certain organisations HWM is prescribed (part of policy, employees are informed on which days of the week to work at home or in the office) whilst in others there is 100% liberty given to employees to choose when to work in the office if they prefer to.

A dynamic to consider is that there are two types of flexibility: employee-centred flexibility, which aims to help employees attain work-life balance, and the employer-centred flexibility, which is geared towards obtaining maximum outputs from employees (Avgoustaki & Bessa, 2019), highlighting the context factor stated by Chung and Lippe (2020). This is confirmed by Iqbal et al. (2021) and Vandelannoitte (2021), in that an employee's perception that their company prioritises their well-being by giving them the choice of where to work may be a push factor in terms of increased productivity when working outside the office. Although employees may believe the HWM is for their well-being and appreciate the flexibility associated with the model, organisations are seeking maximum productivity from them. This phenomenon is referred to as nonpecuniary motives on the part of organisations to push for maximum output by providing non-monetary incentives aligned to employees (Choudhury et al., 2020). Giving employees the option to work from home in this regards is the perceived employee incentive, and the organisation benefit from the employee almost paying back or working extra hard for the benefit. This unfortunately assumes that all individuals perceive having the choice to work from home or the office as an incentive.

2.5. Work-related commitment theory

Much of literature has stated that remote work, although not conducive for all individuals to be productive, has increased the level of productivity, due to flexibility and autonomy. Managers have experienced a challenge in performing their management duties remotely, away from the people they manage (Mostafa, 2021; Ozimek, 2020). The blending of both

remote and office seems to address the negative aspects of remote working. It is worth exploring the reason for the increase or continued productivity while working remotely. The work-related commitment theory has been identified by Amin (2022) to explain the overall increased productivity. Chusmir (1982) has stated that that people work for different reasons: some individuals work for economic reasons (earn money), some work because they enjoy their work and some people work because they are expected to work. The reasons that people work could determine their level of commitment to their jobs, especially in SA with high levels of unemployment and poverty. Work-related commitment theory has gained interest in business studies because of the benefits that business stands to gain from knowing what drives work-related commitment in employees (Somers & Birnbaum, 1998).

However, there are three constructs studied independently in work-related theory namely: job commitment, career commitment and organisational commitment (Somers & Birnbaum, 1998). Job commitment (JC) is defined as the attitude towards the work that links the identity of the person to their job (Chusmir, 1982). This definition could mean that the people whose productivity has increased while working remotely have a good attitude towards their jobs. Millward (1998) extended this, stating that JC is the individual's acceptance of the goals and values of the work they do therefore making them willing to exert more effort for the job. Thus observing employees exerting more effort could be due to JC and not necessarily working remotely or the HWM. Somers and Birnbaum (1998) state that JC emanates from an innately satisfying job, therefore the work will be performed regardless of the location, especially if the individuals are working because of economic reasons.

Organisation commitment (OC) has two elements to it. There is affective organisational commitment which describes an individual's personal identification with the organisation's goal and values to a point where they are committed to being part of that organisation (Meyer et al., 1989). The more transactional organisational commitment, termed continuance, describes a calculated OC, by which individuals staying in an organisation because there are no better job prospects or and for economic reasons (Somers & Birnbaum, 1998). It is stated above that individuals may have put in more effort in performing their tasks, some even overworking, as a form of gratitude to their employers

for affording them the choice deemed a privilege of working remotely. This could be a form of affective organisational commitment that could explain the increase in productivity. While individuals that work for economic reasons, essentially need their jobs to make a living, their increased productivity may not be related to their level of commitment to the organisation they work for.

Career commitment (CC) is described as the level to which an individual is committed to a chosen career path (Blau, 1985). An example would be health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic who continued to work even under risky situations because of their chosen career paths. Their jobs required them to be physically at work while knowledge workers could be safer working from home. Building on this, Colarelli and Bishop (1990) state that CC increases over time depending on the individual's personal career development goals transcending through different jobs and occupations. An individual committed to their career typically overcomes set-backs and difficulties to achieve their career goals. Achieving goals, completing tasks and meeting deadlines (continued or increased productivity) may be associated with individuals who are driven by the commitment to their career aspirations and not necessarily as a result of the physical working environment.

2.6. Conclusion

It was critical while reviewing literature to review what is said regarding the Hybrid Working Model from a definitions perspective, which revealed the duality of the Model, as a blending of office work and remote work. The context of recently having national lockdown restrictions lifted, and a critical review of remote working was important to gain insights on various studies and that revealed the positive and negative experiences of working remotely. This is of interest if relying on the HWM as a way to counter the negative experiences, such as people who do not thrive working remotely. Due to the fact that the research is centred on whether or not productivity was affected in the Hybrid Working Model, comprehensively defining productivity and reviewing what literature says on productivity and the HWM was critical in the attempt to formulate research questions in the next chapter. Much of literature states that remote working and the HWM improves productivity among knowledge workers, and some refer to work-related commitment, which may be the reason for the increased productivity. Therefore the work-related

commitment theory was reviewed and possible reasons for the positive growth in productivity in the HWM and remote working arrangement were provided based on the literature.

The following chapter presents the research questions that were formulated after reviewing literature.

Chapter 3: Research Questions

Introduction

The literature review in chapter 2 explored the Hybrid Working Model in relation to productivity. The HWM being a blend of both working remotely/at home and office work, it was critical to review literature in the work from home model and the advantages or disadvantage thereof so as to formulate research questions to ultimately provide an insight into South African knowledge workers' experiences and perception of the HWM and its impact on productivity.

The main research question is stated below, followed by two sub-questions designed to provide a comprehensive answer to the main question by obtaining the overall experiences and perceptions in sub-question 1; and the effects of the model on productivity in sub-question 2.

Main research question:

What is the impact of the Hybrid Working Model on productivity?

Sub-question 1 was formulated in order to gain insights on the overall experiences of South African knowledge workers on navigating the HWM. This question was asked to gain insight on their positive and negative experiences, how they navigated through the negative aspects and how the positive aspects affected them. This question was also asked in order obtain the participants' preferences in terms of going back to the office, remote work and the HWM and perhaps suggestions as to how to improve the HWM based on their perceptions and experiences.

Question 1:

How has South African knowledge workers experienced working in a Hybrid Working Model environment?

Sub-question 2 was asked in order to gain insights from the participants on how their productivity was affected while working in the HWM. Taking into consideration that the flexibility of the model was connected to productivity by the literature, it was worth asking whether or not productivity was affected by this. Productivity is a wide topic therefore the question divided productivity in terms of planned-to-done ratio, turnaround times and performance targets, responding to three common measurements of productivity.

Question 2:

How has the flexibility of the Hybrid Working Model affected the productivity in knowledge workers?

The following section (chapter 4) provides the detailed research design and methodology to answer the two research questions stated above.

Chapter 4: Research Design & Methodology

4.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design, philosophy, methods and techniques utilised to gather and analyse data in order to answer the research question mentioned in Chapter 3. The qualitative research method was used to gather data, with justifications addressed in the strategy section. This chapter also outlines the unit of analysis, research instrument, data collection and analysis methods used in this study, concluding with the ethical considerations followed when conducting the study.

4.2. Proposed research design

According to Creswell (2008), the research design is the plan or proposal to conduct research. Research design is the strategy applied to conduct research coherently and logically to best answer the three questions posed in Chapter 3. Creswell (2008) proposed that research design should be chosen to study a specific topic; that is the nature of the research, audience, data collection methods, analysis, and interpretation.

The study was explorative in that it sought to obtain insights into the South African knowledge workers' hybrid model experience regarding productivity. Saunders and Lewis (2018) define explorative research as study that seeks new insights and asks different questions about a sound phenomenon. This research provides the SA experience of the hybrid model's effect on the productivity of knowledge workers. This study is relevant because business is contemplating which are the appropriate working models to adopt in order to enhance productivity and profitability, post the remote working model imposed during the national lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gathering employee perspectives on the Hybrid Working Model is intended to provide business with data to influence their decision making process. From an academic point of view, most studies of the HWM were conducted in developed countries, whilst this study will contribute to the research from the perspectives of knowledge workers in a developing country.

4.3. Philosophy

Research is anchored on philosophical assumptions that support the research strategy and methodology used in the development of knowledge in a particular field (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The philosophical assumptions are categorised as ontological, epistemological, and axiological.

Ontology was defined as the researcher's assumptions on the nature of reality (Tuli, 2011). Saunders & Lewis (2018) expanded this notion and have stated that the researcher's ontology determines their view of the world, that is, the world of business and organisation in the case of this research. Ontology seeks to give an answer or reality to a research question (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). This research had an element of realist ontology in that it sought to bring to light a South African reality of the effect of the Hybrid Working Model on productivity which really exists outside of the perceptions and experiences of the research participants. Epistemology is the researcher's assumption regarding knowledge, legitimacy, and validity. Kasim and Antwi (2015, p.217) have stated that *"in conceptualising the difference between qualitative and quantitative modes of research, the assumption concerning the nature of the knowable or reality (ontology), views on truth and legitimate knowledge (epistemology) and how the inquirer finds out knowledge is to be taken into account"*. An individual with a particular worldview is likely to have a question (research question) based on the researcher's worldview. The question will be phrased in a way that will require to be answered using a qualitative or quantitative method.

Both in terms of ontology and epistemology the researcher will have different paradigms that she adopts in conducting the research. Paradigms were defined beliefs that guide action, providing a logical set of constructs that provide a rational framework for research (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). These are classified as either positivism (consist of positivism and post-positivism) and interpretivism (consist of interpretivism and constructivism).

Both Rahi (2017) and Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) claimed that much of the positivist research approach is experimental and deductive, testing cause and effect and making

use of statistical analysis. Interpretivist research entails "*capturing the actual meanings and interpretations that actors subjectively ascribe to phenomena to describe and explain their behaviour*" (Leitch, Hill, & Harrison, 2010, p. 73). The researcher, in this case, sought the South African knowledge workers' perspective and experience and conducted the semi-structured interview to obtain data, believing that this provides real information about the impact of the HWM on productivity. The above description implied that this form of research gave the researcher a holistic social interpretation through the experience of their research subjects. Interpretivist oriented research seeks to understand the world through human experience (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Human beings are different, and their context is different; therefore the study sought the detailed experience of the subject (productivity in a Hybrid Working Model for knowledge workers) without losing sight of their individual contexts. The context factor of this study was a clear indication that the study took elements of an interpretivist philosophy because the Hybrid Working Model is a model that exists and is employed in business, and the data set consisted of the experiences of a sample of various participants in order to study the effect of the Hybrid Working Model on productivity.

According to Rahi (2017), interpretivism is often used in qualitative research, with the understanding that actual knowledge can only be understood in its entirety from an interpretation of a subject. In conducting interpretivist research, researchers seek to get first-hand experiences of their subjects through in-depth semi-structured interviews and to make use of quotations in their findings as a mechanism to capture their subject's experiences (Tuli, 2011). Therefore the semi-structured interviews conducted gathered the lived experience and perspective of South African knowledge workers regarding productivity in Hybrid Working Model. While it was essential to stay within the boundary of the research topic and questions, the researcher allowed each participant to give their perspectives and experiences of the hybrid working environment, taking into account the Covid19 pandemic and the effects thereof. Below is a table explaining two main research paradigms (Lofrida, Luca, & Gulisano, 2014):

Table 1: Comparing two major philosophical orientations in research

	Positivism-oriented		Interpretivism-oriented	
	Positivism	Post-positivism	Interpretivism	Constructivism

Ontology: What is reality?	Naïve realism. Objective reality.	Critical realism Reality is imperfectly apprehended	Subject and object are dependent. The real essence of the object cannot be known. Reality is constructed.	
Epistemology: How do you know?	Dualism Researcher - research. Replicable findings are "true". Reality can be explained.	Dualism is not possible. Replicated findings are "probably" true. Impossible to fully explain reality	Knowledge is interpreted. Reality can be understood.	Knowledge is constructed. Reality can be constructed
Methodologies: How do you find it out?	Experimental, deductive. Mainly quantitative. Relationship cause-effect. Statistical analysis.	Experimental. Mainly quantitative methods, manipulative. Scientific Community plays an important role of validation. Statistical analysis. Probability sampling.	Interpretation. Mainly Qualitative methods. Purposive and Multipurpose sampling.	Mainly Qualitative methods. Purposive and Multipurpose sampling. Stakeholders' involvement.
Quality criteria	Rigorous data produced through scientific method.	Statistical confidence level and objectivity in data produced.	Intersubjective agreement and reasoning reached through dialogue, shared conversation and construction.	

(Lofrida, Luca & Gulisano, 2014, p.43)

4.4. Approach selected

The study was anchored on the Work-related Commitment Theory. Given that much of the literature to date has been conducted in certain contexts, that is, largely in the developed world, this research aims to provide a developing country's knowledge workers' experience and perspective of the effect of the Hybrid Working Model on productivity. The research does not seek to build a theory nor develop a theory but seeks to provide new insight based on the South African context (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Therefore the research was deductive. This research sought to get the experiences and perspective on the hybrid working arrangement's impact on productivity in light of business considering adopting hybrid, remote or back to the office post the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.5. Methodological choices

Researchers seek to make known what is not known by applying the quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method of collecting data (Kasim & Antwi, 2015). The research was conducted by using the qualitative method through semi-structured interviews to collect data. The research was not testing causality or relationship but the experience of a specific demographic on hybrid working arrangements' effect on productivity, using words and not numbers.

4.6. Strategy

Saunders and Lewis (2018) stated that qualitative research, in most cases, applies narrative inquiry, drawing on the narration derived from semi-structured interviews. Each participant provided a unique narrative. Therefore, the research adopted the narrative inquiry strategy. The chosen strategy was suitable for the choice of study. Feasibility testing against the chosen strategy was applied, ethics and testing whether or not the methodology chosen were suitable to answer the research questions (Denscombe, 2010).

The strategy adopted for this study was suitable because it took on an interpretivist approach of inquiring about the effect of Hybrid Working Model on South African knowledge workers' productivity. Literature showed that hybrid and remote working arrangements enhance productivity, however the studies were mostly conducted in

developed countries. For data collection, semi-structured interviews provided insights into three elements of productivity namely planned-to-done ratio; turnaround times and performance targets. The purpose of the research was to highlight the lived experience of knowledge workers in the HWM. The feasibility of the study has been taken into account in terms of accessibility to knowledge workers, given the time constraints. The researcher ensured the anonymity of the participants, the data was treated as confidential and signed consent was obtained from the participants.

4.7. Time horizon

The time horizon for the research was cross-sectional which refers to research on a particular topic conducted at a certain time (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The semi-structured interviews were conducted between 1 and 15 August 2022 and were conducted with the specified demography described below, for the research paper to be submitted on 1 November 2022.

4.8. Research methodology

As stated above, the research was conducted using the qualitative method grounded on an interpretivist philosophy in order to study the effect of the Hybrid Working Model on productivity from the lived experience and perspective of the South African knowledge workers.

4.9. Population

Population is the total set of group members of the group being studied (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). For this research, the chosen population was knowledge workers in South Africa. The choice of population is based on the suitability to provide answers for the research question for this research. The target population is knowledge workers in corporate South Africa, across industries, not gender specific, no specified level of employment, who are working under the Hybrid Working Model.

4.10. Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis refers to the entity being studied (Grunbaum, 2007), for instance an individual, group or organisation. Therefore the unit of analysis for this study was a group: corporate South African knowledge workers.

4.11. Sampling method and size

This study was conducted by using the purposive sampling strategy which was utilised to select participants intentionally from the pool of qualifying participants, based on the participants' individual traits and qualities (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). Denscombe (2010) states that purposive sampling occurs when a researcher handpicks the sample from the population to be studied based on their relevance to the issue/theory being studied and their knowledge and experience about the topic. The chosen sampling strategy allowed the researcher to select participants that would best answer the research question and add meaningfully to the study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In addition, an intentionally diverse selection was made of participants, who represented professional diversity, gender diversity and career level diversity (there were junior and senior managers who took part in the study) (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

The selected group of knowledge workers who took part in this study represent the sub-group of knowledge workers in South Africa. Sample size is defined as the number of research participants required to answer the research questions (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). Qualitative research does not prescribe a particular number of interviews to be conducted (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Casteel and Bridier (2021) state that data collection (interviews) can continue until data saturation is reached. Data saturation occurs when additional data collection does not provide additional insight into the research objective and question (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A total of 12 interviews were conducted with purposefully selected South African knowledge workers.

4.12. Research instrument

Creswell (2008) states that the researcher is the central instrument in the collection of data. The research instrument for this study, aside from the researcher herself, was the

semi-structured interview guide used for conducting the semi-structures interviews. Semi-structured interviews is a method of data collection in which the researcher has prepared a set of question for the participant but in a flexible manner according to the topic in order to allow the participant to generate ideas and speak widely (Denscombe, 2010; Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The researcher prepared a set of main questions to be used during the interview to gain more insights, and probing questions were asked emanating from the responses given. Therefore the researcher is also a research instrument. Although semi-structured interviews maximise validity, some literature argues that semi-structured interviews have the potential of making the coding tedious (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002). The researcher has the responsibility to ensure that the participant stays within the topic as much as possible. Since the researcher is the central instrument in the collection of data, Creswell (2008) states that therefore biases, values and assumptions regarding the research should be identified – see below regarding biases.

Upon obtaining ethical clearance, the researcher scheduled meetings with the twelve participants, giving them the options to meet physically or virtually via MS Teams or Zoom, subject to COVID-19 regulations at the time and the comfort level of the participants. All participants opted to meet virtually, so interviews were all conducted through MS Teams as described below.

4.13. Data analysis approach

Denscombe (2010) posits that there are various forms of analysing qualitative data depending on the kind of data used and the nature of the study, further stating that there is no single approach overarching qualitative data analysis. Due to the exploratory nature of the study the research analysis was both inductive and theoretical. Theoretical qualitative data analysis is based on the researcher's concepts, ideas and topics (Braun & Clarke, 2012), the study had a specific topic and theory, therefore the specific experiences and perceptions the researcher was studying, and this prevented analysing outside the scope of the study. While in contrast, the inductive qualitative data analysis is when themes are derived from the data itself without the researcher's preconceived ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006); this takes form in letting the data lead the researcher. Braun and Clark (2006) state that analysing qualitative data makes use of both methods of data analysis, because while the researcher is bound to remain within the scope of research,

emerging themes that are shared by the research participants form part of the study and are highlighted in the findings. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, an approach which is defined as a method of identifying, organising and presenting the patterns and themes from the data set thus helping the researcher make sense of the shared perceptions and experiences of the participants and identifying emerging and unique experiences and perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The researcher manually conducted the thematic data analysis as discussed in the following section.

4.14. Thematic data analysis

The data analysis framework employed in the study had various elements:

- Familiarisation – listening to the recordings, reading the transcripts, making notes and to identify themes from the raw data
- Identifying thematic framework – identifying key issues, concepts for further examination
- Indexing – numerical coding on the thematic phrases
- Charting – rearranging the data according to themes and subjects
- Mapping and Interpretation – making use of the map to identify associations between the themes and providing explanations thereof in line with the research objective and emerging themes.

(Creswell et al., 2006; Pope et al., 2000)

All interviews took place on Microsoft Teams and were recorded and transcribed, therefore the first step was to download the recording and transcribe immediately after conducting the interview. The following steps were followed to analyse the data and organise in to codes and themes as stated by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) (Braun & Clarke, 2012)

Table 2: Steps taken in the data analysis process of this study

No.	Phase	Description
1.	Familiarising the researcher with data	Reading the transcripts multiple times, listening to the recordings, and writing down notes

2.	Generating initial codes	Codes are the building blocks of the analysis, therefore identifying codes relevant to the study and interesting codes for emerging themes
3.	Searching for themes	This entails organising the codes into groups and themes from all the data
4.	Reviewing themes	Double checking the potential themes identified in phase 3 are in line with the codes in the entire data set organising the codes into a thematic map for analysis
5.	Defining and naming the themes	Continuous analysis to refine each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6.	Writing the findings	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

(Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2012)

4.14.1. Phase 1: familiarising the researcher with data

Familiarising the researcher with data entailed reading the transcripts multiple times, listening to the recording and watching the interview in order to note the body language and reactions of the participants. Writing down notes that were relevant to the study and interesting, and unique points raised were also noted down because of the dual analysis approach of theoretical and inductive. This entailed reading, and watching the audios in order to merge the verbal responses with the tone and body languages and identify the nuances. It is stated that the researcher has discretion as to how and where the notes are made (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For this study the researcher made use of highlighters on Microsoft Word (transcripts from MS Teams were downloaded into MS Word). The researcher assigned specific colours to specific codes.

4.14.2. Phase 2 & 3: generating codes and searching for themes

The purpose and scope of the study was helpful in ensuring that the researcher remained within the research question due to the nature of semi-structured interviews and the dynamic composition of the participants. Pope et al. (2000) state that themes identified should be in line with the study. Generating themes by grouping the codes with the same highlighter colour, for instance, grouping the various work-life integration codes together, grouping flexibility codes as individuals have used different words and expressions to describe the same thing, grouping the negative and positive experiences and perceptions of the HWM... concluding with grouping the interesting points and themes together that would form part of the study. Due to the fact that in the coding process, the coding was done by highlighting similar codes with the same highlighter the identification of dominant themes was already facilitated. This step was followed by creating a table on a new Word document where all themes were grouped together with quotations for validation of the codes and themes.

4.14.3. Phase 4 & 5: reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes

The next phase began by checking the proposed themes against the data, for instance double checking the themes against the collated excerpts of the interviews in order to ensure that the themes are not merely codes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Basically, this entailed repeating phase 2 with the aim of ensuring that critical and relevant aspects of the data were highlighted in related to the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this stage the dominant themes began to emerge and the thin or weaker themes were discarded or moved to the interesting and emerging themes, the researcher noticed that certain themes are out of the scope of research and discarded them. The following step is giving the themes particular names and defining them in order to adequately report on them, for instance work-life integration is an academic term used to name all reported statements regarding merging home and work. Defining and naming the themes was also guided by the question which the study aims to answer.

4.14.4. Phase 6: writing the report

Braun and Clarke (2006) have stated that the purpose of reporting on the findings is to provide a data based story and analysis in order to answer the research question. The

findings are in chapter 5.

4.15. Limitations

The following limitations were identified when conducting the study:

4.15.1. Researcher biases

The researcher being a research instrument also means that the biases they have on the topic may be evident to the participants and in choosing participants. The researcher's bias was that the participants would report that the HWM has exponentially increased their productivity due to the researcher's bias towards the HWM. The researcher had to caution against leading by being self-aware, especially when reacting to the responses from participants. This was identified as a limitation to the study.

4.15.2. Time horizon

One of the limitations of this study is that it was a qualitative study bounded in South Africa, therefore not a worldwide study. There was also a limited period to conduct the research as hybrid working arrangements are in a state of flux, therefore the limitation of it being a snapshot study instead of longitudinal in nature. The participant's perception and experiences may change in the not so distant future.

4.15.3. Power outages

Electricity power-cuts are a reality in South Africa, therefore there were instances where power outages led to postponements and cancellations from participants. Low bandwidth as the result of power outages led to participants requesting to switch off their cameras during interviews therefore the researcher missed some body language and facial expressions from the participants.

4.15.4. Sampling bias

The researcher could have omitted to interview individuals of an opposing view regarding the HWM or who had a different perception on the HWM, but with the purposive sampling strategy described above, the researcher attempted to choose participants based what they know in relation to the study. However, the researcher could be more likely to choose particular representatives of the population according to another unconscious bias. It could be personality, profession or experience in a certain field. This could compromise the study in that the findings could reflect the perception and experiences of a certain group of knowledge workers individually chosen by the researcher. All efforts were taken to draw a diverse sample from within the population.

4.15.5. Power distance

In their paper on conducting and coding elite interviews, Aberbach and Rockman (2002) state that the interviewer needs to be cognisant of the level of power difference between themselves and the participants which may influence their level of transparency in the interview. The power distance between the interviewer and certain participants who were older and more senior in their career intimidated the researcher in terms of driving the conversations and clarifying questions asked when there was a misunderstanding on the part of the participants.

4.15.6. Language barrier

Participants that were familiar with the researcher spoke mainly in sePedi (researcher's home language), therefore there are certain expressions that are innate to vernacular language. Much time was spent translating especially expressions, exclamations and humorous anecdotes with certain participants. Zulu speaking participants occasionally expressed themselves in isiZulu, the researcher had to request that they translate which annoyed certain participants.

4.16. Ensuring quality research

Reliability and validity are concepts associated with research (Golafshani, 2003) that were considered from the beginning of the study: while designing the study, analysing the

results of and testing the quality of the study conducted. Although, qualitative research is conducted to get an understanding of a phenomena, Denscombe (2010) and Golafshani (2003) have suggested that reliability and validity are observed in the trustworthiness of the study conducted, dependability of the study and results, neutrality, consistency and transferability According to Saunders and Lewis (2018) research validity requires a mechanism to check whether the findings are what they seem to be. External validity validates the study with other studies conducted elsewhere - there should be consistency in the conclusions and findings (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Denscombe further stated that credibility in research formed part of the research because it needs to be demonstrated (Denscombe, 2010) and even when conducted elsewhere, some similarity should be inevitable. There are several internal validity tests which were conducted and are listed below.

4.16.1. Validity

The researcher has specified and justified the research design and methods in conducting the study with the guidance of literature, by following the documented data analysis steps and having the supervisor review the work of the researcher.

4.16.2. Reliability

An audit trail was ensured because all data and findings were readily available and proven by the researcher. Recordings of the interviews and data analysis process documents are stored on the researcher's Google Drive.

4.16.3. Generalizability

In gathering data especially in relation to the literature review, ahead of concluding, the researcher has taken into account the context of the participants when reporting the findings (Denscombe, 2010). For instance, there were participants who were leading teams, some with children and some living alone; this is reflected in chapter 5. The researcher has taken note of the difference that may appear in literature and the study due to the contextual differences of developed and developing world, therefore the findings may differ. It is the researcher's responsibility to take that into account.

4.16.4. Objectivity

The ontological aspect of qualitative research is that the researcher is not completely removed from the participants and has certain biases that need to be acknowledged in order to incorporate contradicting views and theories while conducting the research (Denscombe, 2010). Therefore the research limitations in the previous section have addressed the researcher's biases when conducting the study.

4.16.5. Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was granted to the researcher by the Gordon Institute of Business Science (**Appendix B**). All the research participants signed a Consent Form (**Appendix C**) after the researcher explained the purpose of the study and assured them of their anonymity in the report. Anonymity was maintained, the participants are presented as P1 –P12 in chapter 5.

The following chapter presents the research findings for the study.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the research, based on semi-structured interviews with twelve participants representing South African knowledge workers. The following section provides some details about the participants such as industry, position, and management level (part of a team or leading a team), which is followed by a more comprehensive look at the findings related to the research questions.

5.2. Interview participants and context

For the sake of anonymity, the names of the participants have been withheld and the participants are presented as P1 – P12. All twelve interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams, as per the preference of the participants. The participants consented to recording and having their cameras on during the interviews with the exception of two, who could not keep their cameras on due to low bandwidth because of electricity outages at the time of the interview. The participants were a heterogeneous sample of knowledge workers across different sectors, genders, and management levels as depicted below:

Table 3: Individual participants

Parti pants	Industry	Position	Gende r	Childre n	Managin g / part of a team	HWM type
P1	Banking	Data Science Manager	Male	Yes	Yes	Informal
P2	Financial Services	Fund consultant	Male	Yes	Yes	Informal
P3	Pharmaceutical s	Supply Chain Officer	Female	No	No	Informal
P4	Financial Services	Business Analyst	Female	No	No	Prescribe d in policy
P5	Pharmaceutical s	Regulatory Affairs Manager	Male	Yes	Yes	Prescribe d by line manager

P6	Banking	Project Manager	Female	No	Yes	Prescribed by line manager
P7	Financial Services	Fintech & Digital Partnerships Manager	Male	No	No	Informal
P8	Marketing	Sales representative	Female	No	No	Prescribed
P9	Media	Data Analyst	Female	Yes	No	Prescribed
P10	Telecommunications	Business Analyst	Female	Yes	No	Prescribed
P11	Research, Science & Technology	Stakeholder Management	Female	Yes	Yes	Prescribed
P12	Non-Profit Organisation	Project Manager	Female	Yes	Yes	Informal

5.3. Results Question 1

Research Question 1: What has been your experience adopting the Hybrid Working Model?

This question was asked to gain insight of the overall experiences of the participants of the Hybrid Working Model - the manner in which they navigated in the model, the negative and positive aspects of the model and their recommendations related to it. The following themes were common among the participants and will be discussed in greater depth in the sections below: Flexibility in terms of time and place was a key experience emerging from the interview data. This was perceived as a positive aspect of the model because of its relation to work-life integration. Another positive experience was that the HWM gave participants a greater sense of autonomy and ownership of their work, especially in terms of organising their tasks. Participants reported that, as a consequence, the HWM demanded both planning and self-management in order to be successful. Particularly, participants also needed to manage distractions both at home and in the office, since the HWM involves both of these spaces. Overworking was found to be a common experience, usually related to work-life integration, but participants did not see it as a concern. Finally

some other emerging themes will be explained before considering the overall preferences of the participants with regards to the HWM.

5.3.1. Flexibility and work-life integration

All participants spoke about the flexibility experienced while working in the HWM. It is to be noted that although all the participants experienced flexibility, they make reference to different kinds of flexibility, which can be classified as flexibility in time and geographic flexibility. The participants also reported a variety of ways in which they benefited from this flexibility, the main one being better work-life integration.

Participants reported that the HWM gave them the opportunity to integrate their work-life with their personal lives, due to the option to work out of the office, the majority reporting that when not in the office, they work from home. Working from home was revealed to be both a physical and temporal integration of work and life for participants, who reported that working from home gives them an opportunity to perform home chores without compromising their work tasks.

The HWM, for P10, enhanced her experience as a mother by giving her the option to work from home. She states:

“I have an 18 months baby, I’m able to be there with every step of her growth. She’s still breast feeding but didn’t have to stop breastfeeding” (P10)

Personal context was a factor in the manner in which the flexibility of time affected people in fulfilling their duties outside of work while working and being productive.

“I’m a single mother, there are things I have to do, especially when it comes to my daughter, get her ready for school, drop her off, and clean the house. My day starts at 9.” (P9)

Capitalising on not having to spend time in traffic facilitated work-life integration for participants who reported, for example, that the extra time could be utilised to drop off their children at school in the morning and pick them up in the afternoon. All seven participants with children highlighted that not having to spend time in transit to and from work, which would often be at times when traffic is at its peak, helped them fulfil their

parental duties. On the other hand, participants who did not have children reported that the time they would normally spend in transit, they invested into their physical wellbeing, such as through physical exercise or getting extra hours of sleep, which set them up for the day ahead.

“Waking up in the morning and exercising before you start your work, because your energy levels are high, you become so productive. Because at some point I used to have the issue of getting drowsy at work and I would get less productive in times of the day” (P5)

Time spent in traffic was reported to be energy consuming by participants. Therefore, the reality of not having to spend as much time in traffic under the HWM was found to preserve their energies, making them able to start work almost immediately, as opposed to getting to the office and needing to rest before starting work. Thus the flexibility which participants experienced as offering them additional time was also associated with additional energy to perform their work.

Having the choice or option to work outside the office gave participants the opportunity to multitask. The interviews reveal that the model allowed them, with the help of technology, to perform work from anywhere in the country without having to file for leave, and so fulfil their personal duties as well as work duties.

“My mother stays by herself in Mahikeng. I'm able to. I go if she needs me for that week, I'm able to go work there.” (P9)

“You know, the other day, I was able to go watch my child running. And I told them what my child is all about, took my laptop. If they need me, I go in the car and have that meeting.” (P10)

“You can work from home in Limpopo for instance. I have network from home, the connection is not that bad” (P4)

The geographic flexibility of the HWM facilitated the work-life integration of participants in that their work could be combined with personal errands such as attending to family duties outside of the city of employment, or being physically present when this is what makes the difference for a family member.

5.3.2. Autonomy

The flexibility experienced by the participants was also linked to autonomy. By definition, the HWM gives employees the autonomy to choose between working in the office or remotely, either on certain days of the week or at the discretion of the employer. Working away from the office and colleagues, for example, working in a different town for a week required participants to be capable of working independently. Participants reported increased autonomy to organise tasks and work, autonomy in scheduling of meetings and planning tasks.

The autonomy to organise their own work in the context of the HWM, appears to have given participants the ability to maximise on work performed remotely and work performed in the office. The majority of the participants explained that they organised work/tasks intentionally based on whether they would be better performed when they were working remotely or in the office. It is interesting to note that the participants identified this as a positive feature of the HWM compared with different working models (remote and traditional office work) which they had experienced previously.

It was reported that much of the collaborative activities such as meetings, brainstorming sessions, project kick-offs and team project tracking were performed in the office, in a face-to-face set up. Participants who were managers reported that physical team interaction is more conducive than virtual, where one may miss nuances communicated through body language in ensuring that team members are all on the same page.

“I decided on having a team that comes in between Tuesdays and Thursdays. And on those days, we actually book a boardroom to actually meet up and talk. About the issues that we're having, you know, workwise. So we meet up, so just Tuesdays and Thursdays, basically” (P1)

“With projects you have things that are dependencies on one another. When you communicate virtually, people don't necessarily get to understand what you're saying the impact is of them not doing what they supposed to do to the project.” (P12)

The HWM also gave participants the autonomy to organise work and tasks based on individual personality types and preferences. It was reported by certain individuals that they found they were more productive when in the office and the HWM thus gave them the autonomy to choose to perform certain tasks in a physical location where they were more effective personally without it negatively affecting output.

My trick is that I leave the heavy lifting for the days in the office, at home I attend to emails. I can come sit on my couch and I see emails on my phone, and if it needs me to attach or anything then I grab my laptop.” (P3)

Prescribed HWM systems determine which days employees need to come into the office, but even participants who were working under these systems reported that they had the opportunity to make their own decisions, based on where they prefer to work and which tasks are best performed in the office or remotely, since employees who work cross-functionally retain the autonomy to organise certain activities for the prescribed office days, to ensure they deliver on expected outputs.

According to participants, the HWM fostered organizing work independently of team members and or line managers. For example, some employees that were in teams reported that they had become responsible for sourcing inputs from colleagues independently, unlike previously in the office, when one had to go to their line manager whenever they had a specific query.

Scheduling time on Microsoft Outlook and Microsoft Teams to focus on a particular task was revealed to have been instrumental in the participants' autonomy to organise work. This was dependent on the organisation's culture and whether colleagues would respect the indication to not disturb when their status on MS Teams was set to 'busy'. One participant disclosed that they had blocked off certain periods of focus time for the next 12 months, whether they were in the office or at home, and how this would not have been possible if they were working traditionally in the office. Blocking the calendar to focus gave the participants with this possibility the license to decline meetings at those times. Scheduling activities in the HWM was not limited to work activities but participants also scheduled life activities such as taking a walk, having lunch and going to the gym. The interviews revealed how technology such as the above-mentioned software served as an instrument for the participants' employers to make HWM more effective, and how this

enhanced the autonomy they experienced in organising their work. Some participants described organisations which encouraged and facilitated a level of control over the calendar, whilst others described organisations which had days or hours of the day that their workers are allowed to decline meetings and perform other tasks at their discretion.

“Any meeting after 1pm on Friday, you are allowed to decline. This is just to give you a sense of control back and to also let you do other things. Other than sit and talk, because the problem with meetings is that they force you to sit in front of your screen.” (P9)

Participants explained that prior to the HWM being adopted, employees experienced a routine way of working with limited autonomy in terms organising and arranging work activities. They described how the autonomy to plan around their own time reignited an interest in their work, whilst the autonomy to complete tasks independently increased their level of ownership of the work. As evidence of this experience of autonomy and sense of ownership, they cite independently crafting an individual to-do list for the week or the day and working towards these deadlines. An increased level of enthusiasm could be observed in participants, with the increased level of autonomy to plan and greater ownership of the work they do keeping them enthused.

“I’m trying to even remember what my day like was before this model. I actually don’t know what I was doing before, like I’m trying to recall.” (P6)

5.3.3. Planning

Planning emerges strongly in the findings of this research, and could even be considered the glue that holds the HWM together, in that it was reported by participants that the model would not be effective without planning. The increased autonomy experienced by the participants was essentially autonomy to *plan* the where, the how and the when they perform certain tasks. Planning in a system of prescribed HWM is what facilitated the optimum use of participants’ autonomy to arrange tasks accordingly when all employees had to be in the office on a specific day.

“I would make sure that on the days that I do go to the office, I optimize those days to have maximum interaction.” (P9)

Team managers reported an increased level of planning due to the HWM, due to the need of planning activities and work for their teams. Most managers reported that the remote working model presented a challenge for them in that employees would not be available or online when required, or that they noted a deterioration of the quality of work. The HWM, on the other hand, with certain days in the office and some at home, allowed managers to plan work in a manner that empowered them to better track performance and take remedial action. However, the nature of this type of project management was reported to be heavily reliant on planning. Managers reported that planning is at the core of the model.

A Manager reported that the HWM: *“requires detailed, careful planning including motivating employees by giving them the option to work some days at home”* (P2).

Closely linked to planning was communication. An increased level of communication was experienced by participants as an important component of the HWM, and an overall increase in communication within departments and organisations was observed by them. Some participants described how their organisations faced a challenge keeping employees working remotely during the national lockdown, and how creative ways were adopted with the help of technology to ensure maximum engagement with employees. The shift to the HWM was seen to maintain that level of communication as an important component and it was considered by participants to be a determinant in the success of the Model.

“Her understanding is not the same as mine and I can't achieve what I need to because of miscommunication.” (P6)

Managers depend on communication to ensure that their teams are productive and targets are met. Online tools such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom and WhatsApp were reported to be tools used to communicate with employees, not only for engagement's sake but to track performance and receive updates on progress. Managers reported that communication needed to be almost constant, especially on days that their teams were working out of the office. While such regular communication was seen by some to be helpful in the effectiveness of the HWM, others described line managers who abused communications tools to micromanage employees.

“We discuss every day like, OK, how far are you with this?” (P1)

“To keep employees engaged - There's a lot of communication with very clear conversations about setting monthly targets. And do we identify problems quickly, unlike before. There's more engagement unlike before.” (P11)

A participant who managed teams under a HWM system that was not prescribed, and so had teams working remotely most of the time, found they needed to balance between using communication technologies to coordinate work and using them to engage socially with colleagues to discuss matters outside of work. Communication was thus also a mechanism to manage relationships, and not just to prove that work is taking place.

“I said I set aside time for us to just talk, not about work. There is no manager in that meeting. It's about us talking.” (P5)

“So as long as we are in, in constant communication. So whether it is WhatsApp, Teams or normal phone, our relationship is good when we in communication.” (P7)

Increased levels of communication added a layer of work for managers, who had to ensure that the individuals they led had understood what was being communicated and executed tasks correctly, and that deadlines were adhered to and targets reached, all in order to avoid having to take corrective measures or give negative feedback later on. Effective communication that is clear and simple for the team to understand, was for some a skill they had to acquire, because previously, being in the same room had eliminated ambiguities. This explains the finding that team meetings and collaborative work was seen to be more efficient in the office, face-to-face. For organisations that did not prescribe the days worked in the office, communication was a tool for tracking productivity, organising work, for performance management and for delegating work.

5.3.4. Self-management

The positive impact of the autonomy experienced by the participants was understood to be highly dependent, not only on planning but also on self-management. By this, we refer to the individual and their level of responsibility and accountability to still perform and be productive while away from the office, often in a home environment, with the absence of

both colleagues working around them and the supervision of a manager. More broadly, it is about managing oneself in response to what is expected from one at that moment. This could therefore be while working from home (or out of the office) but also while in the office, in which case it involves ensuring maximum interaction and getting all that is required from people so that deadlines are adhered to. The need for self-management in the HWM, with a lower intensity of management by others, was thus key to the way autonomy was experienced, that it was positively received as a form of empowerment.

“I personally, I hate being micromanaged when I do my work. I don't like people standing next to me and looking at what I'm doing, how I'm doing things.” (P5)

The HWM was reported to have facilitated the independent solving of problems amongst the participants, with the goal of successfully delivering to the employer. The physical absence of colleagues and line-manager led participants to go directly to the people that could be of assistance to them, broadening their networks, whereas in the office a line manager would either solve the problem or be an intermediary in cross department collaborations.

Self-management also speaks of the management of requests that were received in terms of committing oneself to deadlines that are feasible and attainable. Participants experienced greater ease in managing requests and deadlines in the HWM compared to being in the office physically, where they describe suffering from fear of being perceived as someone who is not hard working. The heightened autonomy and sense of ownership of the work under the HWM has affected how individuals manage themselves and others in the workplace.

“I don't have an answer now, but give me such and such a time and I will have an answer for you. So you don't set yourself up for failure, so somebody doesn't say to you I sent you an e-mail and then two hours later they say, but why haven't you responded.” (P3)

As an aspect of managing oneself, time-management was reported to be a personal skill that developed for participants in the HWM and they felt was a requirement for individual success in the Model. Although it was experienced as highly positive, the flexibility of the Model is what resulted in individuals having to intentionally manage their time, especially

when working out of the office. The work-life integration participants enjoyed required a high level of time-management because, as they explained, one may have the temptation to perform more home duties to the extent that work expectations are not met. Individual planning and team planning mentioned above is closely linked to individual time-management. Planning requires assigning time to perform the different tasks for the day or the week, but time-management is then required to follow that plan. Although participants reported having greater access over their time due to working from home, managing that access was then the responsibility of the individual. Again, participants made reference to technology such as Microsoft 360 and Microsoft Teams, which have productivity tools that are used to ensure that tasks are performed for an allocated amount of time. In addition to these supports, participants described the necessity of being intentional with time and how it is utilised, especially for those struggling with time-management. Certain participants implied that in terms of their personalities they are procrastinators by nature and reported to struggle in the HWM situation and generally prefer to work in the office where they benefit from being with colleagues that are working and from the structured environment. Whilst for some work in the office came with unnecessary pressure to appear busy, for others, deciding to perform more intense work in the office was an element of managing their own energies and leveraging on the energy of colleagues and line-managers.

I've struggled. Time management is more difficult than this hybrid world. Because in the old days it was very structured. You knew I am at the office by 8 or half past 8. You knew you take lunch typically at this time, and you typically leave the office at a certain time." (P7)

Whilst the HWM offered participants flexibility, the accountability factor of work-life integration was that, it became the individual's responsibility to ensure that work was up to date. When utilising work time for personal errands, which the Model allows, the responsibility to catch up with the work and deliver was up to the individual. The flexibility was not equivalent to free time, instead the possibility of working back the time when it was more convenient was what balanced the flexibility for them.

5.3.5. Managing office and home distractions

Participants described how the COVID-19 nationwide lockdown, which restricted movement and gatherings, had many knowledge workers working 100% remotely for a period of 12-18 months. Many homes were being used for multiple purposes: as a workplace, as schools for people with children and still as a home. Participants' places of leisure became places of work instantly, and this added a new obstacle of needing to suddenly begin managing home distractions in order to optimally perform their work.

The physical space to have a designated place dedicated to work, such as an office where one could assemble a desk, chair and a computer, was a challenge for some participants in that their homes simply did not have the room to accommodate their work needs. Having to resort to a sofa, typically associated with leisure, and to then focus and work was a challenge. Participants described how it was psychologically demanding performing work in a home space, because they were often tempted to do house work, watch television and go to buy groceries as a result of simply being in such a space.

Participants who lived with partners or spouses experienced that this could also be a distraction because of the temptation to socialise. They also described the struggle for bandwidth, when they were both on MS Teams or a Zoom meeting, and the battle for space as there was often not enough room to have two work stations in the house. In these instances, participants explained how couples had to alternate: when one was working from home, the other would have to go to the office in order to work optimally. In exercising their autonomy, participants also needed to organise work in such a way that can help in managing home distraction, by not only performing certain tasks in the office on days that they would require to be there for meetings, but also, on days that they were at home, performing work so as make optimum use of bandwidth for those living with them.

For participants with the space to have a designated workplace, it was often the people they lived with who had to adjust to this new presence of a workplace in the home, and to make an effort to not serve as a distraction for them.

“And you know, even my kids know if the door is shut, it means that Mama is working, and then if I open it, if I leave it open, now we can come in and maybe go chat to her and all of that. But if I say guys I'm working, they know, OK, and then they shut the door.” (P10)

“But I still feel there's a whole other set of distractions at home, especially if you living with other people because for them, they're not aware that you are working. They just want to be in your presence.” (P8)

The people that share homes with the participants could be distracting at times, especially because the home space is where they were used to socialise and relax with them. Also, being present in the home sometimes created certain expectations of the participants by those they live with. For example, living with elderly parents resulted in these participants spending time taking care of their parents, cooking and helping their parents with house work, because when present as a child in the house, that was perceived as their duty, whereas when physically going to the office, their parents no longer expected this of them.

Similarly, their being at home raised certain expectations of participants by their colleagues. Participants experienced an increase in meetings when working from home because, since they take place online and there is no physical movement required to attend, their colleagues would expect them to be able to attend six or more meetings in one day. The frustration observed amongst these participants is also that some of the subjects of the meetings could have been addressed via a call or an email. Not only was this a cause of meeting fatigue for participants, it was also a major distraction from performing their other work while at home.

“I'd wake up, do all my wonderful things I do in the morning. I look at my calendar just to get a sense of my day and the meetings that I have. I've got two meetings for the day. By 10 o'clock, I have got 10 meetings! People don't know how to just send an e-mail any more. Or just type it on teams and I will answer you! A quick discussion or chat does not need a meeting, because then you find that you are talking the whole day and not working” (P9)

Office distractions, on the other hand, were often only recognised and highlighted after the participants had experienced working remotely. Physical distractions, such as sitting

in an open plan office when needing to participate in virtual meetings, caused frustration to participants who had to be in the office on prescribed days when they would rather be at home for such tasks. The wearing of earphones for long periods of time under such circumstances became a physical discomfort these participants then associated with working in the office, along with the wearing of surgical masks when these were still mandatory.

A frequently mentioned form of office distractions was time wasted socialising with colleagues during working hours. Some participants expressed that, prior the national lockdown, this aspect of office working was not something that needed to be managed. Instead it became a time management factor when, returning to the office, colleagues defaulted back to socialising but at times that they could have scheduled for focus time. In addition, socialising in the office space was experienced by some participants as noise that could be distracting for other people who are working, whilst at home the environment is more quiet and conducive for concentrating.

Participants experienced that being physically in the office communicated availability to colleagues. There was less control of time allocated to focusing because people could walk over to one's desk for a social chat, or to ask questions about work and managers could pull people into meetings, regardless of their relevance to them, when they physically see them. Not only could this be distracting, it also limited participants' autonomy and time management when in the office. Office distraction often led participants to work late at home, in a quiet space, to catch up on work because of having spent the day in meetings, conversations (social and work-related) and activities that took them away from what was planned to be done for that day.

Interestingly, the interviews suggest that the HWM may have contributed to reducing office distractions by helping participants to be less distracting to others. Having the option to work from home fostered self-awareness, discipline and a sense of responsibility for some participants, empowering them to figure out how to be optimally productive by having to organise their work and how they perform it without supervision.

“Look, I think I was one of the people who was very disruptive in the office. The Hybrid Working Model has shaped me to be more responsible and more accountable. To just be orderly in terms of my day-to-day. The responsibility is on me because working from home, I don't have a policeman.” (P10)

5.3.6. Overworking

Although technology has been an enabler in HWM, the ability to work from anywhere has resulted in the participants experiencing overworking in this model compared to traditionally working from home. For instance, as mentioned above, in order to make up for the productivity loss from office distractions when needing to be in the office on certain days, participants reported having to come home and catch up on work late into the night. Work-life integration, although perceived as a positive by participants, carried with it longer working days because time spent taking advantage of the HWM flexibility was time that had to be made up for by doing formal work. Participants felt compelled to viewing the energy used to perform parental duties and home chores as not working because these activities do not pay the bills. But failing to set clear boundaries to manage the performance of home chores and work resulted in their experience of working late to catch up on work which couldn't be performed properly during the normal work day due to home responsibilities. As one participant revealed, the perception that one can cook while working, actually practically refers to cooking while MS Team is on, and whilst one is available to take a call or answer emails, this can have negative consequences when home duties are then overtaken by work duties.

“I forgot my daughter in the bath because my manager wanted something. I remembered half an hour later, and she had fallen asleep in the bath. Can you believe it? Managers are comfortable to require inputs from you after hours because they know you are going anywhere anyway. And when you're watching TV, you sit with your laptop. When you are cooking, you've got your laptop next to you.” (P9)

Overworking was attributed by some participants to being in the state of working whilst in a familiar and comfortable environment. They observed that one can easily lose track of time because of the level of comfort, which in the end required making up, for example, for the nap one has taken, the cooking performed during working hours or for taking

advantage of the gap in one's calendar to go to the salon to do hair. From the interviews it seems clear, however, that participants do not mind overworking, what emerges from the data is that they are more concerned with deadlines and outputs.

"It is a just the personal choice when you work extra hours." – P11

Some considered it the nature of the job, rather than a feature of the HWM, that people work extra hours outside of the normal hours. That is the reason some participants opted to make use of the extra time they would have spent in transit to and from the office to perform work. They stated that this did not feel like working extra because they were driven by their deadlines to do it. One participant stated that prior to the HWM, they would come back from the office, cook, and rest for a while, but would still end up doing some research work for the following day, because that was just the nature of their job. They were not compensated for the extra hours worked, therefore it was not something they considered to be overworking, but just part of ordinary work.

5.3.7. Other emerging themes

Some other interesting themes came from the participants describing their experiences and perceptions of the Hybrid Working Model. One such theme was the existence of a perception that the HWM was career limiting. This was particularly due to the experience of organisations that had not crystallised their HWM policy or had rolled out the model in an overly prescriptive manner. For example, a participant believed that it could be career limiting if one chose to work from home in the case where one's line managers was not in favour of the Model and actually preferred working in the office. It was suggested that these line managers may have the perception that people who choose to work from home lack ambition or are not productive, and the assumption of the participant was that they would not be eligible for a promotion with such a manager if they chose to work from home, although the HWM gave them that choice. They described how their line manager was always checking to see if they were in the office, as if, when they were not, they were not actually working.

"He, I mean, he messaged me last week. Actually it was like at 6:30 pm. He's like, are you still here? He was in the office the entire day and had not seen me the entire day to justify asking me that question." (P7)

The same participant stated that the HWM limited one's involvement with office politics, which seemed to be both negative and positive. In terms of the HWM being career-limiting, they reported that working out of the office limits time and space to play politics to get ahead in one's career, because of the little interaction with people in the office.

"This boss doesn't really like this boss. So who do I want to get close to?" (P7)

Another interesting theme that emerged was that the HWM eliminated human biases, because of limited human interactions. Participants reported that reaching out to unfamiliar people from other departments was easy because the person became a faceless person on MS Teams, and one did not have to deal with the biases that come into play when seeing certain features of a person. For example, walking over to an introvert's desk to ask for help in the office was a burden for one participant, but online it was much easier because they did not have to deal with their reaction.

"When you see that so and so Van Tonder (referring to a white male) there's a guy with a big beard, you don't know what biases that wakes up in you. Or even if it's a black woman, what biases that wakes up in you? But what I'm saying is, sitting at home, you are less susceptible to those biases. It's just transactional." (P7)

While collaborative work was reported to be more effective in the office, there was also the experience of an increased collaboration especially cross-functional between departments, which some attributed to this eliminating of the human factor. If the task required input from the finance department, it was a matter of reaching out to a finance person regardless of race and affiliations. This not only led to expanding one's network at work and a different way of approaching work relationships, as mentioned in the section on self-management, participants also felt that online work eliminated the herd mentality experienced in the office. The participants felt that the HWM helped them to overcome their biases.

"In the office, its herd mentality. I'm inclined to work with people who are like me, in physical people sense. The black people go to the black people, online I people go to the white people, right." (P9)

A particular negative aspect of the HWM that emerged from one participant's experience was that, under the HWM, there was no on-boarding on the part of the organisation.

Having to figure out who were the people that they would need information from in order to complete tasks fostered, in a sense, an entrepreneurial spirit of searching for people, for example in the marketing department, until the appropriate person was found to assist. The participant was proud of themselves because of the sense of achievement, but also considered it a waste of time. They complained that working virtually has taken away the human element of bumping into someone and asking for directions in a physical sense, and that being on-boarded by simply being given the intranet to figure it all out was a very negative experience.

“So yeah, on-boarding is something else. To be on-boarded virtually does not work because I basically on-boarded myself, right. No one was basically available and willing to on-board me. There was no designated person.” (P10)

5.3.8. Preferences and recommendations

Eleven participants indicated that they were in favour of the Hybrid Working Model. Although their reasons varied, some consistent reasons were the ability to avoid office distractions for at least some periods, the flexibility of the HWM and the benefits in terms of work-life integration.

“I prefer the hybrid model because a lot of time is wasted at the office, let's be honest. Most of the time people are just talking.” (P1)

“Yeah, I think it's a very good option because it allows that flexibility and people can work anywhere depending on their work. You can work from home in Limpopo for instance.” (P4)

Four out of the six managers were in favour of having days in the office, mostly for performance tracking purposes and collaborative efforts. While the majority of participants who managed teams advocated for some compulsory days in the office, an exception was the one in pharmaceuticals, who asserted that his experience with remote work during the national lockdown proved to him that remote work is effective. Although his company decided to adopt a HWM with the days in the office being at the discretion of line-managers, his team was fully remote, with the freedom to go to the office if they chose.

“Nothing stops us from being more collaborative, more interactive, more productive, more collaborative... People are still accessible. The remote working model has helped us overcome the perception of being non-productive when you work from home” (P2)

Following the experience of both remote work and a HWM, P3 stated that the need for human interaction at work had been over played. The periods of working fully remotely proved to him that it is possible to do so successfully.

“I prefer remote working and I personally I think it works. They only say we need the human element. I don't know. We can get away without the human element. But also I think maybe it's a double edged sword as well. Because I realized that, now as a team we're in the office three times a week on the Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, and I think you do work a little bit better physically together in the office.” (P3)

Even those who were in favour of the HWM had their preferences about how it should be applied. Participants who were under a prescribed HWM reported, for example, that they desired less days in the office, perhaps only once a week, whilst those that were under a non-prescribed HWM desired at least some level of established structure to the model, so as to manage the perceptions and expectations of colleagues and managers who were in favour of working full-time in the office.

“I would like for my team to raise their voice and say exactly when would they want to come to the office and why. And then we'd have that written down and we have to follow it.” (P4)

In fact, the attitude of other employees towards the HWM had an important influence on whether or not participants chose to work from the office or at home, in the case of organisations that did not prescribe or force people to be in the office on particular days or a specific number of times in a week or month. On days that the participant decided to go the office, whether it was to get enough focus time, for collaborative work with others or because they needed to access the work network; colleagues would pass remarks that were uncomfortable. Participants explained how their choice to go the office was not only based on preference but also on external pressures.

“It's these small comments that say, Oh are you here today? Where are you?” (P7)

The application of the HWM also had an impact on participants' overall impression of an employer of a job. For instance, being afforded a mechanism to integrate work and family gave some participants the sense of being valued and seen as an employee.

"It is the nicest thing ever for a company to actually think of me as a human being. She has kids or this person is studying or this person has an elderly person living with them. They are taking care of other aspects of their lives, let's give them that room." (P10)

Returning to the office following the experience of working fully remotely, had a long-term impact on some participants, in that the idea of going back to traditionally working in the office had become unacceptable to them. One of the respondents resigned from a job because the organisation required them to be in the office full time.

"I wasn't productive in the office because I was so used to being at home and the company was full time office based. I resigned within 2 months of joining, without a job!" (P10)

Even having to go into the office on certain days was a significant disincentive for some. After joining a company that was implementing the HWM, P9 stated:

"In fact, I probably would have negotiated for more money. I'm struggling with being in the office." (P9)

5.3.9. Conclusion to results of Question 1

Although the majority of the participants (11/12) preferred the HWM, their experiences and perceptions were different. For most, flexibility was expressed as a positive aspect of HWM. The use of time and geographic flexibility varied between participants with and without children, although in both cases the time was used to integrate work and life. The seven participants who had children made use of this flexibility to fulfil their parenting and family duties, such as getting children ready for school, taking them to school, picking them up in the afternoon, watching their children play sports, performing home chores such as cooking and cleaning and even visiting their parents who live out of town without

having to take leave. The five participants who did not have children made use of their flexibility to run personal errands, which improved their work-life integration, but also to invest more time into their work. The flexibility which allowed them to do either family and home chores or personal activities during the work day often meant that participants needed to catch up with their work after hours. Overworking was an experience reported by many of the participants, both as a result of individual choices when working from home and because some managers required inputs from the participants after hours. But the findings suggest that participants did not see this as a concern.

It is worth noting that the appreciation for going to the office was different based on management level. Managers especially appreciated days that they would go into the office, in order to track team performance and perform collaborative work. Participants who managed teams reported the difference in terms of managing others, for instance that it increased the need to communicate effectively and constantly, especially when team members were working from home. While respondents that were part of a team reported a new found autonomy to perform their work independently from their managers and teams. The HWM afforded participants this autonomy in performing their tasks as well as a greater sense of ownership of the work, because, when working independently from home without their team members and line-managers to assist, the responsibility to deliver on what the employer expected from the participants was squarely on them as individuals. Understandably, planning, self-management and discipline were reported as critical to deliver in this model. Planning, from the perspective of managers, involved measures such as those mentioned above of physically going to the office on specific days of the week for collaborative tasks. From the perspective of individuals, planning allowed the participants to work in places where they were optimally productive, making them able to deliver to their employers what had been required of them. For some individuals home distractions surpassed the office distractions and they preferred to perform more intense tasks in the office, while the opposite applied for others. Some of those preferring to perform the more intense tasks in the office, were motivated partly by the perceptions of their colleagues, because of the pressure to look busy.

5.4. Results Question 2

How has the flexibility of the Hybrid Working Model affected the productivity in knowledge workers?

This question was asked to gather the perceptions and experiences of the participants in terms of their productivity given the flexibility of the Hybrid Working Model. Productivity is a wide topic therefore the question has been divided in terms of planned-to-done ratio, turnaround times and performance targets, representing three common measurements of productivity.

The overall experience of the Hybrid Working Model of the knowledge workers that participated in this study was that it did not negatively affect their own productivity; the participants reported that, according to their own experience, they continued to perform at the level that was expected of them. Seven participants reported that their productivity actually improved as a result of the flexibility of the Hybrid Working Model; three stated that it remained unchanged. Two participants reported a decline in their performance but they felt that this was due to macroeconomic factors of the national lockdown rather than the HWM itself. On the other hand, those who managed teams described how some staff were notably less productive in terms of both planned-to-done ratio and turnaround times. These people required a high level of supervision to detect and resolve performance problems, which was easier in the HWM than in a fully remote system thanks to the occasional days in the office. Participants described how macroeconomic factors and industry factors required changes in performance targets, for example, how the marketing and advertising industry was negatively affected by the national shutdown. But setting these changes aside, there was some consensus that the actual meeting of targets was also unaffected by the HWM in the participants' experience. The way that the model helped to reveal the passion that one has for their work emerged from the interview data as an interesting theme, as well as the change in management style to be more dependent on performance monitoring technology and yet more understanding regarding potential reasons for non-performance.

5.4.1. Planned-to-done ratio

Planning was perceived by participants as a crucial component of the effectiveness of the Hybrid Working Model at a management level and individual level. A typical measure of performance is to check how much of the work that was planned to be done, is in fact

done in the end. Participants 1, 3 and 12, who were managing teams, reported that the ratio of work planned to work actually done remained unchanged, with the exception of one or two individuals that required more constant monitoring, which they said was possible under the HWM crediting the days spent in the office for this. These managers thus experienced an improvement under the HWM compared to the 100% remote model imposed during the nationwide lockdown, where they observed a slackening by their team members who were not familiar with self-management and were never coming into the office where problems could be mitigated.

“We experienced a big decline in productivity from the team, especially those who had not worked from home before.” (P2)

Project managers' jobs rely heavily on planning, therefore the need to plan did not present much of a change for these participants when it came to the HWM. But they explained that planning and organising work for the team did not always ensure that they could perform the work in the case of the HWM, because working from home is not suitable for all people. From the experience of managers, the planned-to-done ratio of certain individuals was so negatively affected by the HWM that was intolerable.

“It's been interesting, to be honest. There is a guy that I had to actually fire quite recently just because it just wasn't delivering on the on this model. Basically when working from home, he just wouldn't perform.” (P1)

However, from the experience of participants as individuals, there was not been a sense that planned-to-done ratio was negatively affected by the application of the HWM. Participants explained that this was because the work that was planned had deadlines which were there to be met. If it required one to work late or on weekends, that was done. Participants described a constant balancing act of ensuring that one's to-do list for the day was complete. Whether in the office with the various distractions or at home with home distractions, participants ensured that what was expected from them from a work perspective was complete. Some participants stated that in instances of an electricity power cut while working from home, they would drive to the office regardless of the time of day to ensure that work was done.

Some participants suggested that the sense of responsibility and accountability fostered by the model also enhanced their sense of ownership towards the work, therefore slacking was not an option for them. As a display of the level of accountability of the participant, one reported taking advantage of the flexibility of the HWM to go to Home Affairs to run personal errands, but having a laptop physically there and continuing to work throughout.

5.4.2. Turnaround times

Managers observed that, compared to a fully remote working system, turnaround times significantly improved in the HWM from a team perspective. They reported that, because of days spent in the office, performance management was quicker and those that were not coping were detected quicker in the HWM compared to a fully remote model. But because the HWM was not effective for every individual member of the team, a decline in turnaround times of specific team members was also observed and generally the quality of work these people produced deteriorated.

“Remote working negatively affected those who require constant supervision and lack self-accountability. The quality of work deteriorated when working remotely. These are the people who were called back into the office after COVID.” (P2)

Participants responsible for project management observed this deterioration in individual turn-around times outside of the delays that take place in projects in general, but they felt that this was the failure of specific people to be accountable and did not attribute this to the Model.

Individually, participants experienced no change in turnaround times, due to the model's inherent demand for planning and their individual responsibility to deliver within the timelines provided. The nature of the job was a factor in the consequences of adhering to timelines, for example, for the participant working in pharmaceuticals supply chain, missing a deadline could cost the company millions and they risk losing their job. Participants explained how the planning and standardisation of work under the HWM ensured that people knew what was expected from them (planned-to-done ratio) and when the work was expected (turnaround times), and that delivering accordingly was the responsibility of the individual.

“And I suppose also fortunate that most of the time the deadline is Friday. So I ask myself, how do I get to Friday? And get to doing it at my own pace.” (P3)

Deadlines served as goalposts for the participants. The manner in which they adhered to the deadlines was their responsibility - the physical space became irrelevant, what was critical was reaching the goalposts.

When working cross-functionally in organisations that gave employees discretion to decide where they worked, participants explained that turnaround times could be negatively affected by struggling to reach people on MS Teams when working from home, whereas in the past, for example, a participant could physically take work to the legal division to get a legal opinion or obtain input from the marketing division. Participants felt that there are certain conversations that were best conducted physically, especially brainstorming around developing a new product and kicking off a new project. Not having a set day for all to be in the office for these conversations was sometimes the cause of a delay.

The positive and empowering experiences that participants had of the HWM such as job autonomy, self-management and flexibility, came across as push-factors for them to commit to adhering to deadlines and delivering to the employer. The findings suggest that this was a critical factor in driving people to be productive.

“I still continue working after working 8 hours due to deadlines.” (P4)

5.4.3. Performance targets

Participants explained how, in most instances, retaining performance targets as they were before the COVID-19 pandemic would have been futile, because, worldwide, economies took a knock and certain industries had to close due to the limited movement of people, with the exception of critical workers. One participant felt that because in general economic activity slowed down, therefore the marketing and sales industries were the hardest hit. They described how there was a stage during which clients were pulling out of advertising because they were not selling to anyone at that time. With the HWM being applied after the country had gradually started opening, the participant explained that

performance targets remained conservative because businesses could not afford to spend money on advertising because they were recovering financially. Although this adjustment of performance targets coincided with the HWM coming into use, it cannot be attributed to the Model but more to external economic factors.

“I think, uh. You know, targets became a luxury during lockdown. If we, if we're honest. Business was interrupted in such a major way that a lot of people actually don't understand how close they were. Many companies came to the brink right. If people are not interacting, if businesses are not getting paid, stuff increases. If people are not travelling, if people are not buying food, if people are not going to conference centres, if people are not buying clothes, if everyone is cooped up at home, that limits economic activity. Business depends on economic activity, right? And economic activity allows business to then allocate new business or sales targets to employees and so on.” (P2)

Some of the targets that were reported to have changed were in sales, where people's targets moved from being on the number of new sales and changed to being the retention of current clients. Again this was due to external economic factors and not the Hybrid Working Model. In marketing, they targeted regaining the lost clients, which participants reported to be extremely competitive.

On the other hand, participants in the finance sector experienced that there was little change in their performance targets, and stated that they met their targets and even reported getting performance bonuses. In their case, over and above the standard performance measurement, certain performance measurements were introduced in order to enhance collaboration and team work. Team KPI was introduced, which participants felt was in order to encourage team cohesiveness and engagement by having peers measure one's team engagement.

“When we're working from home, we still continue to still have that rapport and still make efforts to reach out. I guess it was also to encourage people to reach out, especially to those people who might be suffering from something, just to engage and have that interpersonal relationship.” (P9)

Participants reported that there were organisations that encouraged flexible setting of targets. In order for employees to meet their targets, they could shift the goalpost when delays were experienced whilst implementing projects. Again, therefore, the HWM was not credited for their changing performance targets but rather their company culture.

5.4.4. Other emerging themes

A compelling theme that emerged from the interview data was the linking of passion to productivity and performance. There was a sense amongst participants that if an individual loves what they do and they are passionate about their work they would perform regardless of where they are physically. This was especially evident in the belief that the HWM exposed individuals that lacked passion for their work, because their productivity deteriorated when working from home and the quality of their work declined.

“You know, I actually feel like the Hybrid Model shows like what passion you actually have for your work. You know, you either, if you don't like your job, then you won't do it. You know what I mean? It exposes people, actually. If you don't have passion, then you won't work. It's in fact, it's pretty interesting. Guys fall off. You see it like, Not interested. And then guys that love what they do, yeah, they'll do a lot.” (P1)

Another emerging theme was related to the finding that managers observed some staff struggling to work well from home and requiring more intense supervision. The need to constantly view and measure the productivity of the team via productivity software had a positive and negative aspect from the perspective of participants who were managers. Using this technology, it was quicker to track non-productivity and mitigate. This positive aspect was combined with the finding described above that having some days in the office also made detecting and resolving performance issues more rapid. The negative aspect was that management found they spent most of their time during working hours on the software, because of their need to see what the team is doing. In this sense, participants reported that the HWM could even have a negative impact on their innovation, creativity and productivity, because of amount of time spent tracking the productivity of their team.

“I spend a lot of time on AGILE because you need to be more aware. So Agile is, it's a software that basically, it shows whatever everybody's doing, they posted on

agile. And it shows the timeline that they've been busy with whatever they're doing, you see. So you can see, OK, this guy's been busy on this, on this project for like a month.” (P1)

The personal need of tracking productivity added a layer of work to participants managing teams. However, managers also reported that the manner in which they manage was affected by the HWM, although this could also have stemmed from the pandemic itself, in that their management now has a more human, empathetic element. When observing non-performance and poor productivity from employees, participants described how a number of scenarios come to mind, such as the fact that employees may be struggling to balance home and work responsibilities. For example, the national lockdown led to massive retrenchments and people had to cut on spending on domestic workers and fulfil these tasks themselves, therefore having to perform double the work. Some managers felt a new need to be aware of the circumstances that their teams are working under, acknowledging that insisting that they work from the office may not be financially viable for them and so would be unlikely to make them perform better.

5.4.5. Conclusion to results of Question 2

From the experience of knowledge workers participating in this study, the HWM did not have any substantial negative effect on their productivity overall. Although managers reported that some of their team members could not cope without constant supervision, participants who were not managing teams reported that planned work simply needed to happen and turnaround times needed to be met due to deadlines. If anything, the HWM, by giving them more ownership of the work, gave them a greater sense that they were responsible for ensuring that they performed what that their employers were expecting of them. The autonomy of work experienced and the flexibility of the HWM allowed participants to make optimal use of their time to work. Coinciding with the application of the HWM for the participants, the extension of the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business cannot be ignored, because some industries were especially negatively affected, which undoubtedly had a negative effect on overall productivity from a performance and target perspective. But participants did not attribute these changes to the HWM, which instead they considered at least partially responsible

for exposing employees' passion for their work and for provoking changes in performance management.

The following section discusses the findings in relation to the literature that was reviewed in chapter 2.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Results

6.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to integrate research findings in chapter 5 with the literature. The qualitative method of collecting data by conducting semi-structured interviews presented findings which will be used to confirm or contrast with the literature. The main research question was: What is the impact of the Hybrid Working Model on productivity? The two questions below were formulated to in order to answer the main question.

6.2. Discussion related to Question 1

Question 1:

How has South African knowledge workers experienced working in a Hybrid Working Model environment?

Question 1 was posed in order to gain the participating knowledge workers' lived experiences of the HWM, their positive and negative experiences and perceptions of the model, which also provided insight into their preferences regarding the model.

6.2.1. Experiences of the Hybrid Working Model

The Hybrid Working Model meant different things to different participants. Due to the newness of the HWM, certain organisations did not have a clear policy or definition of it. The results suggest that certain organisations had prescribed to their employees in terms of the days that they had to be in the office and the days that they could work from home. This agrees with definitions such as that stated by Iqbal et al. (2021), that HWM is a blending of home working and office working, although many of these definitions do not state that the organisations decide on days worked in the office. The participants that had the discretion to choose whether to work in office or remotely if it suited them confirms Lenka's (2021) definition of the HWM in stating that it is the organisation giving employees the opportunity to choose between working in the office, remotely or both. Certain organisations had given managers the discretion as to how they structured the HWM, and

most participants who managed teams chose to prescribe to their teams the days in which they can work from home or in the office.

There is however data that agrees with Grzegorzczak et al. (2021) on the point that the HWM should be determined at an organisational level and an explicit policy be put in place. Certain individuals in the study confirmed that they went to the office on days dictated by their organisations and if it were up to them they would choose to go to the office once per week. The newness of the HWM and the fact that organisations were still familiarising themselves with it could be the reason organisation leaders gave the discretion to managers to navigate the HWM to best meet their objectives.

6.2.2. Flexibility and work-life integration

The duality of the HWM, in that it is a blend between working in the office and working remotely, meant that delving into the experiences of the participants provided accounts of both working remotely and in the office, and the positive and negative aspects of each individually but especially of the combination of the two. This research established that the HWM provided a certain level of flexibility in work, which increased participants' ability to integrate it into their lives. This confirmed the position of Igbal et al. (2021), who state that the HWM gives employees flexibility to blend their work life and home life with greater ease than before. The experience of flexibility reported by the participants varied from person to person, but in general the concept of flexible work by MacEachen et al. (2008) was confirmed by the data, in that the HWM gave these knowledge workers the level of flexibility that allowed them to fulfil their work duties and home duties. Since integrating work and life mostly increased as a result of spending some time working from home in the HWM, the findings also confirm Rupietta & Beckmann (2018), who claim that it is remote work which heightens work-life integration. For example, they speak specifically of the work-life benefit of saving the time used to commute to work. According to the study participants, parents could use the time that they typically spent in traffic to drop off their children at school, or clean their homes, while participants without children were able to use the time for physical exercise.

According to the Border and Boundary theory, employees benefit from physical, temporal and psychological boundaries between work-life and home-life (Clark, 2000). But physically working and living in the same space gave a physical aspect to work-life

integration whereby some participants were able to have a work station where their children and spouse were 'integrated' into their work. These family members knew that when the door was closed, the participant did not wish to be disturbed but when the door was open, they could come in. This highlights that it is also possible, when working from home, to establish the physical and human boundaries to work productively and avoid conflict whilst still achieving work-life integration. Work-life conflict was reported in the data, however, when participants were working from home on the same days as their partners, where conflict could be due to resources such as bandwidth and work space, which confirms the premise of work-life conflict stated by Clark (2000). The data is silent on the negative psychological impacts of working from home, perhaps because the participants work certain days in the office (Grant et al., 2013).

The findings also confirm Iqbal et al. (2021) regarding work-life integration and Aczel et al. (2021) who claimed that working remotely affords employees with the flexibility to plan, organise and schedule their work. Although the utilisation of the flexibility was different for different participants, work flexibility was generally experienced in terms of flexibility of choosing the time and place which was optimal for the individual to perform different tasks. For instance participants with young children preferred to work after performing parental duties, a perfect example of the HWM giving employees the flexibility to perform both work and home duties optimally.

6.2.3. Autonomy, planning and self-management

The data suggests that the flexibility to plan the time and place for work resulted in an increased level of autonomy experienced by participants under the HWM. Rupiotta and Beckmann (2017) state that working from home leads to increased autonomy in employees, especially the autonomy to organise and schedule work, which is an extension of time flexibility. Although, as will be discussed in more detail with regards to productivity, the data does not present job autonomy as a motivation, but more of an empowerment and something developmental because it fosters responsibility and accountability. The data indicates an increased level of autonomy by participants who were not managing teams in that the absence of the managers and team members encouraged a level of independence to complete tasks and take initiative, and an increased level of creativity and innovation in problem solving, as opposed to having team members and the line-

manager present to constantly help. This confirms Hackman and Oldham's (1970) description of what job autonomy entails: employee independence, scheduling work at one's own discretion and determining how to perform tasks.

Autonomy in performing tasks depended on a high level of planning that emerged in the data to be a critical aspect of the HWM. Whilst Hackman and Oldham's (1970) definition of job autonomy speaks about independently working, the data suggests that employees planned their work with externally specified deadlines as their goalposts. Planning was rather in terms of organising where and when to perform particular tasks and ensuring that the time spent in the office was used optimally (sourcing information from colleagues on a project, obtaining inputs from other departments) in order to complete tasks timeously.

The data suggests that for the HWM to be effective, self-management is required, although literature prefers the term self-discipline. Clark (2000) states that individuals who lack self-discipline do not perform in the HWM. Similarly, (Suryadi et al., 2022) claim that autonomy can actually be negative for employees who do not have the self-discipline required. The increased level of autonomy was directly related to remote working in the data because a high level of self-management and discipline was especially required when the participant's line manager or team members were not physically present. The flexibility of remote work in the HWM required high levels of self-discipline and self-management from participants, which those who managed teams revealed that not every individual has. Their experience agrees with literature that connects successful remote working to particular personalities and types of people (Clark, 2000). Radonić et al. (2021), on the other hand, claim that it is a combination of the type of person and the type of job or task. This is more in line with the findings since participants indicated repeatedly that they planned certain types of work to do in the office and others to perform at home, based also on their own personal strengths in each place. One of the participants, for example, stated that she lacked the self-discipline when at home and preferred to work in the office in order to be productive. The same was true for participants who said they were procrastinators by nature and worked better when surrounded by busy colleagues. It has been reported in literature that working remotely can be negative for extroverts (Lippe & Lippényi, 2019), but in the data the self-proclaimed extrovert often chose to work from home. The participant thrived in the HWM because of the flexibility to integrate life and work, having more time to attend to their children, performing work when it was optimal to

do so late into the night, always with deadlines in mind and fulfilling their contractual duties with employers.

Many authors advocate that certain tasks are better suited to certain working environments, based on the level of autonomy required or distinguishing between routine and creative work, and reporting differences in productivity and creativity as a result of the environment (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021; Monteiro et al., 2019; Shobe, 2018). This is in line with research findings, for example, some participants preferred to do more intense work in the office and more routine jobs when working from the comfort of home, like catching up with emails while sitting on their couch. Sostero et al. (2020) claim that there are some tasks which should not be performed remotely just because of the nature of the task. Drawing from the findings, an example could be on-boarding, which one participant found extremely unhelpful because it was not done in the office. In Radonić et al.'s (2021) claim that the level of productivity when working outside of the office is determined by personality type and nature of the job, they propose that individuals that thrive in completing complex tasks independently report higher levels of productivity in the HWM. The data of this study is mute on the complexity of tasks but rather shows that collaborative tasks were organised in such a way that they were performed on days in the office. The literature states that remote working poses challenges in terms of team work, organisation of tasks and collaboration (Lippe & Lippényi, 2019), which the interview data confirms in that office work was mainly to perform collaborative tasks, hold meetings and project kick-offs.

The data indicates that the managers experienced a different dimension to managing remotely, such as insisting that their team had certain days in the office even though the organisation had not prescribed this, and they observed that an added layer of effort was required for effective communication and taking the responsibility to ensure that their team understood what had been communicated to them. This accords with literature regarding the challenge of managing remotely (Ozimek, 2020), and how it can result in a lack of team coordination and buy-in for new projects (Lippe & Lippényi, 2019). Various authors speak of the need for new ways of tracking performance (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021; Lippe & Lippényi, 2019; Suryadi et al., 2022), often in the form of technologies like those used by managers in this study. Chafi et al. (2022) even sees the HWM as an opportunity for managers to use technology in novel ways. Whilst Shobe (2018) submits that virtual

performance management results in delays, the experience of participants was that it actually made detecting problems easier and by combining it with regular days in the office, performance issues were resolved more rapidly. The data suggests that the HWM essentially addresses the negative aspects of remote working and non-performance in ensuring physical interaction within teams, addressing bottlenecks and combining remote and in-person performance management. Instead, the negative impact for managers was overworking, largely because some employees did not have the discipline to work from home and required constant supervision when working remotely.

6.2.4. Managing office and home distractions

Following their experience of remote work the participants observed that the HWM presented another degree of managing distractions from the office and distractions at home. Aczel et al. (2021) state that working in the absence of colleagues and a manager could facilitate focus and productivity for workers. The interview data confirms this, with participants finding that, on starting to go back to the office following working fully remotely, office distractions were experienced more. The physical lack of boundaries by people in the office was one of the aspects of managing office distractions in the findings whereas at home participants used technological tools to let people know of their unavailability. In contrast, it has been considered above how participants were able to establish boundaries with their family members to ensure they could work at home without distractions.

It has been noted that some found the office more conducive for focused work, with participants reporting that they perform the 'heavy lifting' tasks in the office, partly in order to look busy, and respond to emails on days spent working from home, a place of leisure, in order to manage home distractions. Although some participants that lived alone and had children reported power outages as a distraction that could see them driving to the office to complete tasks, they usually postponed work until they had completed parental and family duties. But rather than seeing these things as distractions, they were just some of the factors taken into consideration when planning within the flexibility of the HWM. Data does not confirm where workers work optimally, but rather that each participant chose where they were optimally productive according to their personality, circumstances and the task at hand.

6.2.5. Overworking

Literature speaks of overworking as the result of technological advancement which enables work to take place anywhere and at any time. The data, however, shows that it was the lack of boundaries from an individual or management point of view that could lead to overworking. Some participants reported that they had experienced managers that did not respect working hours and would set up MS Teams meetings in the evening, for example. But the more common observation of overworking amongst participants was due to how they chose to organise their work around other personal and home tasks. At an individual level, not knowing when to 'switch off' because of work-life integration, is a challenge reported by Shobe (2018). But the research revealed that it was in order to meet deadlines that participants overworked, and they did so willingly because they had used their working hours for other things.

The data agrees with literature on managers who overwork in the HWM (Bolisani et al., 2020; Kirchner et al., 2021). As these authors suggest, the productivity tracking tools added an extra layer of work, while previously a manager just physically walking to a team member in the office could equate to tracking productivity. The HWM required managers to constantly track performance and perform their own day-to-day job, as reported by one of the participants, who stated that his own work had been affected because of constantly watching the productivity of the team using a visibility tool. Some literature proposes that this kind of virtual visibility is not the same as the visibility from in-person interactions with one's manager (Lippe & Lippényi, 2019; Xiang et al., 2021). The data confirms this aspect because there was a feeling that when one was not physically in the office they were not really seen by their managers, especially managers who were not in favour of the HWM and deemed physical presence in the office as productivity. So although in the data, career progression was present, with participants changing jobs and organisations and progressing within the HWM environment, the data also confirms Xiang et al. (2021) which highlights that choosing to work from home when given that option could be career limiting due to lack of visibility.

6.2.6. Summary of the discussion of Question 1

In agreement with the literature, the data suggests that the flexibility of the HWM facilitated the work-life integration of participants, which was generally a positive experience, for

example because parents had more time to be with their children which was meaningful for them. Experiences of balancing home and work in one space were both negative and positive because whilst participants needed to manage distractions in the office and at home, and there was some evidence of the work-life conflict and overworking proposed by certain authors, these were overshadowed by participants experiencing the ability to perform personal and family tasks whilst still meeting work expectations. Findings agreed with literature about the need for planning and self-management. The element of development in these abilities was facilitated by the autonomy to choose which tasks were best performed where and when, and a sense of owning the work done empowered participants to be self-starters. Like previous research, results revealed that whether work is better performed at the office or at home depends on the type of task and the person, with some lacking the discipline to work remotely without constant supervision. The data suggests that the HWM addresses the negative impact of this on line managers' ability to manage performance in that the Model is a blend between office and remote working, but it was also in line with the proposition that it increases managers' workload.

6.3. Discussion related to Question 2

Question 2:

How has the flexibility of the Hybrid Working Model affected the productivity in knowledge workers?

Research Question 2 was asked in order to gain insights from the participants on how their productivity was affected while working in the HWM.

6.3.1. The Hybrid Working Model and productivity

Literature has claimed that the flexibility that is afforded to knowledge workers to choose where and when to work, the convenience of working from home and the financial benefits of not having to travel to the office and waste time in traffic guarantees their increased productivity under a Hybrid Working Model (Monteiro et al., 2019; Vandelannoitte, 2021). The data, on the contrary, suggests that whilst flexibility and convenience are appreciated,

this did not motivate participants to maintain or improve productivity. Instead, they were driven to produce by work expectations, especially in the form of deadlines, suggesting a level of commitment that was unrelated to having these benefits. The potential impact of the HWM was that the work autonomy experienced by the participants gave rise to a higher sense of responsibility and ownership of the work, which could have contributed to their commitment. To make this commitment compatible with work-life integration, the planning element comes into play: individuals ensure that they optimise time in the office so as to effectively and efficiently work at home, with all data, information and collaborative efforts done on days in the office. The data suggests that knowledge workers have managed to take advantage of the model to both attain their professional goals and enjoy greater quality of life. There is direct evidence of a participant who was grateful for the newly found work-life integration that the HWM afforded and even expressed that this led her to believe that the organisation she worked for valued her as a human being and not only as an employee. However, the interviews reveal that this did not result in more effort being put into her work, but rather her taking advantage of the flexibility of the HWM.

Participants who manage teams however have validated Iqbal et al.'s (2021) claims that employees who do not master working independently do not thrive in the remote working and Hybrid Working Models. These managers state that, during the period when workers were forced to work remotely, productivity and the quality of work deteriorated and that this was still observed in the HWM on days out of the office.

6.3.2. Planned-to-done ratio

The planning and autonomy experienced in the HWM resulted in employees being driven by delivering and completing tasks that they had set for themselves, either for the day, week or month. This is contrary to literature that claimed that increased work effort is attributed to having achieved work-life balance, that comes as a result of the work-life integration that the HWM permits (Chung & Lippe, 2020; Lautsch & Kossek, 2017). Instead, the data reveals that the autonomy to plan empowered participants to set goals for themselves and achieve them in work sense. Respondents were mainly driven by the goals and company deadlines set by their line managers and organisations. Regardless of where the employee was, they had to deliver. The data suggested that having the liberty to choose where they were optimally productive to perform certain tasks gave them an

advantage in terms of work-life integration but did not actually increase productivity. Some individuals focused more in the office and some when alone at home, therefore the autonomy to plan and arrange work ensured that participants met the goals that they had set for themselves, maintaining the planned-to-done ratio. But whilst their goals were based on externally determined deadlines, their planning the where and when of their work was intended to allow them to meet both these professional goals and their personal and family ambitions. Rather than a direct result of work-life balance, productivity in terms of planned-to-done ratio could be attributed to an element of job commitment as stated by Millward (1998), who defines it as an individual's willingness to do their ultimate best to achieve their goals. For example, one of the participants stated that she was prepared to drive to the office when there was a power outage at her home in order to meet deadlines, whilst others admitted willingly overworking on a regular basis. The novelty of the HWM is that job commitment was made compatible with other commitments in the lives of participants.

6.3.3. Turnaround times

Literature states that whilst employee-centred flexibility tries to facilitate work-life balance for staff, employer-centred flexibility is geared towards obtaining maximum outputs from employees (Avgoustaki & Bessa, 2019). But giving employees the choice to work from home did not yield an increase in overall productivity according to the data, instead the respondents were driven by deadlines. Their organizational and team turnaround times were actually negatively affected either because of external factors or for some respondents who had 100% liberty to choose when to go to the office, because this created a bottleneck for conducting collaborative work or getting in-person input from people in different departments such as legal and finance because there was no synchronisation of when employees should come to the office. In terms of individual turnaround times, the determining factor was the deadlines that participants had to meet. Still related to external expectations rather than improved work-life balance, one example of improved turnaround between a line-manager and an employee was in order to satisfy a micromanager who was prone to asking for feedback regularly. But overall the data suggests no change in individual turnaround times and the few changes that occurred were not due to the HWM. From the perspective of managers, some reported an improvement in turnaround times under the HWM compared to fully remote working and this was credited to the compulsory days in the office prescribed in the HWM.

6.3.4. Performance targets

Literature is silent on whether organisations increased targets because of the HWM, instead a blanket approach is taken that incentivising employees with choosing where to perform work or work part-time in the office and remotely with result in better performance (Chung & Lippe, 2020; Iqbal et al., 2021; Lautsch & Kossek, 2017; Vandelannoitte, 2021). Some authors go further to state that this nonpecuniary motive given to employees will result in maximum productivity (Choudhury et al., 2020). The data is contrary to this take because productivity was not observed to change in response to such an incentive. Participants' ability to meet performance targets did not change apart from macroeconomic external factors which negatively affected several industries, such as the marketing and advertising industry, whose participant reported that performance targets were changed because of the negative economic situation caused by the national lockdown and businesses cutting spending on advertising. The fund specialist who led a team stated that sales targets changed from making new sales to retaining current customers due to external factors and not the HWM. Certain organisation were flexible in culture in that employees had the liberty to revise performance targets, but again, this was not due to the HWM.

In order to facilitate the HWM, there was an organisation that introduced new targets such as peer review targets on team collaboration and interaction to ensure that employees did not fall into silos, which could be seen as a strategy to reduce the negative social and psychological factors affecting employees working from home (Grant et al., 2013).

6.3.5. Summary of discussion of Question 2

The work related commitment theory has been identified to explain the increase in productivity in the HWM and remote working arrangements (Amin, 2022). According to this theory, organizational commitment (Somers & Birnbaum, 1998) could be understood to be the link between the HWM and better productivity: employees would feel grateful and more loyal to their employer and would thus be more productive, in response to the nonpecuniary motive of improved work-life balance afforded by HWM (Chung & Lippe, 2020; Iqbal et al., 2021; Lautsch & Kossek, 2017; Vandelannoitte, 2021) or the apparent privilege of greater autonomy (Ipsen et al., 2021; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). As discussed above, the data contradicts this take because overall productivity remained

constant and did not change under the HWM in response to this, the manner in which participants were motivated in their work was different. In relation to job commitment, Chusmir (1982) stated that people work for different reasons; some work for economic reasons (to earn money), some work because they enjoy their work and some people work because they are expected to work. The overall consistency in productivity of participants could be attributed to the reason people work, as the work-related commitment theory claims in terms of job commitment. The participants' commitment to their jobs was what drove their productivity, therefore they were capable of adapting to the HWM and remaining productive and embracing the changes the model introduced.

It is worth noting that the HWM was not observed to affect overall productivity among this sample of knowledge workers, regardless of having to manage home and office distractions, because their heightened sense of responsibility towards their work ensured that they performed tasks according to expectations. In addition, the findings suggest that the autonomy offered by the HWM fostered a sense of ownership of the work for participants confirming Hackman and Oldham (1976), who have stated that higher job autonomy gives rise to a higher sense of responsibility towards the job. This is indicated in the data when the experience of a higher level of autonomy by participants reinforced their efforts in managing their time and performing work. Although the data confirmed the position of literature that managing remotely has a negative impact on productivity and performance (Shobe, 2018), this was offset in the HWM by combining remote work with days in the office. It was reported that monitoring employees took much time for managers and their own work suffered. This could be as a result of a lack of trust on the part of management due to their experiences with remote working systems, and perhaps is not warranted under the HWM.

The following section will provide some recommendations which arise after conducting the study and will provide concluding comments.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1. Introduction

This chapter will provide the principal conclusions following the research findings and the discussion of the results in comparing and contrasting with literature. Implications for management and business will be discussed, as well as study limitations and suggestions for future studies.

The disruption caused by the sudden national lockdown in order to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus resulted in a sudden change in the world of work. Homes became multipurpose spaces: offices, schools, yoga studios. The health emergency meant that people were left with little choice but to work from home with the aid of advanced technologies. Work relationships turned into virtual relations overnight, permanently shifting the work of managing teams. With the vaccination roll-out efforts, the restriction of movement was lifted and essentially people could return to working in the office. However, this resulted in an uproar in the US termed 'the big resignation' where a rise in the number of resignations among knowledge workers occurred when organisations demanded that they revert to working in the office. After experiencing the advantages of working from home, employees were averse to going back to the way they used to work before. Knowledge workers in Western economies proposed that they were more productive when working from home (Gartner, 2021). Therefore the purpose of this study was to establish, from the perspectives and experiences of a sample of South African knowledge workers, whether the Hybrid Working Model (combining working from home and working in the office) had an impact on productivity, through a qualitative method of conducting semi-structured interviews in order to answer the research question.

7.2. Principal conclusions

The principal conclusion of this study is that the Hybrid Working Model did not have a negative effect on participants' productivity suggesting that it does not limit productivity for knowledge workers in South Africa. The Hybrid Working Model enhanced work-life integration due to the flexibility of the Model, allowing participants to be better parents, invest into their physical wellness and reinvest time into their work. But the results did not

reveal that this motivated them in terms of productivity, as the literature suggests. Instead, the participants in this study displayed a level of work-related commitment, covered in literature, by which they ensured that they worked whenever and wherever they needed so that deadlines and expectations were met. This was facilitated by the sense of responsibility resulting from the overall empowerment of the employee to be more autonomous in the workplace under the HWM. By planning and managing themselves within the flexibility afforded to them by the HWM, they were able to maintain or improve productivity at work, whilst integrating it with the rest of their lives. The HWM has changed the dynamics of work such as relationships between employees and their line managers, team dynamics has become more virtual and intentional, and the role of management has been impacted negatively by the HWM. Remote management is known from the literature to be a challenge and this was confirmed by participants who managed teams, however, they took advantage of the days in the office characteristic of the HWM to mitigate this. 11/12 of the participants stated that they preferred the Hybrid Working Model after having experienced the remote and traditional office models.

7.2.1. Flexibility and work-life integration

The findings do confirm that the flexibility that the model enables for workers enhanced their ability to tend to their families because of having the freedom to choose where to work in a manner that best suits both home responsibilities and work responsibilities (Aczel et al., 2021; Ipsen et al., 2021). All participants highlighted the flexibility of the HWM as an enabler for integrating both work life and personal or family life. Participants with children had more time to attend to their children's needs, and to fulfil parental duties such as dropping off and picking their children from school, which before, when they were required in the office full-time, was not possible. There was abundant evidence of an enhanced quality of life without having to compromise on work outputs. Positive impacts on the lives of parents, included, for example, making the choice to breastfeed a baby for the desired longer period without worrying about having to be in in the office. Or the ability to watch children play sport in school, for a person who used to leave the home before sunrise and return after dark due to the long distances to work. Respondents that did not have families either invested time in physical exercise, more sleep or reinvesting time into their work. Visiting parents in different provinces without having to compromise on work is a phenomenon that respondents cannot imagine not having in the future. Nor should they need to, because their level of productivity remained unaffected.

7.2.2. Autonomy, planning and self-management

Working remotely during the national lockdown presented a situation where knowledge workers had to perform without the physical presence of team members and line managers. True to Rupietta and Beckmann's (2018) claims, the absence of line managers and team mates heightened the independence and autonomy in performing tasks because the results indicate that there was an increase in the level of autonomy in planning, in scheduling of tasks and meetings (calendar) and in accomplishing tasks. This new found autonomy facilitated the development of self-management, accountability and an overall ownership of the work, resulting in a heightened sense of responsibility amongst the knowledge workers.

The study indicates that flexibility of the HWM allowed for the work-life integration in whichever form, due to the autonomy to choose where to work and when best to work, but its success was dependent on high levels of planning and discipline from individuals. Knowledge workers took the office and home distractions in their stride, planning and managing themselves and choosing the optimal time and place to perform certain tasks given the level of focus it required, ensuring that the work was completed. For some, certain tasks such as compiling reports were better conducted in the office due to home distractions, while others prefer to do such tasks in the office where there are team members present in case input is required. The flexibility of the HWM facilitated the manner in which knowledge workers adapted to suit their individual professional needs and family needs. Participants that had to be in the office on specified days resorted to ensuring that the appropriate work was performed in the office and the remaining work was made compatible with duties at home without compromising on the quality of work produced.

The findings agreed with Shobe's (2018) notion that working remotely negatively affects team collaboration, but under the HWM the participants who manage teams could plan so that there was dedicated time in the office to perform collaborative tasks, project kick offs, performance management and monitoring. This added complexity for managers, who had to coordinate, organise, control and monitor performance remotely on other days. Certain individuals work well remotely, but this isn't the case for everyone: one of the respondents had recently fired an employee who was not performing in the Hybrid Working Model.

Managers highlighted having added responsibility due to managing remote work, such as increased level of communication, ensuring that what is being communicated is understood, and constant monitoring of productivity through technological means available, over and above their duties.

7.2.3. Productivity

Overall productivity has not been negatively affected by the Hybrid Working Model, according to the findings of this study. Knowledge workers continued to be productive while incorporating their lives in the Model. The findings indicate that the autonomy allowed workers to efficiently manage their energies to work at optimal times in order to integrate work and life and meet deadlines and commitments to their employers. The assertion of literature that giving employees the privilege to choose where to work or whether to work from home will yield more productivity or effort was not evident in the research findings. The findings showed that knowledge workers in South Africa were committed to their work and would perform it from either the office or at home. The HWM has enhanced their quality of life but having to ensure that the quality of their home life did not come at the expense of their work displayed a level of commitment to the work, to deadlines and to fulfilling their commitments to their employers.

7.3. Implications for management and business

The HWM is a recent model in South Africa, organisations have not clearly articulated it for themselves and what it means for their employees. In this research, the majority of the participants reported that the organisations they work for do not have clear policy on how the Model works and therefore how it should be implemented. Some organisations merely communicated that the office building was open and accessible for anyone who may prefer working in the office. Therefore, if it was up to line managers (not policy) to prescribe the days in which they required their teams to be in the office, they would set compulsory days for their team in order to organise tasks which would be performed in the office (collaborative tasks). Organisations granting employees the liberty to choose to work in the office or at home, and line managers then requesting office presence on certain days may cause dissatisfaction among employees who prefer to work from home but have to go into the office while their peers do not have to. While employees may appreciate it when organisations that give them carte blanche over choosing where to work, leaving

the option to work from the office open, this runs the risk of employees choosing to work in the office only to appease line managers that do not favour the HWM. It is worthwhile for the Model to be defined and applicable for all to avoid disgruntled employees and promote fairness.

Line managers and management have been faced with the change in managing employees who have experienced the flexibility and work autonomy made possible by working from home and the Hybrid Working Model. Line management responsibilities such as coordinating, organising tasks, and monitoring performance were a challenge when employees were 100% remote. The HWM, on the other hand, presented a mechanism for them to perform their managerial duties effectively, especially coordinating collaborative work. This study has highlighted the importance for line-managers to function in trust and be output focused. Certain individuals could prefer to work outside of office hours, which could signal non-productivity to the line-manager that constantly monitors the productivity tracking tool. Whereas the study suggests that employees maintain productivity and are more delivery and deadline driven, while making use of the flexibility of the HWM to perform home duties as well. Organisations have not yet customised the HWM to their organisations and cultures.

Remote working and the HWM has brought forth a revolution in that employees' lives outside of work have been brought right into organisation, because they have spent over one year being productive while juggling home responsibilities. Organisations cannot ignore that and return to business as usual. Employees have had to accommodate work into their home and families, so business needs to do the same and take into consideration that employees are mothers, fathers, daughters and sons and those roles are just as important as a job. As the big resignation in the US has shown, the priorities and expectations of the employee have changed. One of the participants in this research resigned from a job that required staff to be full time back in the office, without having alternative employment. The quality of life experienced when working remotely and in the HWM had a lasting effect. Corporate South Africa cannot rule out a big resignation happening here unless they are willing to embrace change.

7.4. Study limitations

The research was conducted in the infancy stage of the HWM being adopted in South Africa. Had the research been conducted later, when clear guidelines on how the Model is to be adopted in corporate South Africa were in place, more findings from organisational, managerial and individual experiences and perceptions could have been collected to validate or contrast with literature.

In term of potential researcher biases identified in the study, the researcher has a bias towards the HWM based on her own experiences and perceptions. The researcher had the perception that increased productivity would have been the findings to confirm literature.

The limitations of this study were that it was a qualitative study based in South Africa, therefore not a worldwide study. There was a limited period to conduct the research as hybrid working arrangements were not stable, therefore there was a limitation in that the findings reflect the reality for that particular time period. The participants' perception and experiences may change in the not so distant future.

Power outages led to postponements and cancellations of interviews with potential participants and low bandwidth as a result of power outages resulted in virtual interviews being conducted with the participants' cameras off. Virtual interviews even with videos on, limit the researcher's observation of body language. With cameras off, facial expressions were missed by the researcher when conducting the semi-structured interviews.

The researcher's choice of the purposive sampling method may compromise the study because the researcher chose the sample population based on prior connection with the individual. Although there was a variety in the pool of industries included, the sample does not represent the entire corporate South Africa's knowledge workers. Therefore the results may be reflective of people in particular industries.

The power distance between the interviewer and certain participants who were older and more senior in their career intimidated the researcher in terms of driving the conversations and clarifying questions asked when there was a misunderstanding on the part of the participants.

There was a language barrier between the researcher and Zulu speaking participants, who sometimes displayed annoyance when being requested to revert to English or needing to translate certain expressions and exclamations and humorous anecdotes because certain expressions are unique to that vernacular language.

7.5. Suggestions for future research

It is recommended that research be conducted on how the HWM and remote working affected line-managers in 3 to 5 years in South Africa, because the HWM is relatively new. It is worth conducting research on the future of line-managers, when employees are growing in autonomy, self-management and a heightened sense of responsibility towards their jobs.

A study should be conducted on the effect of a more laissez faire approach to implementing the HWM to determine whether a top-down approach is more effective and conducive to productivity.

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Appendix A: Data Analysis

<p>Consolidated Main Themes</p>	<p>HWM – Prescribed 5/12 HWM – Discretionary 7/12 Flexibility 12/12 Work-life integration 8/12 Increased Autonomy 10/12 Planning 10/12 Self- Management 5/12 Collaborative work in the office 8/12 Work-life integration 8/12 Increased communication 7/12 Prefer HWM 11/12 Decline Productivity 2/12 No change Productivity 3/12 More Productive 7/12 No change in targets 10/12 Change in targets 2/12 negatively affected targets 2/12 no change in performance 10/12 negatively affected 2/12 Managing Home distractions 6/12 Managing Office distractions 6/12 Overworking 6/12 Performance Management negatively affected 3/12 Not affected turnaround time 8/12 Positively affected turnaround time 1/12 Negatively affected turnaround time 3/12</p>
<p>P1</p>	<p>HWM – Prescribed Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-life integration <p>Collaborative work – in the office</p>

	<p>Increased communication</p> <p>Visibility</p> <p>Non-performance in HWM</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Planning and sticking to deadlines</p> <p>Passion & performance</p>
P2	<p>HWM – Discretionary Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-life integration <p>Choice</p> <p>predictable human behaviour</p> <p>lack of accountability and responsibility</p> <p>Managing Home distractions</p> <p>Over-working-temptation to overdo it</p> <p>performance management</p> <p>Increased communication</p> <p>Connectivity</p> <p>Decline in Productivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • productivity decline • Turnaround times declined • Targets did change <p>Planning</p> <p>Measuring outputs is important</p>

<p>P3</p>	<p>HWM – Prescribed Negative On-boarding experience Collaborative work – in the office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social aspect <p>HWM Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fosters Innovation <p>Time wasted in traffic</p> <p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time <p>Increased Autonomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising work/tasks <p>Planning</p> <p>Self- Management</p> <p>Time management</p> <p>Overworking at home</p>
<p>P4</p>	<p>HWM- Discretionary Lack team collaboration Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work life integration • increased time for work <p>Transparency of HWM</p> <p>Collaborative work – in the office</p> <p>Self-management</p> <p>Increased productivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased time for work • Time and energy spent on traffic <p>Performance not affected</p> <p>Increased Autonomy</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to organise tasks/work
P5	<p>HWM: Discretionary Increased productivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel time <p>Financial benefits Managing Office distraction Managing Home distractions</p> <p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work-life integration <p>Increased Autonomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Organising tasks/work • Calendar <p>Planning Time Management Increased Collaboration Increased communication Self-management Accessibility Connectivity Increased productivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing Office distraction • Increased communication • Org Culture • Empowered due to HWM
P6	<p>HWM - Discretionary</p> <p>Collaborative work – in the office Work Increased Collaboration negatively affected performance management</p> <p>Development</p> <p>Increased Autonomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calendar • Time <p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work life integration • time • Work-life-balance <p>Managing home distractions</p>

	<p>Increased innovation Personality-type-introvert Increased productivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel time <p>Increased communication Delegating</p>
P7	<p>HWM - Discretionary</p> <p>financial benefits</p> <p>limits personal bias</p> <p>Career Limiting</p> <p>Loss of opportunity</p> <p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work life integration • Flexible targets <p>Increased Autonomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising work/tasks <p>Increased Communication</p> <p>Managing relationships</p> <p>Time management</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Overworking</p> <p>Managing home distractions</p> <p>Prefers Office work</p> <p>Productivity has not been affected</p>
P8	<p>HWM – Prescribed</p> <p>Collaborative work – in the office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Benefits

	<p>Managing Home Distractions</p> <p>Managing Office Distractions</p> <p>Personality –ill-disciplined</p> <p>productive in the office</p> <p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-life integration • time • Abuse <p>Increased Autonomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise work <p>Productivity not affected</p> <p>Performance & targets negatively affected by the pandemic</p>
P9	<p>HWM: Prescribed</p> <p>Collaborative work – in the office</p> <p>Negative On-boarding experience</p> <p>Increased time</p> <p>Empowerment</p> <p>Increased Collaboration</p> <p>Time management</p> <p>Flexibility</p> <p>Work-life integration</p> <p>Self-Management</p> <p>Accountability</p> <p>Overworking</p> <p>meeting fatigue</p> <p>Productivity not affected – in par with what is expected</p> <p>Travel time</p> <p>Increased Autonomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise work planning

<p>P10</p>	<p>HWM – Discretionary Social meetings Negative On-boarding experience Reduced stress – better health Flexibility Work-life integration Increased Autonomy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To Organize work • Time • calendar Increased productivity Managing Office distractions Travel time Planning Nature of the job</p>
<p>P11</p>	<p>HWM – discretion Increased Communication Flexibility Time Planning Work-life integration Collaboration negatively affected Over-working Increased Autonomy Work Managing home distractions Managing office distractions Overworking – personal choice</p>
<p>P12</p>	<p>HWM – prescribed Collaborative work – in the office Positive social aspect Increased engagement</p>

	<p>constant management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• performance management <p>Time in traffic Managing Office distractions Increased Autonomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organising work/tasks <p>Flexibility - time Planning Self-management More productive at home Low flexibility – nature of the work Productive at home Managing distractions at home</p>
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Appendix B: Ethical Clearance

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance
Approved**

Dear Phomello Mojapelo,

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS [Research](#) Admin team.

Appendix C: Consent form

I **Phomello Mashadi Mojapelo**, a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science (University of Pretoria) and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research on the effect of the hybrid work model on productivity: perspectives of South African knowledge workers. Our interview is expected to last about 60 minutes and will help us understand how South African knowledge workers perspective on Hybrid Working Model.

Purpose of study:

The purpose of the study is to obtain the South African knowledge worker's experience and perspective on effectiveness of the Hybrid Working Model on productivity.

The benefits of the study:

The benefits of conducting the study will provide the knowledge worker perspective of the Hybrid Working Model on productivity. As many organisations are contemplating or have implemented the Hybrid Working Model, it would be beneficial to appraise the effectiveness of the hybrid model on productivity deliberating whether or not to return to the office, offer hybrid model, flexible working arrangement options and or remote work.

Confidentiality:

Please note that your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be reported without identifiers. The study has been approved by the Gordon Institute of Business Science (University of Pretoria). Upon completion of this study, it will be made available upon request to the Gordon Institute of Business Science.

If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below:

Student details:

Name: Phomello Mashadi Mojapelo

Email: 20807092@mygibs.co.za

Mobile: 0721069126

Supervisor details:

Name: Jabu Maphalala

Email: MaphalalaJ@gibs.co.za

I hereby request you to sign the attached document, in order to indicate that you are familiar with the conditions stated above and that you have consequently given your permission to take part in the interview.

Signature of participant:

Signature of researcher:

Phomello Mashadi Mojapelo

Appendix D: Interview Guide

The Hybrid Work Model and Productivity: Perspectives of South African Knowledge Workers.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Name:

Designation:

Date:

Start time:

End time:

MS Teams / Zoom link:

Research title: The Hybrid work model and Productivity: Perspectives of South African Knowledge workers.

Main research question: What is the impact of the Hybrid Working Model on productivity?

Thank you for availing yourself, it is much appreciated. As mentioned I am conducting a study on the hybrid work model and productivity from a South African knowledge worker's perceptions and experience. With organisations contemplating or having implemented the Hybrid Working Model, it would be beneficial to appraise the effectiveness of the hybrid model on productivity.

Virtual Interview:

Please confirm if you are comfortable to have the camera on during our meeting.

Before we begin, could please sign the consent form.

May I please record our conversation?

Questions:

Question 1: What has been your experience adopting the Hybrid Working Model?

1. What has been the positive aspects of the Hybrid Working Model?
2. What are the challenges have you experienced of the Hybrid Working Model?
3. In comparison of the hybrid and traditional, which would you prefer and why?

Question 2: How has the flexibility of the Hybrid Working Model affected the productivity in knowledge workers?

1. How has the Hybrid Working Model affected your productivity in terms of:
2. Planned-to-done ratio?
3. Turnaround times?
4. Performance targets:
5. Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you for your time and great insights.