

**The Influence of hybrid working environments on team collaboration and the  
productivity of a team**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Hybrid work has emerged as a new approach to work following the arrival of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Research points to the lack of understanding about how the adoption of hybrid work structures affects the interactions and collaboration efforts among team members in both the physical office and remote environments. Furthermore, with the shift towards hybrid work, businesses face the challenge of maintaining strong team collaboration, cohesiveness and communication among team members who work both in the office and remotely. The purpose of this research was to understand how this sudden shift in the work environment influences how team members interact and collaborate with one another to meet team objectives.

The study employed an exploratory qualitative research approach. A total of 15 participants were identified, however, only 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals occupying different roles within the Financial Services Industry. The number of interviews conducted versus the number of participants identified was noted when analysing data.

The findings reflect both positive and negative influences on teams operating within hybrid work environments, that can be used by businesses considering this new model of work. Furthermore, the findings contribute to the body of literature on hybrid working environments and provide greater insights into understanding the factors influencing collaboration within these environments.

## **KEYWORDS**

Hybrid working, Team Collaboration, Teamwork, Productivity

## **PLAGIARISM 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.*

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Hybrid work has emerged as a new approach to work following the arrival of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Research points to the lack of understanding about how the adoption of hybrid work structures affects the interactions and collaboration efforts among team members in both the physical office and remote environments. Furthermore, with the shift towards hybrid work, businesses face the challenge of maintaining strong team collaboration, cohesiveness and communication among team members who work both in the office and remotely. This chapter looks to introduce the research topic on the Influence of hybrid working structures on team collaboration. The introduction outlines the research problem, purpose, and then finally both the theoretical and business relevance derived from the study.

### **1.1 BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH**

Teams and teamwork have become an effective way for organisations to get work done. They allow members of an organisation to disseminate information, share knowledge and skills and create synergy which enhances a more collaborative work environment (Oyefusi, 2022). The Coronavirus (COVID) pandemic has altered workplace orientation in lasting ways, as lockdowns forced individuals and organisations to settle into new routines of working from home (Verma et al., 2022). Now as South Africa, along with many others start to work beyond the pandemic, there's a need to redefine the future of what work looks like (Verma et al., 2022). Hybrid working is defined as a "flexible work arrangement where workers work in both the physical office environment as well as locations remote from their central area of work" (Wang et al., 2020, p. 3). The advancements in technology platforms as well as learnings gained from the COVID pandemic have created multiple opportunities for individuals to work in different locations outside of the traditional office space (Bosua et al., 2017).

While research mentions the various benefits of remote working on employee well-being and productivity resulting in reduced worker absenteeism, increased retention of excellent staff as well as an increase in individual and team efficiency (Bosua et al., 2017), there also exists concerns around the disruption it brings about to team working environments as individuals try to settle into new patterns of work and often results in members of teams feeling socially isolated or excluded. To this, Fayard et al. (2021) argue that working virtually is viewed as a double-edged sword in that initially relationships appear to flourish but after some time, loneliness starts to creep in. Since studies have shown that teams with stronger relational ties tend to perform tasks more effectively, the relationship between team effectiveness and team member relationships is said to be crucial in virtual teams (Ramayah et al., 2004b).

Furthermore, Bosua et al. (2017) add that little is known about how hybrid working structures alter team productivity, as productivity in itself is often subjective and it's not always easy to measure the productivity impact of a team.

Tse and Dasborough (2008) found that team dynamics are driven by three main variables: "communication", "team cohesiveness" as well as collaboration. How these two variables are managed within the context of a team is found to largely affect overall team productivity and organisational performance. The social exchange theory as well as the conceptual model developed look to provide valuable frameworks that describe team dynamics and outline how member interactions in teams influence the dynamics and productivity of teams, by having an understanding of these influences' teams can more effectively negotiate and implement new norms of collaboration to remain successful in hybrid work structures.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Organisations are known as a collective of people which involves some element of human relations and interactions. It also includes the communal effort of many employees working towards a common goal (Mohanty & Mohanty, 2018). Human beings require personal connections to build trust and this trust is often established in face-to-face organisational settings. Similarly, Ramayah et al. (2004) mention that teams are a collective of individuals who need to form social interactions to create the cohesion needed to achieve productivity. Ramserran and Haddud (2018a) also point out that while traditional teamwork is characterised by immediate and unconscious personal interactions between members of a team that allow bonds to develop naturally, teamwork in a virtual team can frequently be perceived as being reduced and less interactive, creating new challenges that impede the development of team norms.

In today's evolving world, team dynamics and strong relationships play a vital role in fostering collaboration, enhancing productivity and allowing individuals to achieve common goals (Oyefusi, 2022). Existing literature makes extensive mention of various examples of the need for team development practices themselves, but the need to understand and manage these practices in virtual settings has of late become increasingly popular. As such, it has also become important for managers to develop the skills necessary to be able to address all parties properly and maintain team cohesiveness as virtual teams frequently use digital media to coordinate with at least one team member working remotely (Ramserran & Haddud, 2018b).

While research exists around the impact of virtual working structures on productivity, not much is known about how hybrid working structures (which are a combination of both in-office and remote working) alter the productivity aspect of teams. This is echoed by Ramserran and Haddud (2018b) who mention that because of the many factors preventing clear communication and interaction, managing virtual teams can be more challenging than managing traditional in-office teams. Furthermore, “remote workers may expend considerable energy creating visibility to compensate for their lack of physical presence” (Kelliher et al., 2018, p. 6).

Although teamwork and collaboration have been researched extensively in Human Resource Management. There have been few studies to date that address the change in collaboration patterns for teams working in hybrid environments. This gap is articulated by Waizenegger et al. (2020) who mention that post-COVID there is a need to establish how teams adopt new norms of team collaboration within hybrid working structures and appeal for research into how hybrid work structures could potentially change team dynamics. This study represents an attempt to fill that gap.

### **1.2.1 Team dynamics**

For purposes of this research, team dynamics is defined as the behavioural and social relationships between team members. Such relationships determine how a team interacts, communicates, and works together to achieve common goals and maintain productivity.

## **1.3 RESEARCH PURPOSE**

The purpose of the research is to understand how hybrid work environments influence team collaboration and the consequent effect on the overall productivity of a team. This study aims to understand how this sudden shift in the work environment influences how team members interact and collaborate with one another within this environment to meet team objectives. By delving into the experiences of individual team members, the researcher aims to identify the challenges and opportunities presented by hybrid working structures in fostering effective collaboration strategies within teams and ultimately how this influences team functioning and productivity.

The research objectives for the study are to understand the following:

- The factors influencing the formation of new collaboration norms within hybrid working environments.
- The perceived role of team dynamics in negotiating and implementing these norms.
- How these collaboration norms lead to continued team productivity and overall organisational success.

#### **1.4 THEORETICAL RELEVANCE**

A model of hybrid team collaboration is developed to understand how hybrid work structures may influence team collaboration, whereas the social exchange theory seeks to look at the interactions and relationships in the team and understand how these social exchanges add to overall team and organisational success. Several scholars have researched several aspects of virtual working that impact team performance, for example, teamwork and virtual working (Bosua et al., 2017), the relationship between virtual work settings and team effectiveness (Oyefusi, 2022), as well as virtual work and team functions (Driskell et al., 2018). Knowledge of how fully virtual teams influence performance seems to be extensive, however, there exists an opportunity to understand how a combination of both in-office and remote working done on such a large scale transforms the dynamics of a team.

From a theoretical perspective, the study looks to contribute to hybrid work literature and the broader understanding of organisational behaviour and human resource management in the context of evolving work arrangements which can help shape policies and practices in the future of work.

#### **1.5 BUSINESS RELEVANCE**

The majority of organisations today have moved away from hierarchical work structures choosing to instead adopt team-based structures as a way to get work done (Kimble, 2014). The need to understand team behaviour and team functioning has become ever more important. Dulebohn and Hoch (2017) articulated the importance of understanding how different virtual working structures impact teams as they provide both benefits and concerns for organisations. In addition, Bilotta et al. (2021) highlight that communication, trust, and mutual respect are all elements of team dynamics that influence the cohesive nature and performance of the team. With the increased demand for flexibility and greater emphasis on mental health and work-life balance, businesses now need to adapt to work models that allow individuals added flexibility in deciding how and where they work. As a result, there is a need

for organisations to understand how hybrid working structures influence the dynamics of a team to be able to implement processes that lead to positive team outcomes.

From a business context, the study aims to provide insights into how teams navigate the complexities of hybrid working structures and establish collaboration norms. By identifying potential enablers and barriers to collaboration success, it will offer practical guidance for organisations seeking to optimise their hybrid work models.

## **1.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter introduces the research topic. It highlights the background, problem statement and research purpose. The study seeks to understand how team dynamics, and collaboration as a key factor in team dynamics, operate within hybrid team environments. It looks to contribute to hybrid work literature as well as provide insights into how teams navigate the complexities of hybrid working structures and establish collaboration norms.

## **1.7 STRUCTURE OF PROPOSAL**

The remainder of this report looks to provide deeper insights to answer the research objectives. Chapter Two explores the literature reviewed on the constructs of team collaboration within the context of hybrid working structures. The review seeks to understand the role collaboration plays in building team dynamics and how these norms are transformed in hybrid environments.

A conceptual model has been developed to outline the study's core constructs in order to easily derive meaning on how teams can achieve effective collaboration within hybrid working environments. Question Three highlights the primary research questions derived from the literature that seek to answer this phenomenon.

Chapter Four describes how data was collected and Chapters Five and Six look to present findings and provide an in-depth discussion of what these findings mean for the field of Human Resource Management as well as organisational success. The report concludes with chapter Seven, which looks to draw on the contributions of the study as well as provide recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The nature of work has undergone significant transformations, accelerated by advancements in technology and a changing global landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this transformation, leading to a rapid adoption of remote work. With many organisations now considering the transition to hybrid work models, it is imperative to understand how team collaboration takes place in this new environment, by understanding the benefits and challenges faced in remote and physical environments and the challenges and opportunities that could arise as a result of hybrid working. This chapter looks to review the current literature and provide an understanding of the work that has already been done on hybrid work and team collaboration in order to address the objectives outlined in Section 1.3.

The chapter starts by delving into the notion of teamwork structures and how they have transformed over time. The literature review gathers perspectives and knowledge from multiple sources of literature to enrich the areas being investigated. This is due to the fact that a substantial portion of the prevailing literature on team collaboration focuses on remote work structures and traditional team structures, with only a limited amount of literature available focusing on hybrid working structures. While collaboration in hybrid work settings remains relatively unexplored, the established body of remote working literature is still relevant to provide an understanding of the fundamentals of collaboration. Next, the construct of team collaboration as an element of team dynamics is explored by looking at the individual variables crucial to effective collaboration that may be influenced by hybrid work structures.

The study's theoretical anchor, social exchange theory, and its role in team collaboration are explained. The theory looks to explore the role of exchange relationships within a team context and how these may influence the collaboration effectiveness of a team. The theory draws on the literature on team dynamics and what leads to the reciprocal norms of exchange that allow members of a team to share knowledge and build the cohesion necessary for team effectiveness.

A conceptual model has been developed to outline the study's core constructs to easily derive meaning on how teams may achieve effective collaboration within a hybrid working environment. A structured outline of this section is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

## **Understanding Team Structures**

- 2.2 A conceptual understanding of team working structures
- 2.3 Forms of teamwork structures
  - 2.3.1 Remote team structures
  - 2.3.2 Traditional team structures
  - 2.3.3 Hybrid team structures

## **Understanding Team dynamics**

- 2.4 Team dynamics in hybrid environments
  - 2.4.1 Team collaboration as a vital component of team dynamics

## **Social Exchange Theory**

- 2.5 Social exchange theory and team dynamics

## **Model of Integration**

- 2.6 A model of hybrid team collaboration

*Figure 1: Literature Review Layout (Adapted from: Vahedna, 2019)*

The chapter concludes with a summary of the review. This chapter allowed for the formation of the main research questions which are then further detailed in Chapter Three.

## **2.2. A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF TEAM WORKING ENVIRONMENTS**

In the modern business landscape, we operate in today, teams and teamworking structures play a pivotal role within organisations, contributing to their efficiency, innovation, and adaptability. As businesses have continually evolved in response to the ever-changing environment, most recently accelerated by the seismic shifts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the significance of teams and a profound comprehension of the multifaceted team working environments have become not just important, but imperative (Driskell et al., 2018). Extensive research overwhelmingly underscores that organisations achieve greater effectiveness and accomplish more within the framework of a team, as opposed to relying on isolated individuals (Mohanty & Mohanty, 2018). This is fundamentally due to the dynamic nature of the work in today's world, with complex tasks and limited timeframes requiring collaborative efforts (Mohanty & Mohanty, 2018). Teams have long existed over the years, spanning diverse sectors, from business and education to healthcare and sports, as they offer a means to leverage diverse talents, skills and perspectives towards achieving common goals (Kimble, 2014). The field of teamwork has also been rigorously studied over the years by many scholars, with Tuckman's (1965) model of group dynamics being widely used in understanding the evolving nature of teams as they transition through various stages to achieve productivity effectively.

At its core, teamwork is defined as “the collaborative effort of individuals working together to achieve a common goal” (Driskell et al., 2018, p. 4). Within organisations, team working structures are seen as the channel for optimum productivity. As Driskell et al. (2018) noted: “Much of the work in organisations is completed through teamwork” (p. 2), as this collaborative process allows for employees to achieve outcomes through knowledge sharing, skills sharing, and synergy creating an environment where employees willingly contribute and engage in decision-making and problem-solving (Oyefusi, 2022). The success and productivity of teams can therefore be linked to the effectiveness of integrating team members within the team working structure.

However, with the transition to hybrid working structures, the landscape of team dynamics has become considerably more complex. In such environments, where part of the team operates from the physical office location and others remotely, challenges could arise due to the “power distance” that can emerge between those in the office and those working remotely (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Navigating these intricate dynamics requires a deeper understanding of team functionality and collaboration within the context of hybrid working environments.



This study focuses on understanding teams in the post-pandemic world of hybrid working, as teams still play a central role to an organisation's ability to innovate and adapt more swiftly to changing environments (Robbins & Judge, 2023). In this context, understanding the intricacies of teamwork in hybrid environments will allow businesses to strategically position themselves for success in this evolving landscape. This study will focus on hybrid working teams which became more popular due to COVID-19.

## **2.3 FORMS OF TEAM WORKING ENVIRONMENTS**

This section examines the different types of teamworking environments that have been described in the literature, focusing on three main environments: remote working, traditional working and hybrid working teams, highlighting the differences, similarities and considerations for the future world of work.

### **2.3.1 Remote team environments**

Remote working, (also referred to as flexible work arrangements, virtual work or telecommuting) has become a standard practice in the modern work environment, with many employees around the world embracing this flexible work arrangement. Existing literature primarily centers around remote teams collaborating across geographical locations and time zones, relying heavily on technology for communication and collaboration. This body of work highlights the benefits and challenges faced by such teams in achieving their goals, both at the team and organisational levels (Waizenegger et al., 2020). However, there's not much evidence about how these remote structures operate within the setup of hybrid work environments.

Van Der Lippe & Lippényi (2020) have noted that remote work can be highly advantageous for individual employees, offering them flexibility in their work reducing interruptions, and freeing them from common office distractions allowing them the time to focus on delivering outputs. Fayard et al. (2021) also mention that this autonomy in working leads to increased job satisfaction and improved work-life balance for remote workers. However, a key issue with the existing literature is its emphasis on the benefits for individuals, while not sufficiently exploring the advantages for teams as a whole.

Wang et al. (2021), argue that the barriers and challenges associated with remote working could be more detrimental to business success than the positives achieved, noting that, communication may become more formalized and less spontaneous, relying heavily on digital

tools such as emails, instant messaging and video conferencing. He further mentions that the lack of face-to-face interactions can hinder brainstorming, and creative problem-solving making it more difficult for teams to share knowledge and collaborate effectively. Van Der Lippe and Lippényi (2020) and Dulebohn and Hoch (2017) further add that teamwork in remote settings could lead to uncertainty, tension, and resistance among team members, due to the social distance between individuals making it harder to establish trust and build relationships. This trust deficit can hamper the productivity of teams working in a remote or hybrid environment. As organisations increasingly adopt hybrid work structures, it becomes imperative to examine the interplay between remote and in-person dynamics to understand how collaboration objectives can be effectively achieved. While there is some evidence of the individual benefits and challenges of remote work, a significant gap exists in understanding how these dynamics impact collaboration and team productivity in a hybrid work environment.

### **2.3.2 Traditional team environments**

Traditional team structures are characterised by co-located team members working together in the same physical space. This co-location fosters valuable face-to-face interactions and enables team members to pick up on social cues, thereby promoting more organic collaboration and stronger relationships and trust among colleagues (AlZaabi et al., 2021). The physical office setting is favoured by many organisations for its ability to foster team bonding and allow for in-person interactions and immediate problem-solving (Fayard et al., 2021). Similarly, Krzywdzinski (2022) mentions that physical presence leads to increased productivity within the team and can be more conducive to spontaneous interactions contributing to a strong sense of unity among team members and reinforcing the feeling of belonging.

Although lacking in spontaneity, (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020) argue that these same outcomes can be achieved by those working remotely as can be seen with geographically dispersed teams, further adding that the full extent to which the physical office enhances productivity cannot be known as productivity outcomes of teams are hard to measure. Moreover, (Waizenegger et al., 2020), argue that the primary reason for employees to into the office is not necessarily to boost productivity but to enable organisations to better control and oversee their employees. This need for physical presence can inadvertently limit flexibility making it harder for those individuals wanting to work remotely.

### **2.3.3 Hybrid team environments**

On the other hand, hybrid team environments, which combine both in-office and remote work, have gained immense popularity as a response to allowing for a balanced approach between in-person and remote work. Although hybrid working structures have afforded employees the choice to decide where to work and allowed them increased flexibility in deciding how much time they spend in the office and at home the transition to hybrid work cannot completely replace the physical office dynamics and face-to-face interaction. Purvanova and Kenda (2021), point out that collaboration is still more effective when achieved through face-to-face communication and co-presence highlighting the continued need for office interaction. While hybrid working environments provide greater flexibility, they do not fully replicate the benefits of in-person interaction (Krzywdzinski, 2022), as face-to-face communication fosters a level of connection and understanding that is difficult to replicate remotely, especially in complex situations.

Additionally, Fayard et al. (2021) mention that companies are unlikely to abandon their offices fully. This is because the office has always served a purpose beyond merely being a place to work. It has allowed for social interactions and the fostering of corporate culture. These essential aspects of the office environment still remain even in the context of hybrid work. Purvanova and Kenda (2021) thus conclude that as workers work remotely from time to time, the office is more likely to become the setting for team interaction as opposed to the place where individuals do work. The question that then arises is whether hybrid environments which offer the best of both the office and remote environments can sustain social interactions and in-person contact needed for collaboration while giving individuals the flexibility they desire (Krzywdzinski, 2022).

Based on the above discussion, Table 1 provides a summary of the main differences between traditional, remote, and hybrid teams. In general, it could be possible to achieve several advantages through the adoption of hybrid teams. Managers need to ensure that they pay equal attention to both individuals working in-office as well as at home to ensure balanced communication throughout a team which would allow for better collaboration attempts (Purvanova & Kenda, 2021).

<b>Traditional Team</b>	<b>Remote Team</b>	<b>Hybrid team</b>
Team members are co-located	Team members are in different locations	Team members are both co-located and in different locations
Team members communicate face-to-face	Team members communicate electronically	Team members communicate both face-to-face and electronically
High opportunity to share work and high informal communication	Informal communication is limited due to conversations happening through technological platforms	Informal communication often happens among those in office and limited for those working remotely
Effective collaboration and productivity output from team	Low collaboration and weak productivity output from team	Team could experience moments of both high and ineffective collaboration resulting in mixed productivity outcomes.

*Table 1: Differences between traditional, remote and hybrid teams (source: AlZaabi et al., 2021)*

Hybrid work environments may change how and where work is done, but it does not negate the significance of the office, understanding the ways in which hybrid environments influence team collaboration, can provide greater insights to businesses in developing strategies that allow for more effective collaboration outcomes within hybrid team environments.

## **2.4 TEAM DYNAMICS**

Teams, teamwork and understanding the associated dynamics have become very important for organisational effectiveness and business success (Kimble, 2014) as teams are complex and dynamic structures in that overtime they will often dissolve and reform as people exit the team and new people join the team (Choudhury et al., 2020). In his theory of group dynamics Lewin (2012) characterises teams as open, complex systems that are influenced by both internal and external factors that impact a group’s behaviour (Gençer, 2019). Team dynamics is considered important to team effectiveness as it is the extent to which individuals working in a team are able to communicate, create alignment, and develop the cohesion needed to achieve effective collaboration and productivity (Gençer, 2019).

### **2.4.1 Team Dynamics and Team Productivity**

The connection between team dynamics and productivity has been well-established in literature. Nazzaro and Strazzabosco (2009) mention that team dynamics encompasses the communication patterns, collaboration norms, conflict mechanisms, and leadership structures teams need for success. Similarly, Lewin (2012) in his theory of group dynamics speaks to the various stages teams go through to perform, alluding to the fact that some sort of dynamic needs to be consistently present in the team to remain successful.

Within physical office environments, this dynamic is achieved through proximity and an ability to read social cues and body language to build a common understanding (Fayard et al., 2021). This dynamic could be altered in remote environments as a lack of physical presence requires teams to read and understand social cues in different ways. To this Morrison-Smith & Ruiz (2020) argue that remote working teams don't necessarily need structures in place around dynamics for teams to be effective, adding that many virtual teams operate outside the context of an actual team culture and are still able to effectively get work done. Kimble (2014) however mentions that these working structures work in virtual teams as they operate as specialist project teams often dissolving once the project is complete and this could be detrimental for non-specialist teams as they tend to work together for longer periods of time. This is aligned with a study by Krzywdzinski (2022) that mentions the difficulty non-specialist teams faced in communicating and collaborating during the enforced COVID lockdown period.

Much of what we know about team dynamics emerges from traditional teams. What we do not know enough about is how team dynamics, and collaboration as a key factor in team dynamics, operate in hybrid teams. This study seeks to address this gap.

#### **2.4.2 Team Dynamics in Hybrid Environments**

Hybrid work environments introduce a unique challenge to team dynamics as members of a team often rotate between the office and remote environments either at the same or differing times. This juggle between the office and remote environment requires teams to adopt new measures for communication, collaboration and leadership structures (Fayard et al., 2021). More so, similar to remote working the virtual nature of hybrid teams can make it more difficult to establish and maintain the cohesion needed for productivity (Ramserran & Haddud, 2018).

(Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020) mention that although advancements in technology have allowed individuals to communicate across dispersed locations, barriers to communication and misunderstandings are still likely within hybrid environments due to a lack of visibility, hindering the ability of teams to develop trust and meaningful relationships. Shockley et al. (2021) further add, that along with communication, leadership and conflict resolution mechanisms may also need to be adapted to accommodate the needs of both in-office and remote workers.

### 2.4.3 Team Collaboration as a Vital Component of Team Dynamics

Collaboration is considered the cornerstone of effective teamwork. As a component of team dynamics, it involves the exchange of ideas, knowledge and skills to achieve a common goal (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Oyefusi (2022), mentions that collaborative efforts enable teams to tap into their diverse expertise leading to innovative solutions and improved decision-making. Within traditional workspaces, collaboration allows for spontaneous and quick idea generation due to the proximity of team members (Waizenegger et al., 2020), which could be hampered in hybrid work structures due to the reliance on technological resources resulting in the need for more structured collaborative interventions making it more difficult for them to be as successful as traditional (co-located) teams. This is echoed by Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020), who mention that virtual teams may find themselves spending considerable time and money to relocate team members when working on significant projects to avoid hindrances in communication and teamwork often associated with distance.

Existing remote working literature also mentions current collaboration challenges those working remotely experience as a result of missed informal learning opportunities and a feeling of decreased support (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Within the context of hybrid environments, more awareness needs to be given to individuals working outside the physical office space to eliminate the potential for misalignment and feelings of exclusion. Although hybrid working structures have afforded employees the choice to decide where they work and allowed them increased flexibility in deciding how much time they spend in the office and at home, Purvanova and Kenda (2021), argue that collaboration is more effective when achieved through face-to-face communication and co-presence highlighting the continued need for office interaction. To this, Fayard et al. (2021) mention that companies are unlikely to abandon offices fully, as going to the office has never just been about going to work.

Purvanova and Kenda (2021) thus conclude that as workers work remotely from time to time, the office is more likely to become the setting for team interaction as opposed to the place where individuals do work. A study by Driskell et al. (2018) found that team members need social interactions and relationships to find meaning and belonging within the team. The office has long served as the place for such interaction. Similarly, Driskell et al. (2018) mention that the more individuals feel like they belong and are included, the more likely they are to communicate and free information flow across the team resulting in higher team outcomes.

Effective collaboration is contingent on a team's ability to communicate and work seamlessly regardless of physical location. As a result, Waizenegger et al. (2020) suggest that in hybrid

settings, the role of collaboration becomes even more critical and organisations applying a hybrid working structure need to find alternative approaches to collaboration as it bridges the gap between team members who are physically present and those working remotely.

Based on this understanding of interactions in teams and the review of relevant literature, four key aspects have been identified as being important to effective team collaboration. Table 2 summarises the variables studied by authors that affect collaboration sharing in virtual and traditional teams that should be a consideration for teams working in hybrid work structures. The key variables will be discussed in further detail below Communication, Technology Adaptation, Trust, Psychological Safety and Goal Interdependence.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Authors</b>
Communication	Waizenegger et al. (2020); Driskell et al. (2018); Morrison-Smith & Ruiz (2020)
Trust	Cheng et al. (2016); Davidaviciene et al. (2020); Oyefusi (2022).
Psychological safety	Cordery & Soo (2008); Jha (2019); Davidaviciene et al. (2020)
Technology Adaptation	Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020); Choudhury et al. (2019)
Goal interdependence	Davidavičienė et al. (2020); Driskell et al. (2018); Waizenegger et al. (2020); Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020)

*Table 2: Variables affecting collaboration in virtual and traditional teams*

#### **2.4.4 Key Aspects of Collaboration**

##### Communication:

In any organisation, effective and efficient communication is considered the lifeline to organisational success and overall business performance (Mohanty & Mohanty, 2018). In the context of teams, communication is considered critical to team collaboration and plays a central role in the success or failure of a team's efforts. Through communication members of a team can share information, ideas and knowledge, resolve conflicts constructively as well as coordinate efforts towards achieving common goals. To this, Waizenegger et al. (2020) mention that teams that communicate effectively are often more able to engage in better critical thinking and decision-making leading to higher levels of productivity, while on the other hand, poor communication can often result in misunderstandings and higher levels of conflict amongst individuals decreasing overall team performance (Mohanty & Mohanty, 2018).

Although advancements in technologies over the years have allowed individuals working remotely to engage in meaningful work through the use of tools such as video conferencing (e.g., Skype and Zoom), and text and collaborative platforms such as Microsoft Teams (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Studies have found that remote teams still face difficulties in achieving effective communication making collaborative efforts much slower and challenging to come by versus what can be achieved when team members are working in a physical office setting (Driskell et al., 2018, Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Similarly, teams working in hybrid environments may encounter challenges in communication as a result of most communication taking place mainly between individuals within the physical office environment resulting in the need to recommunicate the message so those working remotely are not excluded (Waizenegger et al., 2020). To be successful, communication must play a strategic role within hybrid working structures to ensure that teams get work done effectively.

### Trust:

According to Chung et al. (2015), trust is one of the most significant variables influencing team collaboration because it facilitates the sharing of information and is crucial in lowering cognitive load and complexity, both of which are necessary for effective team collaboration. Trust among team members is positively correlated with strong social ties and higher levels of contribution to knowledge-sharing (Cheng et al., 2015). Furthermore, Davidavičienė et al. (2020) mention that trust among team members creates a sense of obligation to share knowledge, and the creation of that obligation motivates them to share knowledge in order to avoid breaking it. Similarly, Cheng et al. (2015), mention how crucial trust building is for teams because it increases members' willingness to put in more effort to accomplish the team's overall objectives. Unlike traditional teams where trust is built through face-to-face interactions, remote teams must rely on prompt and appropriate responses through the use of technological platforms to foster trust (Davidavičienė et al., 2020). This often presents issues related to the absence of body language and nonverbal cues, which can make it harder to foster trust in the initial stages. In remote teams where conflict is more common, a higher degree of trust is required to perform effectively and avoid delays as "people trust people, not technology" (Cheng et al., 2015, p268).

### Psychological safety:

Psychological safety today is considered to be crucial for facilitating learning and change in organisations (Edmonson et al., 2016) and consists of presumptions about how others will respond when someone asks a question, seeks feedback, reports a mistake or proposes an



idea (Jha, 2019). How team members perceive the consequences of taking interpersonal risks within a group is critical to promoting effective collaboration (Cordery & Soo, 2018). In a psychologically safe environment, team members are able to respect one another's opinions, exchange knowledge, and openly discuss errors without fear of repercussions (Davidavičienė et al., 2020). Furthermore, psychologically safe environments allow team members to engage in collaborative, functional, inquiry mode of team discussion resulting in more productive conversations and higher team performance (Jha, 2019).

In hybrid team structures, where some members work remotely and others in the physical office, psychological safety can be challenging due to the physical distance of individuals and differences in communication channels (Jha, 2019). Remote workers therefore need to feel included and encouraged to participate in discussions and share thoughts to enhance a more collaborative environment.

#### Technology Adaptation:

Technology adaptation is linked to how individuals are able to effectively communicate with one another in remote or hybrid working settings. Within a hybrid environment, which combines both in-person and remote working the adoption of the correct technological resources is a necessity in individuals working together (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020), as technology allows workers the flexibility to work where they want while still being connected. This flexibility further fosters productivity as it allows individuals to work in environments that suit their needs and preferences (Kimble, 2014). Dulebohn and Hoch (2017) state that having the right technological tools such as video conferencing platforms and communication applications allows workers to collaborate seamlessly across remote environments bridging the physical gap and enhancing connection. However, Morrison-Smith & Ruiz (2020), mention, that in some instances not all workers have the same access to technology, adding lack of IT support and technology issues as the main driver of individuals working remotely during the COVID lockdown period, this resulted in difficulties in being included leading to individuals disengaging completely. An over-use of digital tools could also result in "zoom fatigue" as experienced often throughout the pandemic, making it harder to engage in collaboration efforts when working remotely (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

It's further mentioned by (Ramserran & Haddud, 2018), that an over-reliance on technology within remote working environments has associated cyber security challenges for organisations. Organisations therefore need to have robust security measures to protect their

sensitive data for individuals operating within hybrid and remote environments which could be costly.

### Goal interdependence:

Goal interdependence refers to the extent to which team members' individual goals are linked to and influenced by the achievement of the team's overall goal (Davidavičienė et al., 2020). It's important in the realm of teamwork and collaboration because it determines how team members work together to achieve common objectives. To this, Driskell et al. (2018) mention that in collaborative teams, aligning goals fosters a clear sense of purpose and enables team members to work together towards achieving shared outcomes.

Within hybrid working structures, team members are not always physically present in the same location at all times. This could result in those working in the office experiencing a different work environment from those working remotely leading to varying levels of access to resources, information and face-to-face interactions (Waizenegger et al., 2020) making it harder for team members to stay aligned to team goals. Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020), state that the use of technological resources can assist in bringing remote workers closer to the office, and the use of tools such as video conferencing and project management software can influence how team members perceive and interact with their goals resulting in enhanced goal interdependence across the team, however technical issues and miscommunication could hinder it.

Goal interdependence is crucial for effective team collaboration because it influences how team members interact, communicate and work together. Within a hybrid working environment where clear alignment is even more essential, teams need to ensure that team goals are well articulated and understood by all as little or no interdependence can hinder teamwork and lead to conflict.

## **2.5 SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY AND TEAM COLLABORATION**

The social exchange theory is widely used in understanding organisational behaviour and holds the premise that all social interactions involve some form of exchange, whether tangible or intangible (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In recent years several scholars have applied this theory to understanding team dynamics within organisational settings (Jha, 2018; Edmonson, 1999; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Jha (2018) argues in his study that within a social relationship, team members will only share their opinions freely if they anticipate a

positive response, and Oyefusi (2022) concurs, adding that employees are more likely to react positively in work environments where they perceive the benefits of exchange to be positive.

Within remote working environments, Edmonson (1999) mentions that social exchange may be hard to come by in remote working environments due to the potential isolation individuals may feel, impacting their willingness to share their opinions and concerns. To this Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005) mention that within the physical office, proximity allows for more timely exchanges contributing to more efficient and productive interactions within the team, increasing individuals' willingness to share information across the team.

In team dynamic relationships, the theory emphasises the principle of exchange where exchanges are only likely to happen among individuals if they perceive the exchange outcomes as beneficial to them (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Within hybrid working environments where individuals operate both within the physical office and remote locations, the reciprocal norms of exchange that guide these social exchanges could be harder to come by (Van Der Lippe & Lippényi, 2020).

Oyefusi (2022) however mentions that these reciprocal norms can still be achieved within hybrid environments as team members are still able to leverage the benefits of in-person and remote interactions. This is argued by Hertel et al. (2005) who note that achieving this balance between in-office and remote workers can be complex, leading to disparities in communication and perceived benefits.

## **2.6 A MODEL OF HYBRID TEAM COLLABORATION**

Remote teams appear to face particular challenges when it comes to effective team collaboration (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020; Cordery & Soo, 2008). In seeking to understand how collaboration is altered in hybrid environments this research focuses on the collaboration aspects that may be affected by hybrid working. To provide a more substantive understanding of the literature, a model (Figure 2) was developed to illustrate how these constructs might interact with one another.

The model is adopted from a study by (Cordery & Soo, 2008) on virtual team effectiveness and proposes that compared to team members working in-office, teams operating within a hybrid working environment may face challenges when it comes to (1) accessing, sharing and capitalising on team information and knowledge; (2) developing a safe space where individuals feel free to share ideas, brainstorm and be creative; and (3) experiencing a sense of collective

purpose that is often associated with productivity and performance excellence. The model also illustrates the willingness of individuals to engage in exchange relationships based on the perceived benefits of collaboration interactions and how these exchanges could influence team dynamics.

Existing literature on collaboration in traditional and virtual team environments is used to support the conceptual argument. The model looks to explore the influence of hybrid work environments on the team collaboration aspects of communication, trust, psychological safety, technology adaptation, goal interdependence, and the overall resultant impact on team productivity.

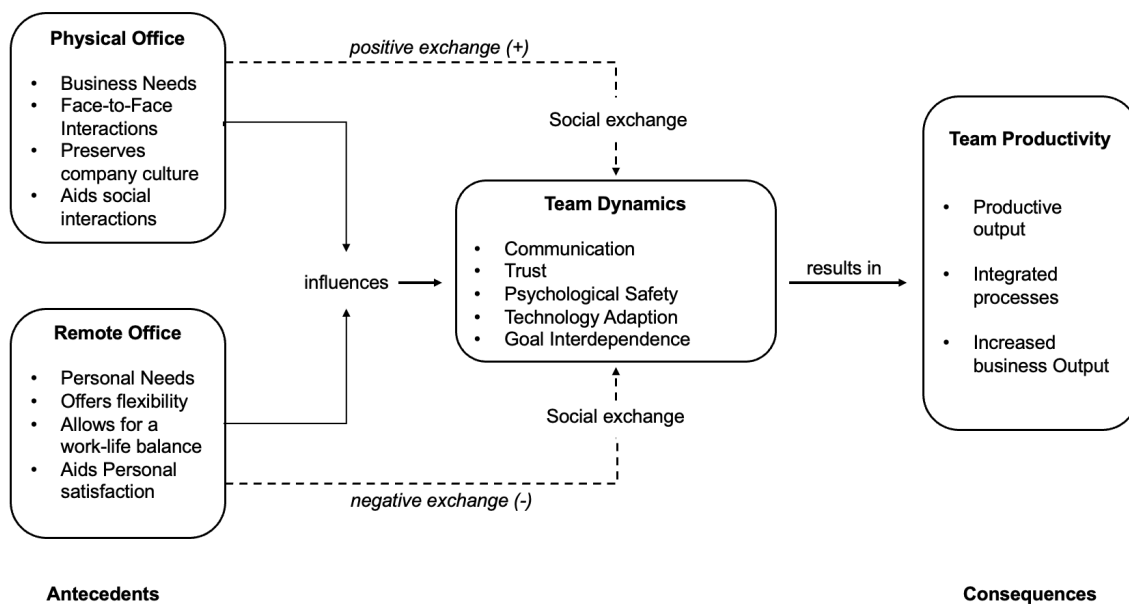


Figure 2: A conceptual model of hybrid team collaboration (Adapted from Stutsky & Laschinger, 2014)

The model proposes that in hybrid work environments, individuals may be more prone to engage in exchange benefits when in the office environment than when working remotely due to the invisible nature of remote working (Edmonson, 1999). Team collaboration although still taking place within remote environments is heightened in physical office environments resulting in teams needing to exert more effort and engage more frequently with remote workers to remain effective (Purvanova & Kenda, 2021). Depending on the nature of the team this could have either a positive or negative effect on overall team productivity.

The model further proposes that social exchanges and the sharing of information are likely where individuals perceive these exchanges to be beneficial to them (Oyefusi, 2022), these exchanges are thus far more likely in the physical office than with individuals working remotely.

In presenting this framework, it should be mentioned that the model seeks only to explain how team collaboration might be altered by hybrid environments and how this in turn impacts team productivity. In doing this it is also recognised that other attributes of team dynamics (cohesion, coordination, consistency, etc.) also contribute to team effectiveness in all team types.

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

The literature review details some of the work that has been done in the area of remote working teams and team dynamics. The research focused on communication, trust, psychological safety and goal interdependence as variables needed for effective team collaboration, as a component of team dynamics. This research was undertaken to explore how teams adopt and negotiate new collaboration norms in hybrid environments. This type of working structure includes both in-office and remote working.

The literature that has thus far been researched on collaboration and team dynamics has mainly been directed in the context of remote working environments in contrast to traditional in-office teams. Literature on the social exchange theory has also been drawn in, to better understand the nature of exchange in team relationships. Although a lot of research exists in these fields, the literature review points to an opportunity to explore how hybrid working, which is considered the workplace of the future may influence how team members relate to one another and how this then alters collaboration and overall team productivity.

Furthermore, given the research objectives outlined in section 1.3 and the identified gaps in the existing literature, this research adopted an exploratory approach to investigate how teams working in hybrid environments might adapt and navigate new collaboration norms to remain effective.

The research questions presented in Chapter 3 were formulated through the linking of the research objectives, along with the review of literature.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the research is to understand the influence of hybrid work structures on team collaboration. This chapter outlines the main research questions that will guide the study. These questions were formulated from the research objectives in conjunction with the reviewed literature. Sub-questions were formed for each primary question to allow for further probing and understanding. This process allowed for the development of the interview guide which was used as the measurement instrument of the study. The interview questions which were derived to gain greater insight into the research questions are mapped out in Annexure A as well as Table 3.

#### **Research Question 1: How do teams working within hybrid working structures negotiate and adopt new norms of team collaboration?**

This research question aims to understand how teams operating within hybrid working structures navigate the process of establishing and accepting new norms for collaborative work. Furthermore, this question seeks to provide new insights into the strategies, processes and considerations that teams need to take into account as they establish new ways of working together in hybrid environments. This question aimed to address the existing gap in literature regarding the limited understanding of how teams working in hybrid environments adopt new norms in collaboration (Waizenegger et al., 2020), which allows them to maintain productivity and achieve team outcomes regardless of location.

Current literature in this field largely focuses on the technological and logistical aspects of hybrid work, such as the use of collaboration tools and remote communication platforms (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). However, it has overlooked the crucial human element of team collaboration – the establishment of shared norms, values and expectations that guide collective behaviour.

In understanding this, the research seeks to offer a more comprehensive understanding of how teams working in hybrid structures can continue to foster unity, adaptability and shared purpose in their work, which ultimately leads to productivity and the successful achievement of team objectives.

**Research Question 2: What are the perceptions about collaboration amongst colleagues within hybrid working structures**

This question aims to explore the attitudes, beliefs and viewpoints that team members hold regarding collaboration in the context of hybrid working structures. It looks to uncover how team members perceive the effectiveness, challenges and benefits of collaborative efforts when working in hybrid environments with some team members working remotely and others working from a physical office location.

The question seeks to further understand how well team members communicate with each other both in person and virtually, the level of unity within the team and whether they perceive themselves as being as productive as they were before the shift to hybrid working.

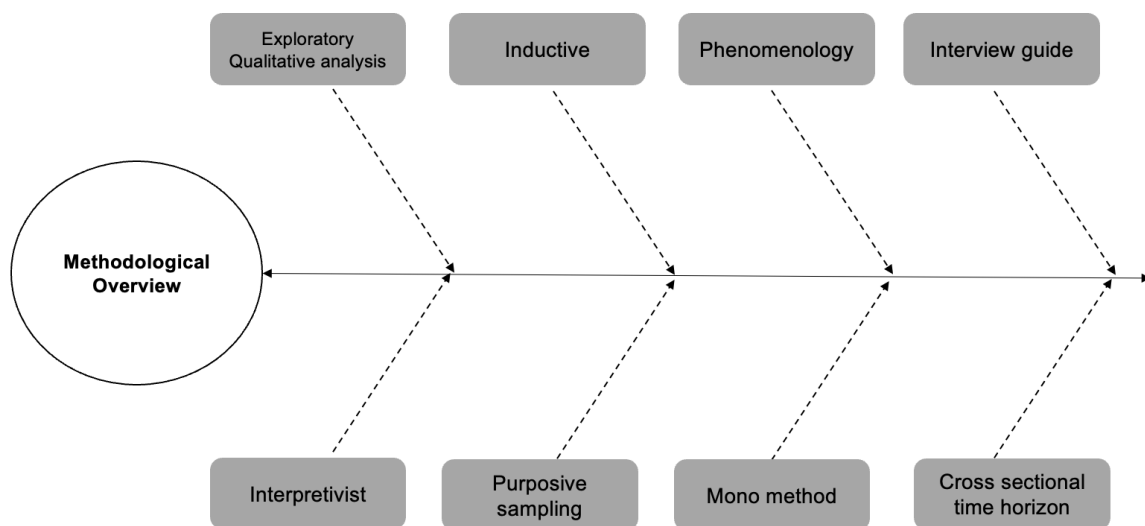
**Research Question 3: What can be done to improve collaboration between colleagues within hybrid working structures?**

This question looks to address the challenges that can arise when some team members work remotely while others work in the physical office. The goal is to ensure that despite the different work locations and potentially differing time schedules, colleagues are still able to effectively work together to achieve common objectives. The question aims to explore the strategies and actions teams can take to improve their collaboration within hybrid working structures.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

The recent rapid adoption of hybrid work structures has become more prevalent in most organisations. The research aims to understand the influence of hybrid work structures on team collaboration. This chapter outlines the methodology and design applied to answer the research questions derived. The study looks to contribute to the identified gap in the literature on how teams negotiate and adopt new norms for team collaboration in hybrid work environments and how this, in turn, influences team dynamics.



*Figure 3: Research methodology outline*

Figure 3 provides a structure of the research methodology process followed for this study. The research design is characterised by an exploratory qualitative approach, rooted in the interpretivist philosophy and driven by an inductive approach. The chosen research strategy is one of phenomenology and purposive sampling is employed for maximum variation. An interview guide served as the measurement instrument of the study, used for the purposes of data collection. A detailed explanation of the methodological choices is outlined in the sections that follow.

### 4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 4.2.1 Purpose of Research Design



Saunders and Lewis (2017) state that “exploratory research aims to gain new insights, ask new questions & assess topics in new ways” (p. 115). An exploratory research design was used for this study to enable the researcher to identify best practices as well as opportunities for sustaining effective collaboration within hybrid teams.

#### *4.2.2 Research philosophy*

The overall research purpose focuses on determining how teams negotiate and adopt new norms of team collaboration within hybrid working structures. This research purpose was explored through a philosophy of interpretivism. Interpretivism “relates to the study of social phenomena in their natural environment” (Saunders & Lewis, 2017, p. 109). Through this philosophy, the researcher was able to gain a greater understanding and deeper meaning of the intentions of participants.

#### *4.2.3 Research approach*

An inductive approach was used because it provided avenues to explore meaning and insights into a given subject. By using an inductive approach, the researcher sought to understand how people see the world by giving a voice to the participants by focusing on their perspectives and points of view. An indicative approach was used to observe specific patterns and repeated occurrences of how team members within a hybrid working structure engage one another. Propositions were formulated from insights gained and these were then further investigated (Saunders & Lewis, 2017).

#### **4.2.4 Choice of Methodology**

Based on the purpose of the study, a mono method was applied as the key choice of methodology. Given the interpretivism philosophy that the study is based on, the research utilised research methods to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of how collaboration is formed within teams and how this contributes to the overall productivity of a team. William (2011) mentions that qualitative research is appropriate when one wants to explore a social phenomenon such as team collaboration from the participants’ viewpoint. Azungah (2018) supports this by stating that qualitative research methods are useful in interpreting how human beings form and attach meaning to their experiences. Furthermore, Johnson et al. (2019), add that qualitative research approaches allow one to make sense of the lived or observed phenomenon in a specific context rather than generalising from numerical data manipulation.

In using qualitative methods, the researcher sought to understand experiences around how individuals adapt to collaborating with team members in both a physical and remote working environment and the challenges, strategies and adjustments employed within these interactions to maintain effective teamwork. Through this approach, the researcher explored the various factors and nuances that influence team collaboration in the context of hybrid work structures and discovered new insights into why and how hybrid working structures either enable or act as a barrier to team collaboration.

#### **4.2.5 Research Strategy**

This study adopted a phenomenological research strategy. Phenomenology is concerned with collecting the views and lived experiences of participants. According to Errasti-Ibarrondo et al. (2018), phenomenology is still undergoing philosophical and methodological reinterpretations (qualitative research design). In using this strategy, the researcher identified a phenomenon, particularly: team collaboration as it occurs among team members working within hybrid environments in South Africa and then collected data based on participants' experiences with this phenomenon. Data was then combined to produce a single picture that captured the essence of each study participant's experiences (Creswell et al., 2007). Phenomenology was used to answer questions about what the experience was like for participants and what that experience meant to them (Saunders & Lewis, 2017).

The phenomenological approach in this study enabled the researcher to understand the lived experiences of individual team members as well as teams as a collective, working within a hybrid working structure. This was done to understand the underlying meaning of their experiences of how social relationships are developed and how teams collaborate within hybrid working structures.

#### **4.2.6 Time horizon**

As a result of the limited time available for the research study, a cross-sectional time horizon was used to provide a single shot of how teams collaborate within hybrid environments at a particular period in time (Saunders & Lewis, 2017).

## **4.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.3.1 Target Population**

A population within a study is referred to as a group of participants from whom information is required to answer the research questions (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). A population is critical to ensure that the researcher selects the correct respondents for the study. The population of the study were employees working as consultants within financial services organisations in the financial services industry.

### **4.3.2 Unit of Analysis**

A unit of analysis refers to the main subject from which the basis of research conclusions is formed. Damsa & Jornet (2021), mention that the unit of analysis is a crucial component of the methodology which establishes the object of enquiry. The unit of analysis was the perceptions of the individual low-level consultants working in teams within the operations or servicing departments in these organisations.

### **4.3.3 Sampling Method and Size**

Purposive probability sampling was used to select participants for the phenomenological study. In a qualitative study, purposive sampling is used to choose the most appropriate participants in the context of responding to the research questions (Johnson et al., 2019). It focuses on locating and choosing individuals or groups of individuals who have knowledge of and experience with the related phenomenon. Therefore, for this study, the researcher looked to select individuals who were best able to help answer the research questions formulated. (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). The reasoning for the purposive sampling strategy is to better match the sample chosen to the aim and purpose of the research which improves the trustworthiness of the data as well as the results of the study. A maximum variation strategy was applied for the researcher to identify essential as well as variable features in understanding the phenomenon as experienced by participants (Suri, 2011). The research study will follow the guide as outlined by Sim et al. (2018, p. 621), recommending three to ten (3-10) participants as the sample size rule of thumb.

A total of 15 participants were selected for the study however, only 14 were interviewed – which was considered when evaluating the findings- this included two Human Resource (HR) practitioners who are experts and have experience in guiding policies around hybrid working

structures, Team Leaders who lead teams as they focus on achieving team productivity as an outcome and know the challenges and opportunities for enabling social relationships which allow for greater collaboration within hybrid working structures, and lastly, focus groups consisting of individual consultants working in hybrid teams who were able to provide insights around the social dynamics within the team. By selecting a sample size consisting of individuals at different levels, multiple methods of data sources were used which is, therefore, a form of triangulation and adds to the trustworthiness of the data collected (Stenfors et al., 2020).

#### **4.3.4 Measurement instrument**

A semi-structured interview guide was developed listing the key issues the researcher wished to delve into during the interview process (Appendix A). This guide formed part of the measurement instrument and was the tool used to gather data from the sample. Three overarching research questions support the research purpose, which were used as the base of the interview questions. The interview guide consisted of between four to seven sub-questions across the three main research questions. These sub-questions were developed in such a way as to allow for greater information to be derived from the three research questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015).

Interviews were conducted by the researcher to gather information and interpret the context of the interviews (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015). Direct open-ended questions were asked to allow participants to share their experiences in working in hybrid working environments and how this influenced the way collaboration takes place within the team. Where needed the researcher provided further insights around the questions asked to best assist participants in responding to the questions.

Although participants were asked direct questions about collaboration in hybrid environments, they were still able to share experiences in working within hybrid environments which were not just limited to collaboration. This allowed for greater insights to be gained.

Prior to the interviews taking place, a pilot test was undertaken with a group of test participants. The purpose of this pilot test was to ensure that there were no closed-ended questions in the interview guide, to confirm that all questions were understandable, and to verify that all questions could be answered. The interview guide was then updated following feedback from the pilot test. Table 3 details the semi-structured interview guide used for this study along with the probing questions to derive a clearer understanding of the participants' thoughts.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
<p><b>RESEARCH QUESTION 1:</b></p> <p><b>How do teams working within hybrid working structures negotiate and adopt new norms of team collaboration?</b></p>	<p>1. How do team members interact with each other within the team?</p> <p>a) (Probe) How were team interactions before lockdown?</p> <p>b) (Probe) How are team interactions now within a hybrid working environment</p> <p>2. What is your opinion about the interactions and communication within the team?</p> <p>a) (Probe) Are team interactions more or less effective in hybrid working environments</p>
<p><b>RESEARCH QUESTION 2:</b></p> <p><b>What are the perceptions about collaboration amongst colleagues within hybrid working structures?</b></p>	<p>1. How does the team get work done when team members are working in the office?</p> <p>a) (Probe) on methods of interaction</p> <p>b) (Probe) on ways in which work gets done</p> <p>c) (Probe) on resources used in working</p> <p>2. How does the team get work done when team members are working remotely?</p> <p>a) (Probe) on methods of interaction</p> <p>b) (Probe) on ways in which work gets done</p> <p>c) (Probe) on resources used in working</p> <p>3. What have you noticed about team interactions 1) when working remotely and 2) when working in the office?</p> <p>a) (Probe) In what ways do interactions differ?</p> <p>b) (Probe) How has this impacted on the effectiveness of getting work done?</p> <p>4. How have team interactions changed through hybrid working?</p> <p>a) (Probe) What are the noticeable differences in how team members interact now?</p> <p>b) (Probe) what is the impact of these differences on the productivity of the team</p> <p>5. What has been put in place to ensure that team outcomes are achieved?</p> <p>a) (Probe) What has the team put in place?</p> <p>b) (Probe) How has the team changed the way in which they work to better suit their new environment?</p> <p>c) (Probe) What resources are drawn on to ensure that outcomes are achieved</p> <p>d) (Probe) How does the team measure the success of outcomes</p>

	<p>6. When and in what ways do you reach out to others in the team when performing team functions?</p> <p>a) (Probes) What are the methods used to approach individuals?</p> <p>b) (Probe) Are these methods effective in getting work done?</p>
<p><b>RESEARCH QUESTION 3:</b></p> <p><b>What can be done to improve collaboration between colleagues within hybrid working structures?</b></p>	<p>1. What may improve how team members relate to one another?</p> <p>a) (Probe) What can be done to build relationships among team members?</p> <p>b) (Probe) What resources can be used to bring teams together?</p> <p>2. What other interventions would you recommend to aid in creating better collaboration between members of a team?</p> <p>a) (Probe) What is currently missing that could make collaboration easier?</p> <p>b) (Probe) are their other methods that can be used to make collaboration more effective?</p> <p>c) (Probe) What other tools or resources can be used for collaborating teams?</p>

*Table 3: Semi-structured interview guide*

#### **4.3.5 Data Collection**

A total of 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected participants within the financial services industry. The participants had various roles to provide an in-depth understanding of working within hybrid working environments from different perspectives. Interviews were a combination of one-on-one in-depth and focus group interviews and varied between 25 minutes to 50 minutes. The variation in the length of interviews reflects the various ways in which participants wished to share their experiences. Certain individuals were concise in their comments and descriptions while others talked extensively about their experiences within hybrid environments and the various nuances that come into play within their day-to-day.

The sample targeted participants within the Financial Services Industry, including HR practitioners, Team Leaders, and Servicing Consultants within an Operations department. The sample was drawn from a total of two companies within the Financial Services Industry. Participants were based both in Johannesburg and Cape Town (Figure 4).

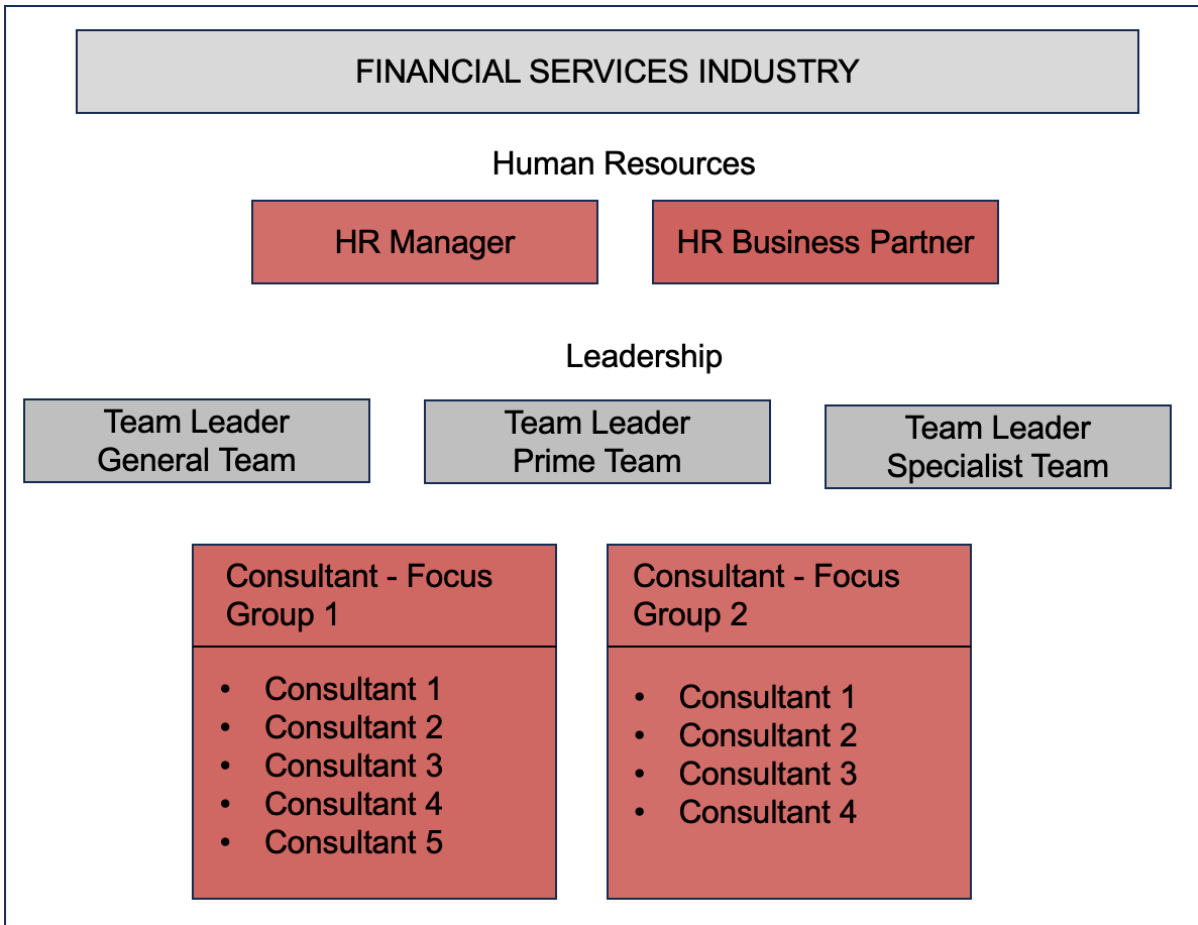


Figure 4: Research Sample

To initiate contact with all participants, the researcher initially reached out to participants via email through their network. This initial contact enabled the researcher to provide a brief description of the study as well as confirm boundaries of confidentiality with participants. Once rapport had been established, interview invitations were sent out. In preparation for the interviews, a consent letter was drafted and sent to all participants to get approval ahead of the interviews. The consent letter included a section confirming non-disclosure, to help create a sense of comfort among participants, allowing them to openly share their experiences. A sample of the letter of consent is given in Appendix B.

According to Saunders and Lewis (2017), it is recommended to conduct a pilot test before commencing the initial interview phase to ensure that the questions are easily understood, non-leading, and will provide the researcher with the data needed. All interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams, as this was the preferred platform for chosen participants. With the participants' consent, the recording feature on Teams was used to transcribe the interviews in addition to the notes taken during the interview process. The recordings were

transcribed and cross-referenced with the researchers' notes to ensure the quality and accuracy of the data collected.

### ***Interview Process***

Prior to the interview commencement, participants were briefed on the purpose of the research study. The researcher attempted to keep away from words such as team collaboration when asking questions to avoid bias in responses. Participants were also asked once again for permission to record the interviews.

All interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams as some of the participants were based in Cape Town and the researcher was located in Johannesburg. As the researcher had a working relationship with most participants, rapport had already been established. This allowed for the researcher to go straight into the questions.

In total, participants were presented with three main questions, consisting of ten supplementary questions that allowed for further exploration and inquiry (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015). Some interviews were short as participants were brief in their responses, however, the focus groups provided rich insights and allowed participants to add or further elaborate on someone's point. This allowed for the richness in conversation and made for a more fruitful interaction.

#### **4.3.6 Data Storage**

All information gathered from interviews is to be used only for the purposes of conducting the research and will not be shared with anyone outside of the research. The identities of the interviewees were kept private, and names were not mentioned or saved in any of the researchers' findings. The interviewer did not make use of a transcriber and all interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Data collected has been encrypted and stored away on a hard drive.

#### **4.3.7 Data Analysis**

The analysis approach taken was one of qualitative content analysis, which involves the systematic process of coding and categorising meanings based on patterns observed, followed by the identification of themes that represent similar meanings (Hsieh & Shannon,



2005). No pre-conceived codes were not used to allow for any discovery of new insights and relationships (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Once interviews had been conducted they were transcribed and prepped for analysis. Atlas. TI was the software program used for the analysis process. The original names of participants were removed to protect confidentiality and notes and recordings were reviewed throughout the analysis. An inductive thematic analysis approach was used to code sections of data relevant to the study. Thematic analysis was used as it allows for the identification of patterns or themes within the data collected which may be considered important or interesting to addressing the research (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Once codes had been assigned through an open-coding process, these codes were grouped through the guidance of the research questions and then categorised based on how they related or were linked to each other (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Atlas. TI also allowed for the analysis of categories using frequencies. Any further overlapping categories were further refined through clustering and the merging of similar groups to allow for consolidated themes.

Once all data had been sorted and organised, it was transferred to Microsoft Excel for additional analysis. The data sheet was then refined, retaining categories relevant to the research questions while excluding those that were not within the scope of the research (Appendix C). The entire six-phase analysis process is outlined in Table 4.

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Description of the process</b>
1. Familiarise yourself with the data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generate initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Look for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Review themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Define and name themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Final write-up	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.

*Table 4: Data analysis process (Source: Braun & Clarke, 2006)*

#### **4.3.8 Data Control**

In qualitative research, credibility ensures that the research findings are considered plausible and trustworthy, dependability reflects the potential for replication in similar conditions, confirmability emphasises the clear link between the data and quoted findings, and transferability assesses the extent to which the findings can be applied to another setting, context, or group (Stenfors et al., 2020).

Credibility and trustworthiness were achieved through the recording of interviews by the interviewer. Member checking also took place throughout the interviews by following an orderly process of data collection, interpretation, and the reporting of multiple perspectives on the interpretation of data.

Consent was received from participants regarding the recording of information and participants' names were anonymised to ensure that information is not traced back to any individual. This ensures that confidentiality is maintained. A semi-structured interview guide was used throughout the interview process and a pilot test was conducted ahead of the actual interviews to ensure that all questions asked were clear and well understood. Original records were encrypted and housed within a folder on Google Drive.

Dependability and confirmability were achieved through the collection of data using multiple sources and methods. Data was collected from participants at different levels within the organisations to allow for the reporting of multiple perspectives from the sample which served to triangulate the data. The transparency of data collected through the documentation of questions asked during the interviews was also employed as a measure of dependability and confirmability.

#### **4.3.9 Limitations of the Study**

Although qualitative research can provide rich data insights for exploring concepts, it's not always quantifiable as it lacks objectivity, and it cannot easily be replicated. The limitations of the study include the following:

1. The study had a cross-sectional time horizon, which means that the study provides only a snapshot of a specific moment in time (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).
2. Qualitative analysis using interviews may introduce bias and emotional influences, potentially distorting the information collected (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

3. The use of probability sampling can lead to non-representative participant selection, undermining the generalisability of the data.
4. The small sample size means that findings from the study may lack generalisability, diminishing the validity of the results.
5. The deliberate selection of participants pre-selected for the study could introduce sampling bias.
6. The way questions were posed by the interviewer might sway how participants chose to respond.
7. Objective data verification is challenging and can only be verified through future study findings.

## CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the study based on the research questions described in Chapter Three will be discussed. The structure of this chapter follows the inductive approach of qualitative analysis. The interview questions were formulated in alignment with the semi-structured interview guide created. The analysis of the data collected was carried out using Atlas.ti, to generate codes. These codes were then structured into categories and served as the basis for establishing overarching themes. In the section to follow, these themes developed will be used to discuss the results.

The chapter seeks to outline how responses to the research questions were coded and how these codes were then categorised and themed to answer the research questions. Each participant provided insights into their experiences of team collaboration with hybrid working environments. From the responses, patterns and trends that emerged were used to group codes into categories and like categories were then further grouped to arrive at the final themes.

Through the approach of inductive data analysis, a total of 216 unique codes were generated from data across eight interviews with 14 participants, as detailed in Appendix C. These codes were further organised into 49 categories, providing for the emergence of 13 distinct themes. Some of the themes that emerged did not relate directly to the research questions, however, the use of the inductive approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. Additionally, this approach allowed for the emergence of new themes that had not been previously explored or identified in existing literature.

Participants provided insights into the challenges experienced and opportunities available in hybrid working environments. In total thirteen themes influencing team collaboration in hybrid working environments were identified (Table 5). Codes and categories that were not associated with the study were included in the data but left out of the process of categorising.

Rank	Theme	Frequency
1	Effective Communication Strategies	28
2	In-Office Efficiency	27
3	Face-to-Face Communication Preference	22
4	Social Isolation	20
5	Learning Environment	19
6	Hybrid Social Engagement and Inclusion	17
7	Cultivating a Supportive Environment	17
8	Effective Task Management	16
9	Optimising Remote Work Collaboration	15
10	Remote Work Communication Challenges	13
11	Open and Inclusive Decision-Making	9
12	New Styles of Collaboration	7
13	Challenges of workplace distractions and Socialisation	6

Table 5: Ranking of key themes derived

Results of the Pareto analysis indicated 10 main themes influencing team collaboration in hybrid environments. These include effective communication strategies, in-office efficiency, face-to-face communication preference, social isolation, learning environment, hybrid social engagement and inclusion, cultivating a supportive environment, effective task management, optimising remote work collaboration and remote work communication challenges. These are depicted in Figure 5 below.

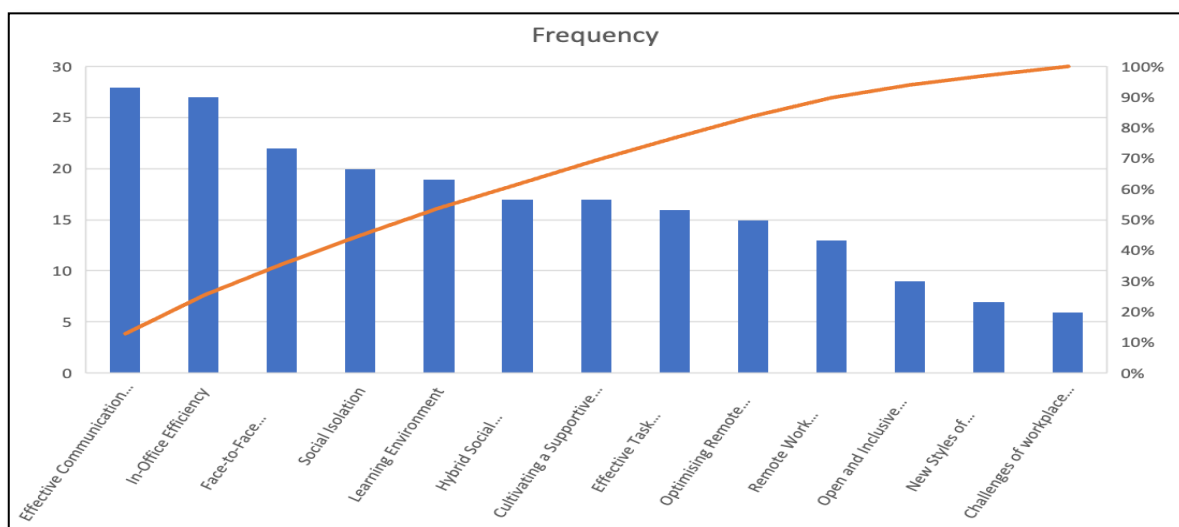


Figure 5: Results of Pareto Analysis

These themes were further grouped to reflect their association with three main research questions (Table 6).

Research Questions	Adoption of New Collaboration Norms	Perception of Hybrid Collaboration	How Collaboration in Hybrid working can be improved
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Themes</b>	1. Effective Collaboration Strategies 2. Face-to-Face Communication Preference 3. Optimising Remote Work Collaboration 4. Remote Work Communication Challenges	1. In-office Efficiency 2. Learning Environment 3. Social Isolation 4. Effective Task Management	1. Hybrid Social Engagement and Inclusion 2. Cultivating a Supportive Team Environment

Table 6: Themes grouped according to the main research questions

Findings in addressing the research questions were ranked for each key theme and are summarised in Table 7 below.

Theme	Influence on Team Collaboration
Effective Communication Strategies	Teams feel that communicating on Teams is more effective because they are still able to discuss facts and solution as when in the office
	Working from home meant that teams had to be intentional about communicating on Teams so all had access
	Hybrid work has resulted in teams communicating on platforms even if all were in office to ensure all were aware
	Collaborating remotely meant needing to sharing screens on Teams this led to more interaction across the team

In-Office Efficiency	Consultants felt that when working through problems it takes longer in a remote setting
	The ability to resolve issues more quickly is greater when everyone is in the office
	Conclusions are reached quicker as thinking happens at a collaborative level as individuals can help one another think when working in office
Face-to-Face Communication Preference	Interactions and communication are easier when everyone is in the office
	Interactions and communication are better in office because of ease of proximity
	Better communication when WFO, helps with relationships
Social Isolation	Check-ins are reduced when working remotely due to people being more focused on work
	More intention needs to be given to include those at home, prolonging effectiveness
	Team office day is the only day where everyone in the team is in the office at the same time
Learning Environment	More options are available regarding how we work as a result of hybrid
	Individuals would choose to spend time finding the answers and enhance self-learning as opposed to having to send a message to someone
	Individuals are able to learn from one another's scenarios and apply in future within the office environment
Hybrid Social Engagement and Inclusion	More frequent interactions to improve team relations amongst individuals
	Understanding the importance of team buildings in building relationships across the team
Cultivating a Supportive Environment	Having more than one team office day for more effective team collaboration
	Creating psychologically safe environments for communication
Effective Task Management	Consultants spoke to how quick check ins and catch ups have helped break the ice and build relationships
	The rotation of tasks rotated in the team and being transparent in sharing that information has helped in collaborating
Optimising Remote Work Collaboration	Business insistence on WFO conflicts with personal preference to WFH affects employee attitudes
	Even if effectiveness varies, communication and collaboration is seamless

Remote Work Communication Challenges	When working online it is possible not to communicate with colleagues all day
	Miss emotional cues leading to taking messages out of context

*Table 7: Key themes based on participant results indicating influences of collaboration in hybrid working environments*

## 5.1 Description of the Sample

The study employed a purposive sampling method with the aim of ensuring maximum variation in the selection of 14 individuals for the study. The participants were chosen based on their specific industry and job roles, all of whom were active in the financial services sector at the time the study was conducted. The study focused on individuals occupying roles as low-level entry consultants within team-orientated operations environments, team leaders responsible for managing these teams, and two Human Resource practitioners who were engaged in comprehending the dynamics of individuals within the workplace. By including perspectives from both team leaders and HR practitioners, the collection of data from multiple sources was possible, allowing for a greater understanding of different aspects influencing team collaboration in hybrid work environments. All participants used in this study were either based in Johannesburg or Cape Town. A list of the particulars of each interview along with their reason for selection as part of the study is provided in Table 8 below. Participants' names were anonymised to protect confidentiality.

Name	Occupation	Age	Gender	Industry	Additional information
<b>HRM</b>	HR Manager	30-40	Female	Financial Services	HRM is a Human Resource Manager with over 10 years of experience in HR. She is new to the financial services industry, having only worked with her current employer for 8 months now, but has a good understanding of business needs as well as human nature, having worked in different companies and industries within HR over the years.
<b>HRB</b>	HR Business Partner	30-35	Female	Financial Services	HRB is an HR business partner who has been in her role for the last 4 years. She works in a team of four and services the IT spaces in her company terms of HR needs



<b>Team Leader 1</b>	Team Leader	35-40	Male	Financial Services	Team Leader 1 is a Discretionary Operations Team Leader. He has been a team leader for 7 years and looks after a team of between 7-10 entry level consultants
<b>Team Leader 2</b>	Team Leader	35-40	Female	Financial Services	Team Leader 2 is a Prime Team Leader and works in Key accounts. She's been a Team leader for 6 years and is responsible for a team of 5-9 skilled consultants
<b>Team Leader 3</b>	Team Leader	35-40	Female	Financial Services	Team Leader 3 leads a specialist team within Operations. She has been a leader for 5 years and is responsible for a team of 7-9 specialised consultants.
<b>Respondent 1 - focus group 1</b>	Operations consultant	20-30	Female	Financial Services	Respondent 1 is an operations consultant. She has been working for 2 years now and started just as we moved out of fully remote working. She has no working experience pre-COVID. Her context of work has fully been remote and now moving into hybrid
<b>Respondent 2 - focus group</b>	Operations consultant	20-30	Female	Financial Services	Respondent 2 is an operations consultant within the financial services industry. She has been in this role for 5 years and has experience. She understands team settings both pre as well as post-COVID.
<b>Respondent 3 - focus group 1</b>	Operations consultant	20-30	Male	Financial Services	Respondent 3 works as an operations authoriser. He has been working within Operations for the past 6 years and understands team settings both pre- and post-COVID
<b>Respondent 4 - focus group 1</b>	Operations consultant	20-30	Male	Financial Services	Respondent 4 is a Prime consultant. He has been working at his current employer for the past 4 years. He started working a little before COVID started. He has some experience in the pre-COVID environment but most of his learnings within team settings has mainly been when working fully remotely and now moving into Hybrid working
<b>Respondent 5 - focus group 1</b>	Operations consultant	35-40	Male	Financial Services	Respondent 5 is an operations consultant with over 15 years of experience and has an in-depth understanding of team settings pre-COVID. He has also been a huge source of support within his team when remote working was enforced and has helped significantly in supporting his team through the transition into hybrid environments.

<b>Respondent 1 - focus group 2</b>	Operations consultant	20-30	Male	Financial Services	Respondent 1 (FG2) is an operations consultant. He has been working for 4 years and understands team settings both pre and post COVID.
<b>Respondent 2 - Focus Group 2</b>	Operations consultant	35-40	Female	Financial Services	Respondent 2 (FG2) is an operations consultant, who has over 10 years' experience within the financial service industry. She has extensive knowledge on team settings and understands collaboration both pre and post COVID
<b>Respondent 3 - focus group 2</b>	Operations consultant	25-30	Female	Financial Services	Respondent 3 (FG3) is an operations consultant who has over 6 years' experience working within the financial services industry. She joined her recent employer 2 years before enforced lockdown and understands working environments both pre and post COVID
<b>Respondent 4 - focus group 2</b>	Operations consultant	20-30	Female	Financial Services	Respondent 4 (FG4) is a Prime consultant within Operations. She has been working for just over 4 years now.

Table 8: Description list of participants

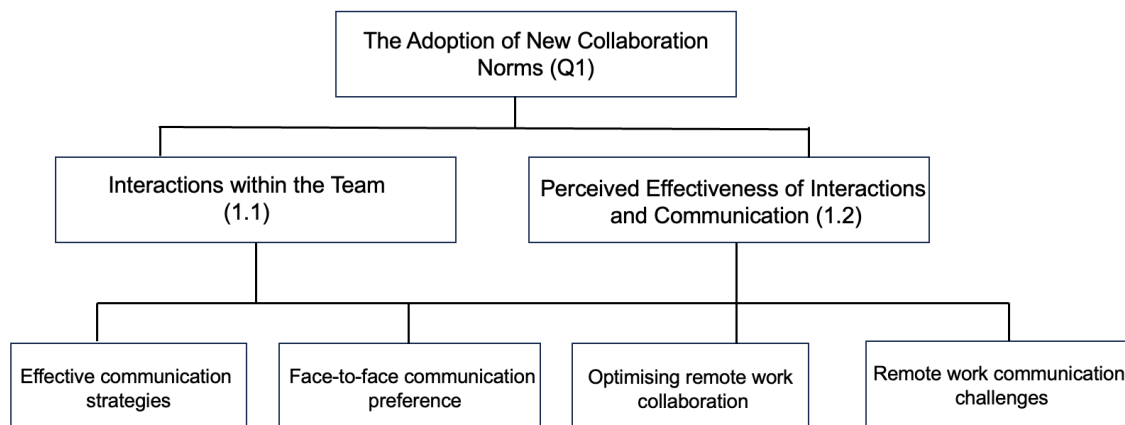
The sections that follow below further detail the themes derived.

## 5.2 Results for Research Question One

**Research question one: How do teams working within hybrid working structures, negotiate and adopt new norms of team collaboration?**

This question aimed to understand how teams operating in hybrid working structures navigate the process of establishing new collaborative norms as well as the strategies, processes and considerations taken into account to establish new ways of working together in hybrid working environments. Participants were asked questions that allowed them to share their experiences on how interactions within the team now take place and the effectiveness of these interactions now versus before COVID. From the conversations, four main themes emerged including: Effective communication strategies, Face-to-Face communication preference, Optimising remote work collaboration and Remote work communication challenges. These themes will be discussed in greater detail below.

Figure 6 provides an illustration of how emergent themes are linked to research question one.



*Figure 6: Research question one mapping of themes*

Since the approach used was one of phenomenology, participants were invited to speak in-depth about their experiences in interacting with others in the team and whether they perceived these interactions to be effective (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). The process provided fruitful insights and differed across participants based on the individual's role and level within the organisation.

#### Effective communication strategies

To understand the findings on the adoption of new norms for team collaboration, it was important to understand how interactions in the team currently take place. Participants were asked to contrast interactions before hybrid working was introduced. Understanding the nature of how interactions took place before hybrid working allowed for exploration around the transition of working pre-COVID, during COVID and post-COVID and how this process of transitioning influenced other areas of this study.

Some participants went in-depth in answering the question and elaborated on the tools, resources and methods used in connecting, how this differed from when everyone was in a physical office setting, and their preferences around these interactions, while others were brief in their explanations on experiences around interactions. Most participants touched on the communication component and the modes of communication used and how this was a large

contributor to how others perceived interactions. **Respondent 1-Focus Group 2** highlighted platforms provided by the company as main resources for team interactions,

*“Most of the time we communicate through the platforms or communication channels that are offered to us by the business like your Microsoft Teams or Outlook and so on”.*

**Respondent 2-Focus Group 2** agreed adding that these platforms are mostly used as team members are rarely in the office together,

*“Most of the time it's very rare for the team to be together in the office at the same time, except on our team day. So, most times it's Teams and emails, but mostly Teams”.*

In answering these questions, respondents mainly focused on the communication strategies that had been established through remote working to ensure that the team is constantly able to interact with one another. These norms now take place regardless of whether one is working in the office or from home as highlighted by **Team Leader 1**

*“Most of the communication does happen on Teams, even though someone is next to you, just to make sure that everyone is in the same boat in terms of information or communication being sent”.*

Participants highlighted the move to technological tools as the main communication base to keep interactions alive within the team setting. The answers provided gave insights into the aspects of team interactions they perceived to be important in understanding how teams now function.

#### Face-to-Face communication preference

In sharing experiences in interactions within hybrid environments participants spoke on the various ways in which interactions took place. The various communication platforms available were referenced and participants spoke in detail on how platforms and modes of communication would change. They were also encouraged to speak on the ease of using these platforms when working remotely and when in the physical office environment. Although working remotely was preferred by most participants, working in the office and having those face-to-face interactions still came up as beneficial for all participants,

*“Obviously being in the office and having that face-to-face interaction was a lot better for me”.* **Focus Group 2 – Respondent 1**

**Focus group 2 - Respondent 2** seemed to share the same sentiment mentioning that,

*“being in the office is more beneficial to be quite honest. It gets things done quicker”.*

From a leadership perspective, in terms of getting things done, leaders mentioned the significant role that the office plays in collaboration emphasising the need to keep it front of mind within hybrid environments and being intentional about bringing people together.

*“It's been difficult with team collaboration also being a manager myself if you don't force team meetings and team interactions, people will just move on their own and kind of do their own”.* **-HRM**

This theme indicates that although remote working can be suitable for some things, it doesn't work for everything, and the role of the office is still important in terms of getting in-person time in with individuals to get work done (Fayard et al., 2021).

### Optimising remote work collaboration

Participants were asked to share their opinions on whether or not they perceive interactions and communication in hybrid environments to be effective. In speaking on their experiences, participants spoke about the strategies and approaches they used within their teams to enhance collaboration and working together in hybrid work environments as well as how remote working has enhanced interactions within the team setting. Some participants spoke about how remote working has allowed those that normally keep to themselves, the platform and opportunity to speak up and be involved in the conversation.

**Respondent 2-Focus group 2** spoke about how many in her team are reserved and keep to themselves but are more willing to interact and engage in conversation when working remotely due to a certain level of safety they feel when working in their home environment.

*“I think a lot of people in my team are more introverted so being in their own space is more comfortable for them and it makes it easier for them to communicate, it takes the*

*pressure off, whereas in the office people may feel like they now need to also engage in small chats as opposed to just focusing on work”.*

Others mentioned that there isn't necessarily a real difference in how interactions take place now versus when everyone was working in the physical work office. This is noted by **Team Leader 2** who highlighted that within the current hybrid structure, individuals are required to come into the office for three out of the five business days. She further elaborates that most people prefer the office environment, but little has changed in how teams interact.

*“It’s the same pre-covid versus now. I think before we spent five days in the office now it’s three days I can’t seem to see a difference in terms of either people being less engaged or less collaborative in the team setting because the majority of the time is still spent in the office”.*

**Team Leader 3** agrees but adds that the differences can only be felt when individuals need to reach out for processes that were never initially built for the online environment, and how consultants usually face challenges in finding assistance to finalise these processes.

*“However, I do not feel that there is a difference between now and then except with the little things like when they need EDDs signed and stuff like that, but if they need me they know that they can just reach out to me”.*

#### Remote work communication challenge

In speaking to their experiences when answering research question one, participants touched on the challenges that are sometimes experienced when some individuals in the team are working remotely and others in the office environment. Some noted the social distance that existed as individuals working in the office are more likely to interact with those around them resulting in those working from home being forgotten.

*“But because we are all in the office and we are interacting with each other, you’ll find that we hardly interact with consultants who are working from home because they like on the other side, and we don’t see them”* **Focus Group 1-Respondent 4**

**Respondent 2-Focus Group 2** also mentioned distance as a communication barrier as individuals working remotely cannot be seen and responses could take longer to come by.

*“The distance makes it quite challenging because they can also take their time to answer you or respond to you. Whereas in the office we could just go up to each other and chat”.*

Interestingly, some participants spoke about in-office communication as being an inhibitor to effective communication. Many have noticed through remote working, that in-office debates tend to get drawn out as everyone gets involved in the conversation, in this regard some participants pointed out the efficiency in communication when working remotely as opposed to the office environment.

*“Everyone is trying to have an opinion. Everyone is trying to get to the end of the instructions, so I think that's the downside of in-person communication when it comes to like the hybrid model that kind of changes, the efficiency of the communication”.*

**Focus Group 1-Respondent 3**

Table 9 provides a summary of the main findings that resulted in the emergent categories related to research question one.

<b>EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Increased and regular communication	3
Communication channels varied	5
Tactics for communicating on platforms	8
Tactics for communicating when in office	2
Adjustment to communication styles	3
Online visibility	7
<b>FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION PREFERENCE</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Face to Face interactions are more effective	6
Benefits of in office interactions	7
Preferred communication channels	7
Richer communication when face-to face	2
<b>OPTIMISING REMOTE WORK COLLABORATION</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>

Benefits of remote work	5
Business versus personal preferences	3
Leadership support available for collaboration	2
Seamless collaboration between those WFH and WFO	5
<b>REMOTE WORK COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Limitations of working remotely	1
Limitations to communication with those working remotely	12

*Table 9: Summary of findings relating to research question one*

### **5.2.1 Summary of Results for Research Question One**

In summary, results from research question one provided insights into how teams make use of the various technological platforms available for interacting within hybrid environments. The enforced lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic aided in getting teams used to virtual interactions which made the transition to hybrid easier for most even though admitting that there is now more intentionality in communication than ever before. Zoom and Microsoft Teams were cited most as the platforms used for team communication, with many teams still opting for Microsoft Teams communication when communicating messages to their team regardless of whether they are working from home or in the physical office environment. Teams touched on some of the challenges faced in communicating with remote workers and how distance can result in some being excluded from the conversation.

Other significant findings included the personal preferences of individuals in choosing where to work and how these choices impact communication and interactions within the team. As well as how remote working allows some to contribute more to interactions while an in-office presence can act as an inhibitor of effective communication. Overall individuals highlighted the importance of the physical office as echoed in literature (reference) while touching on other benefits to remote working that were not necessarily visible before COVID-19.



### 5.3 Results for Research Question Two

#### Research question two: What are the perceptions about collaboration amongst colleagues within hybrid working structures?

This research question aimed to explore the attitudes, beliefs and viewpoints that participants held regarding collaboration in hybrid work environments. The question looked to uncover how participants perceived the effectiveness, challenges and benefits of collaborative efforts. Six sub-questions were asked to provide greater insights in addressing the research question. The main objective of this question was to identify the challenges and benefits of collaboration in hybrid working as well as highlight the interventions put in place to allow for better collaboration within teams. Even though personal preferences did come into play once again in answering this question, the majority of participants did note that collaborating within hybrid environments is much more difficult to achieve due to the proximity distance between members of a team. The degree of difficulty however differed depending on the role and level of responsibility within the organisation. Four themes were identified in answering this research question, In-Office Efficiency, Social Isolation, Learning Environment and Effective Task Management.

Themes developed from the resulting categories are mapped out in Figure 7 and discussed in greater detail below.

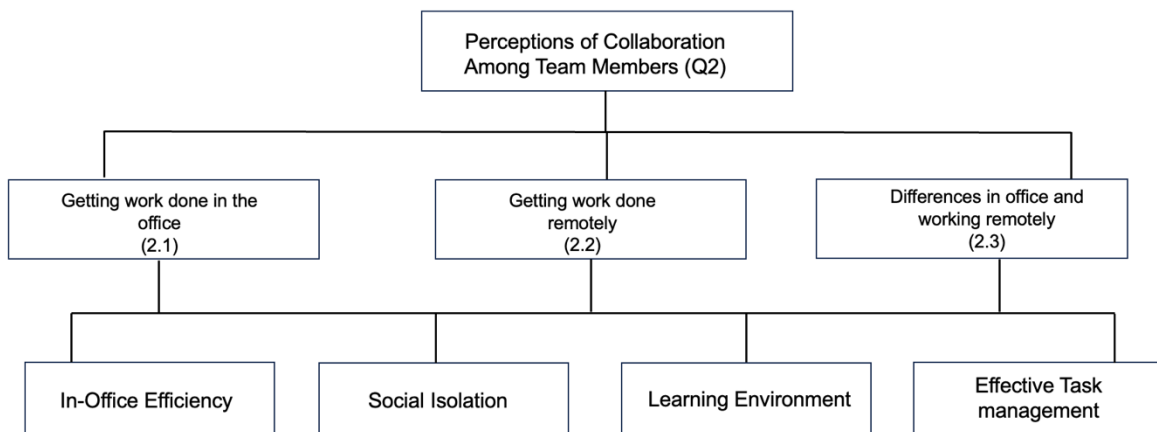


Figure 7: Research question two mapping of themes

### In-Office efficiency

Participants were invited to share their experiences in working together when everyone was in the office. Although preference for working remotely still came up, unsurprisingly most participants reported that working together when everyone is in the office is easier as problems get resolved at a quicker rate.

*“If you were in the office, everyone would be able to come together and huddle about the problem and then we’d also be able to go down to the certain department that is being impacted and discuss the issues and try find solutions in that way”. – HRM*

**Team Leader 2** touched on the fact that collaboration happens more consistently and at a higher level when working in the office, *“but I just think, yeah, in terms of collaboration it is higher in the office, and I think things can be resolved quicker the majority of the time”*.

While **HRM** spoke to the convenience of having people working in the office when it comes to collaboration stating,

*“As a manager, if I want something quickly done, I’d just want to gather everyone around, or if I want to share something new with the team it’s just easier when we are all just sitting around each other and we can easily chat but with our current hybrid setting it’s very difficult to do that, those spontaneous conversations are kind of just lost, it’s also very difficult when assisting the rest of the business as it means most of these collaboration meetings then need to happen via teams and it’s not that effective”*.

The social aspect and the ability to build relationships also came up as an advantage to in-office working, **Focus Group 2-Respondent 5** spoke to the benefits of these relationships and how they make individuals in the team more comfortable to reach out to others and ask for assistance,

*“the biggest advantage of being in the office is the social aspect but also when you are working and you are confused or there’s some situation that needs to be debated, it’s more robust”*.

Interestingly enough some teams mentioned that there was no difference in how the team works when individuals are in the office versus when working from home, this was largely due

to the way the team structure was set up and the nature of how individuals understand their roles.

*“I don’t even think there’s an actual difference when individuals are in the office and working from home because even when people are working from home it’s like normal business and everyone knows what they need to do”. - **Team Leader 2***

### Social isolation

All participants reported the social distance challenge faced in working together when working remotely among other things. Issues ranged from a slower rate of response to technological disruptions including loadshedding. One of the biggest areas sighted in how teams work remotely was the reduced interaction among team members and the potential of social isolation due to lack of visibility. Participants mentioned the importance of proximity in team engagement and how often in working remotely engagement is reduced or does not happen at all.

*“Proximity does matter, what you’d find is that people who are in the office will only interact with the people in the office”. – **HRB***

**Focus Group 1-Respondent 3** agreed mentioning, *“We don’t get to interact with the whole team, so it kind of does damper the opportunity to cross-collaborate because we become isolated to your silo, and they stick within their silos as well”.*

In multi-teams (a combination of a team within a team), participants shared how distance can act as a barrier to cross-team collaboration as the tendency would naturally be to communicate and interact with those whom you share a common function with. Individuals spoke about how this impacts overall team collaboration as team members can tend to go in their direction when it comes to achieving outcomes.

*“We don’t really get to interact with the whole team, so it kind of does damper the opportunity to cross-collaborate because we become isolated to your silo, and they stick within their silos as well”. **Focus Group 1-Respondent 3***

There was also a reference to how interactions taking place remotely tend to be ones of a more transactional nature, focused on work and potentially losing the human element of

coming together. Many noted that although the work still gets done, relationships get lost which results in a harder effort to understand one another. The office environment has become the place needed to sustain and nurture these relationships.

*“Conversations are more concentrated on work so it’s transactional, whereas when they’re all in the office is just endless banter and you can feel how close they are when they are in the office”.* **Team Leader 3**

Leaders also mentioned how communication has had to change within their teams to be mindful and accommodating of those working remotely, *“So communication has changed in that sense to be more accommodating of those working remotely, and I can say I now understand how easy it can be to forget someone when they are working from home especially when the majority of the team is working in the office”* -**Team Leader 3**

On a leadership decision-making level, there was also mention of how hybrid meetings could unintentionally focus only on those in the room, pro-longing decision-making because of a one-sided conversation.

*“I think the conversation tends to be more in the physical room with the eight other people who are in the office versus the two people who are online. So, it does kind of take a bit longer to get the insights or for them to be actively involved in the conversation”.* -**HRM**

This points to how easy it can be to leave those working remotely out of the conversation on all levels within the business, impacting effective decision-making and the overall dynamics of teams.

### Learning environment

The office provides the opportunity for individuals to interact with one another, not only on a business level but also on a social aspect. Participants pointed out how learning is more front of mind now and how this is easily achieved through in-person interactions, highlighting the office as the place where collaborative learning is stimulated and encouraged.

*“I think it’s when we are all in the office it’s a bit of a learning environment because if one person asks a question, we are all here to hear and give opinions as opposed to*

*when someone Teams someone specifically and the rest of the team is not privy to that conversation". **Focus Group 1-Respondent 1***

**Participant 1 in Focus Group 1** spoke about his experience of interactions within the office and how effective it is when everyone is present together stating that it offers a platform for learning from each other, he further mentions, *"So when we are in the office we gain access to information just from hearing the conversations that are happening around us and you get to learn from those scenarios, which doesn't happen when you are working remotely"*.

Other participants agreed with this sentiment further mentioning that opinions are not one-sided in office interactions, debates offer differing perspectives that allow one to come to the best outcome while allowing others to learn at the same time.

*"It's more interaction and you just don't get the solicited opinion. You can raise a situation or scenario with someone whose expertise you trust, but others around you can pick up on the conversation and give you a different perspective, which both of you may not have considered previously and you find that it's more correct". **Focus Group 2 – Respondent 1***

While touching on learning on a greater business level and how essential this is to business areas reaching overall outcomes, **HRM** touched on the danger to collaborative efforts if there's no intention of bringing people together in a face-to-face setting.

*"if you are not deliberate about getting your team together in person and spending that time with each other, we could lose that collaborative nature". **HRM***

One respondent did however mention that in their experience learning could be stimulated in the remote environment as individuals may not be spoiled with the option of ease of access to others, which encourages one to apply themselves a bit more and use resources available to solve certain problems for themselves as opposed to depending on others.

*"It feels like a task when I'm sending a Teams message or asking for assistance, so it forces me to be more proactive about my learning and figuring out for myself". **Focus Group 1-Respondent 4***

### Effective task management

In answering the question on what has been put in place to allow teams to remain collaborative in achieving team outcomes, participants spoke about the various things they have done to keep communication across the team space active and ensure line of sight for team effectiveness.

*“There are also team norms we have created in terms of certain tasks and those are housed within our Teams channel on Microsoft Teams, so when we approach day-to-day tasks, we just know who needs to do what so we can wrap up the day, it's just known within our team and it's a natural flow.”* **Focus Group 1-Respondent 2**

**Respondent 4 in Focus Group 2** agreed with Respondent 2 above and added, *“We have our teams chat where we check in with each other. Then we have check-ins to just show what the team has done for the day. We email that view to each other and then just communicate amongst ourselves if anything needs to be done or if working is still coming through.”*

Leaders spoke to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as a guide on outcomes to be achieved within the team and how these then allow for the team to put their measures in place to ensure that these KPI targets are reached.

*“We obviously have KPIs, we sit down, and we are like this is what we need to achieve as a team. So, when everyone is in the office everyone has their portfolios, let's put it that way, like who is handling admin for the team for example and if someone's not there who's handling that admin for the team, what needs to be sorted out when there's an IT issue?”* **Team Leader 1**

Some participants touched on the importance of roles and responsibilities within the team, *“From the current structure, we as a team have a schedule that specifies who's in charge of what responsibilities for a certain day/week.”* **Focus Group 1-Respondent 2**

Others spoke to the need to remain flexible and agile to changing tasks due to technological disruptions that could be encountered by those working remotely.

*“you get situations where maybe someone working from home experiences technical issues, people that are working within the office could give an extra hand in terms of pulling work or doing their tasks in the meantime.”* **Focus Group 1-Respondent 1**

A summary of the main findings that resulted in the emergent categories related to answering this research question can be found in Table 10.

<b>IN-OFFICE EFFICIENCY</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
More interactions in the office environment	2
In person correspondence beneficial	9
Efficient working solutions	13
Loss of spontaneous interactions	1
<b>SOCIAL ISOLATION</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Communication is isolated	7
Remote isolation	7
Team member exclusion	6
<b>LEARNING ENVIRONMENT</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Individual autonomy	2
Enhanced learning opportunities	11
Purposeful meeting interactions	2
Shared learning	4
<b>EFFECTIVE TASK MANAGEMENT</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Agility in terms of working around disruptions	2
Set roles and responsibilities	3
Rules of engagement	1
Task coordination	9
Team check-ins	1

Table 10: Summary of findings for research question two

### **5.3.1 Summary of Results for Research Question Two**

In summary, the results from research question two provide insights into the perceptions individuals have on the effectiveness of collaboration within hybrid environments. The office environment was cited as the favoured place for effective collaboration with many mentioning the ease of getting this done and working together when everyone is in the same place at the same time. Teams also spoke about the things that they have put in place to ensure that collaboration still takes place even when individuals are working remotely.

Unlike existing literature, which mostly speaks on challenges faced when everyone is working remotely, in hybrid working participants touched on the potential of a one-sided conversation and how those working remotely could be left out of the conversation even though everyone is present in the same meeting.

### **5.4 Results for Research Question Three**

**Research question three: What can be done to improve collaboration between colleagues within hybrid working structures?**

This research question looked to address the challenges that can arise when some team members work remotely, and others work in the physical office. The goal in answering this question was to provide solutions that allow colleagues to work effectively and achieve common objectives despite the differing work locations.

Participants were invited to reflect on their current experiences in working within hybrid environments and identify current gaps that could potentially be improved in working together. Two main themes emerged in answering this research question, Hybrid Social Engagement and Inclusion, and Cultivating a Supportive Team Environment.

The themes developed in answering research question three are mapped out in Figure 9 and discussed in greater detail below.



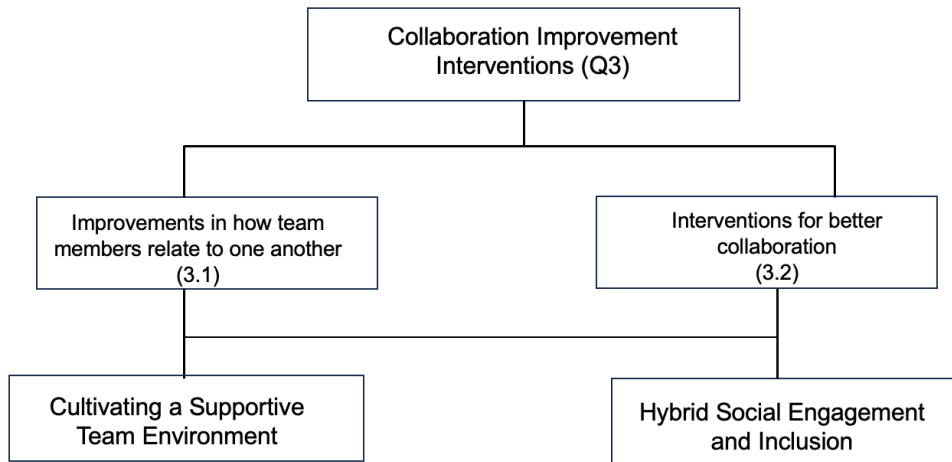


Figure 8: Research question three mapping of themes

Hybrid social engagement and inclusion

In answering the question of what can be done to improve how individuals relate to others within a hybrid environment, participants shared their current relationships within the team as well as how these have adapted or changed over time as a result of individuals spending fewer days in the office. Most highlighted the need for more frequent in-person interactions outside of the context of working as a way to foster relationships which become beneficial in collaborative efforts.

*“I guess it's also about being deliberate, so if everyone is in the office, being intentional about actually having some sort of in-person bonding session”. HRM*

Leaders spoke to the norms that could be put in place when welcoming new individuals into their team and the need for more of an in-office presence from the team in fostering relationships quicker.

*“For new starters, I do recommend that they spend the first 2 weeks in the office every day, it helps with settling in and makes it easier if they need to ask questions. It also allows them to engage with everyone and get a nice lay of the land in terms of how everything works.” Team Leader 2*

All consultants mentioned how a focus on social bonding to build and nurture relationships within the team can be beneficial in improving overall team interactions making collaboration and teamwork more effective.

*“Do more teambuilding activities, so mini building sessions like team lunches or team breakfasts or just coffee sessions to build better relations. Something that doesn’t feel forced.” **Focus Group 2-Respondent 2***

*“The normal stuff like your team builds, some people take them lightly or take them as just fun activities, but those are quite good opportunities as well in terms of enhancing collaboration and interaction within the team because that’s an opportunity where you get to know someone within the team outside the confines of the workspace.” **Focus Group 1-Respondent 3***

#### Cultivating a supportive team environment

In speaking to other interventions that can be looked into for effective collaboration, participants spoke to a need for better structure in terms of days teams work in the office and days that are worked at home. Most consultants mentioned that at the moment only one day in the week is maximised as a team office day while individuals freely decide what other days they come in. Participants highlighted that having more than one team office day could be beneficial to enhancing collaboration amongst the team and ensuring continuous productivity.

*“Having more than one team office day would be quite beneficial in terms of improving how we collaborate as a team, as right now everyone’s in-office days are different as we all have differing commitments.” – **Focus Group 1-Respondent 1***

Peer support across the team also came up in discussions as being most beneficial in team productivity. This came out more as a need for those working remotely as they are not as visible as those in the office, so greater support may be needed by them.

*“Think maybe flexible arrangements can be a bit different to cater for certain people if they are required to be in every day for that specific week and then also coming up with some team traditions around collaboration or just general bonding. Just making it more structured.” **Focus Group 1-Respondent 4***

Similarly, to the support needed, **Team Leader 1** spoke about the need to create platforms that allow individuals the space to speak freely regardless of whether they are working from home or in the office. Emphasising the need to continuously include those who feel more comfortable when working remotely.

*“Create a platform where people can communicate freely. A psychologically safe environment so that they don't feel like they troubling other people or ruffling people's feathers up unnecessarily when it's probably more necessary than they think.”*

Team culture and goal setting as a team were also outlined as ways to enhance collaborative learning in hybrid environments. Participants noted that when the team has common purposes and everyone is of the same understanding regarding what needs to be done, working within a hybrid space can be more effective. The culture of the team also plays a role in the team environment the team operates in as well as their ability to meet outcomes.

*“There needs to be a focus on the type of team culture one would want to have, this goes with the setting of goals as a team so that everyone is aligned with the goals that the team has set. Having set goals as a team because once there's a common understanding it sets in motion what then needs to be achieved.”* **Focus Group 1- Respondent 1**

Table 11 provides a summary of the main findings that resulted in the categories related to answering research question three.

<b>HYBRID SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Structured in-person bonding	3
Hybrid socialisation	3
creating a sense of inclusion	4
Social interactions	6
<b>CULTIVATING A SUPPORTIVE TEAM ENVIRONMENT</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Tactics for collaboration	2
Support needed	6
Structuring the day	3

Having team goals	6
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Table 11: *Summary of findings for research question three*

#### **5.4.1 Results of Findings for Research Question Three**

In summary the results of research question three mainly focused on fostering great relationships in the team and how those relationships can continuously be nurtured and encouraged even though workers may not always be working in the space physical location at the same time. Most companies encourage team building as a way to build greater relations among members of a team, in working within hybrid environments, participants emphasised the importance of these relationships and how things can be put in place that allow individuals to engage with one another even outside of a formal team building sessions.

Individuals also spoke to the importance of support within the environment and the need for a team culture that is aligned with the needs of the environment. Some participants highlighted the value of setting goals within the team space as other ways in which teams could be better positioned for achieving desired outcomes.

#### **5.5 Overall Summary of Results**

The research questions were formulated to address the research objectives mentioned in section 1.3. Participants provided in-depth insights into their experiences working within hybrid environments. Questions were aimed at understanding in what way collaboration changes in hybrid environments, the effectiveness of teams working in hybrid environments as well as the methods that can be employed to allow for enhanced and improved collaborative efforts.

Participants mentioned their personal preferences for working remotely while all noting the benefit of the office environment in driving collaborative efforts. Results show that while collaboration can take place remotely, it's harder to come by and takes more intentional effort from individuals and leaders to remain effective. The use of technological platforms is the biggest driver of individuals being able to collaborate effectively with hybrid environments.

Interestingly enough, although participants agreed that the office was more effective for collaboration, hybrid working seems to have moved this office from the physical environment to the virtual environment with the majority of all team interactions, working and meetings taking place online even when team members are present in the physical work environment.

A focus on team culture and peer support as well as nurturing and building on relationships within the team all came up as areas of focus in improving and enhancing team collaboration in hybrid environments.

The chapter that follows will provide a deeper exploration of the implications of the findings within the context of the literature review conducted.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This chapter provides a more detailed discussion of the research findings based on the study of how hybrid working environments influence team collaboration and the productivity of a team. The results will be discussed in accordance with the literature review conducted in Chapter Two and used to further discuss the research questions outlined in Chapter Three. The discussion of the study's findings will incorporate the themes developed in Chapter Five in conjunction with the literature review in Chapter Two to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

The chapter presents the data findings from the analysis as well as a full interpretation of their significance, offering insights into how they relate to the dynamics of teams working in hybrid settings. These findings contribute to the understanding of how hybrid environments influence team collaboration and team productivity. As the data analysis conducted used an inductive qualitative approach, the alignment of categories to themes and their relevance to the research questions is outlined in Table 12.

Research Questions	Categories	Themes
<p><b>RESEARCH QUESTION 1:</b></p> <p><b>How do teams working within hybrid working structures negotiate and adopt new norms of team collaboration?</b></p>	<p><i>Increased and regular communication, Communication channels varied, Tactics for communicating on platforms, Tactics for communicating in office, Adjustment to communication styles, Online visibility</i></p> <p><i>Face-to-face interactions are more effective, Benefits of in-office interactions, Preferred communication channels, Richer communication when face-to-face</i></p> <p><i>Benefits of remote work, Business versus personal preferences, Leadership support available for collaboration, Seamless collaboration between those WFH and WFO</i></p> <p><i>Limitations of working remotely, Limitations to communication with those working remotely</i></p>	<p>Effective Communication Strategies</p> <p>Face-to-Face Communication Preference</p> <p>Optimising Remote Work Collaboration</p> <p>Remote Work Communication Challenges</p>

<p><b>RESEARCH QUESTION 2:</b></p> <p><b>What are the perceptions about collaboration amongst colleagues within hybrid working structures?</b></p>	<p><i>More interactions in the office environment, In person correspondence beneficial, Efficient work solutions, Loss of spontaneous interactions</i></p> <p><i>Communication is isolated, Remote isolation, Team member exclusion</i></p> <p><i>Individual autonomy, Enhanced learning opportunities, Purposeful meeting interactions, Shared learning</i></p> <p><i>Agility in terms of working around disruptions, Set roles &amp; responsibilities, Rules of engagement, Task coordination, Team check-ins</i></p>	<p>In-office Efficiency</p> <p>Social Isolation</p> <p>Learning Environment</p> <p>Effective Task Management</p>
<p><b>RESEARCH QUESTION 3:</b></p> <p><b>What can be done to improve collaboration between colleagues within hybrid working structures?</b></p>	<p><i>Structured in-person bonding, Hybrid socialisation, Creating a sense of inclusion, Social interactions</i></p> <p><i>Tactics for collaboration, Support needed, Structuring the day, Having team goals</i></p>	<p>Hybrid Social Engagement and Inclusion</p> <p>Cultivating a Supportive Team Environment</p>

Table 12: Alignment of Categories to Themes in relation to the Research Questions

The above Table (Table 11) provides a framework for the themes derived and will be used as a guide for the discussion that will take place in this chapter.

### 6.1 Discussion of Themes for Research Question One

Research question one looked to provide insights into how teams work together and collaborate in hybrid working environments. To answer this question an understanding of how participants engage and interact with each other while working in these new hybrid structures was required. Participants were then requested to provide their opinions on the effectiveness of these interactions by painting a picture of the tactics applied, challenges experienced, and benefits leveraged in working together as well as whether they believed the methods they apply in engaging one another have been enhancing communication and interaction efforts. This line of questioning helped to tie the research findings back to the overarching goal of understanding collaboration norms in hybrid working environments.

The findings derived from the themes presented in Chapter Five addressing this research question will be compared to the literature in Chapter Two and will be discussed further in the section that follows.

### *Effective Communication Strategies*

The need for effective communication strategies was the biggest driver of how teams collaborate within the hybrid work environment. Participants spoke about the various ways communication has changed in engaging one another when working in hybrid structures. In keeping interactions high within the team context, various communication platforms and applications were referenced in how team members engage with one another. Application tools such as video conferencing, texts and platforms such as Microsoft Teams have all become the norm in daily engagement.

When touching on communication teams spoke about the reliance on technological tools when interacting with one another, further mentioning that these tools are constantly used even when individuals are in the office. This is to ensure that individuals are always aligned on the message being communicated regardless of where they are. Wang et al. (2021) spoke about concerns regarding an over-reliance on digital tools in remote working, stating that this often results in more formalised and less spontaneous communication. Participants however spoke to how these methods of engaging have worked for them within hybrid working and how they have been able to engage in meaningful conversations even though everyone is not working from the same location.

What was noted was how the use of communication platforms has also resulted in an overcommunication of information taking place. Participants spoke to this communication need as a measure to ensure that team members are always on the same page with each other and that members consistently feel included. According to Driskell et al. (2018), individuals within a team environment will more often communicate freely and set information free when they feel they belong and are included. Literature however does not make mention of the strategies teams can employ to ensure that effectiveness in interaction and collaboration is achieved. In discussing interactions within hybrid environments, participants touched on the various tactics and approaches they've applied to keep interactions and presence alive within this combined working structure.



### Face-to-Face Communication Preference

The preference for face-to-face interactions still remained high amongst participants, even though remote working is the favoured working environment for many participants. Participants highlighted the advantages of in-person interactions, emphasising that they lead to more efficient work processes. When discussing their experiences in hybrid environments, most participants mentioned that interactions are better when in the office as communication occurs more naturally and conversations flow more smoothly when conducted in person as opposed to remotely.

According to Purvanova and Kenda (2021), collaboration is often viewed as more effective when it occurs through face-to-face interactions and co-presence. This is because being physically present enables individuals to better understand social cues and body language, contributing to more effective collaboration. Within remote environments, nuances in facial expression, and tone of voice can often be misinterpreted leading to misunderstandings and delays in decision-making. Moreover, the findings revealed that when physical team meetings and interactions are not actively encouraged by leaders or team members, it heightens the challenges associated with collaboration. In such cases individuals tend to work in their own separate directions, resulting in fragmented efforts and a lack of alignment within the team.

This finding is supported by Driskell et al. (2018), who also noted that communication difficulties in remote work often lead to a decrease in collaborative efforts. When individuals lack the presence or guidance that comes with in-person meetings, they may find it challenging to coordinate and work cohesively as a team. Overall, these findings confirm those of the literature reviewed and stress the significant role of physical presence and the office environment in fostering effective teamwork. While remote work offers flexibility and convenience, it is important to recognise that the loss of face-to-face interactions can hinder the fluidity and efficiency of communication.

### Optimising Remote Work Communication

Most of the participants interviewed spoke about the seamless transition between working from home and working in the office. Strategies and approaches adopted within teams to enhance collaboration and connection among team members in hybrid work environments were shared. Notably, it was highlighted by some participants that remote work had enabled greater participation from team members who might have been less engaged in the physical office settings, with some even acknowledging that most meetings now took place on remote

platforms like Teams, even when individuals are in the office. This shift was driven by a desire to create a more inclusive space where all team members, introverted or extroverted, could actively contribute and participate in discussions. One participant specifically pointed out that introverted individuals within her team were more likely to voice their thoughts and opinions when working remotely, as compared to when they were in the physical office environment. This revelation was significant, as it shed light on the comfort and empowerment that introverts experienced in remote work settings, allowing them to play a more active role in team interactions.

While some leaders reported that interactions within their teams have remained relatively unchanged. The only difference noted was in most instances the medium of communication used, with virtual platforms replacing face-to-face discussions. This observation suggested that despite the availability of remote work options, most people still preferred the conventional office setup, resulting in fewer changes felt, in how people interact. However, for those who frequently work remotely, the transition of processes from the physical to virtual environments was noted as a challenging aspect of adapting to the new way of working. Over time, as individuals became more familiar with these virtual processes, the adjustment became smoother.

One intriguing finding that emerged from the interviews was the great comfort and participation of introverted team members in remote work scenarios. The value of their increased engagement in discussion and the unique perspective they brought to the table had not been extensively explored in existing literature. Furthermore, while the literature did mention the need for organisations to explore alternative approaches to collaboration in hybrid environments (Waizenegger et al., 2020), reference to the types and effectiveness of strategies employed for teams working in hybrid environments is lacking. The insights gained from the interviews shed light on the strategies employed to enhance communication in hybrid environments and underscored the exclusive appeal of remote work for introverts. These findings not only added depth to the existing knowledge but also highlighted the importance of recognising and capitalising on the unique dynamics of hybrid work arrangements.

### *Remote Work Communication Challenges*

In discussions with participants, most touched on the challenges experienced when communicating remotely and the differing dynamics one needs to remember and incorporate within hybrid working communication. The primary theme that emerged from these conversations was the contrast between those working in the office and those working

remotely, emphasising the role of proximity and visibility in shaping communication patterns. In the context of the hybrid working environment, it became evident that individuals physically present in the office tend to naturally gravitate towards each other when it comes to communication. This tendency can be attributed to the fact that those working from home are not as visible to their in-office counterparts. This observation aligns with existing literature, as Waizenegger et al. (2020) similarly noted that proximity and visibility play a pivotal role in shaping communication dynamics within the physical office environment. Essentially, people working in close physical proximity often interact more frequently, as they are more readily accessible to each other.

A distinctive finding from the research was the emphasis on the timing of responses as a contributing factor to the in-office communication bias. Participants noted a delay in responses from remote workers, which can hamper the efficiency of collaborative efforts. This point extends the understanding provided in existing literature, highlighting that it may not solely be about the visibility of colleagues but also the ease and speed of proximity and responsiveness that contributes to communication patterns. In essence, individuals working in the same physical space have a distinct advantage in terms of immediate access to information and quick response times, thereby fostering more effective and spontaneous interactions.

Surprisingly, some participants also noted that discussions within the physical office environment could sometimes hinder effective team productivity. They mentioned that debates within the office setting tend to be extended because everyone has an opinion and wants to contribute to the conversation. This finding appears to deviate from the commonly held belief, as supported by Krzywdzinski (2022), that physical presence enhances team productivity. It brings to light a less-discussed aspect of in-office interactions where inclusivity and collaboration, while valuable, can sometimes slow down decision-making processes. This contrasts with the notion in the literature that physical presence predominantly fosters productivity and teamwork (Krzywdzinski, 2020).

These insights not only acknowledge the significance of the physical office in shaping team interactions but also highlight the benefits of remote working in certain contexts. They emphasise the complexity of hybrid work dynamics and how various factors, such as proximity, visibility, and speed of communication, influence the effectiveness of team collaboration.

### **6.1.1 Research Question One Conclusion**

To date, limited research has addressed the variables affecting collaboration in hybrid work environments, as most studies have focused on challenges within remote settings (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). This research has made a contribution to the available body of literature on the topic by offering fresh insights and challenging conventional findings in existing literature on physical presence and the role of the physical office environment.

The research adds depth to the understanding of strategies employed in hybrid work environments. While existing literature acknowledges the importance of digital tools and platforms (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020), this research goes further by exploring how teams effectively harness these tools to maintain spontaneity and meaningful interactions. The findings thus address research question one formulated in Chapter Three and aligns with one of the central research objectives highlighted in Section 1.3.

Another significant theme that emerged was the inclusivity and empowerment that remote work provides, especially for introverted team members. This perspective is largely unexplored in existing literature and sheds light on the empowerment and sense of belonging experienced by introverts, which may be overlooked in more traditional, in-person work settings. Overall, the research findings provide a richer and more nuanced understanding of the intricacies of collaboration in hybrid working, and how these intricacies impact team dynamics and the overall productivity of teams.

### **6.2 Discussion of Themes for Research Question Two**

This research question aimed to uncover how team members perceive the effectiveness, challenges, and benefits of collaborative efforts when working in hybrid environments as well as understand how well team members communicate with each other both in person and virtually, the level of unity within the team and whether they perceive themselves as being productive in this new working environment. The literature reviewed drew on group dynamics as well as social exchange theory as a way to understand exchanges among team members.

#### ***In-Office Efficiency***

The research findings strongly support the notion that in-person office collaboration significantly enhances problem-solving efficiency and accelerates issue resolution. This conclusion is reinforced by the observation that spontaneous conversations and group

thinking, which are more readily facilitated in a physical office setting, play a pivotal role in expediting the problem-solving process. As discussed by Waizenegger et al. (2020), collaboration within the traditional office environment allows for spontaneous and quick idea generation due to the proximity of team members.

The participants in the study also highlighted the social dimension of the physical office, emphasising the value of personal connections and the ability to engage in spirited debates with colleagues when tackling complex scenarios. This social aspect of the office, as discussed in the work of Purvanova and Kenda (2021), serves as the foundation for nurturing and maintaining relationships among team members. It also fosters an environment where team members are more willing to share information, echoing the research by Driskell et al. (2018), who demonstrated that a sense of belonging encourages knowledge sharing. Furthermore, the literature review emphasises the role of trust in the social aspects of the office. Trust, as highlighted by Davidavičienė et al. (2020), is a pivotal factor in an individual's willingness to share information, and it is nurtured through in-person interactions. Importantly, the participants recognised that social interactions and the sense of connection are vital components of effective problem-solving. When team members are more at ease with each other due to personal connections, they are more likely to trust the information shared during collaborative efforts. This trust element enhances the overall problem-solving effectiveness.

However, it is worth noting that there was one individual who pointed out, that the mode of work – whether in the office or remotely – might not make a significant difference as long as individuals have a clear understanding of their roles and what's expected of them. This viewpoint suggests that a well-defined framework and a clear sense of what is expected from team members can make remote work just as effective as in-office work.

New insights gained from findings and not mentioned in the literature, were the distractions caused by in-office interactions which could lead to prolonged debates making decision-making harder and collaboration ineffective. When too many individuals are involved in a conversation, although widening opinion and understanding, it is seen as being ineffective in collaborative efforts.

The research findings in this regard align with the existing literature on physical office presence for problem-solving efficiency. The results also affirm the importance of social interactions and a sense of belonging in the workplace, consistent with prior studies on team dynamics and knowledge sharing (Oyefusi, 2022; Driskell et al., 2018). The ineffectiveness of interactions

within the office environments allows for an expansion of existing literature regarding the role of the office.

Overall, findings draw on the value of in-person collaboration for problem-solving and the role of personal connections and spontaneous interactions, while also recognising that effective remote work hinges on clear expectations and roles, all of which have been previously cited in the literature.

### *Social Isolation*

The research found that in hybrid working, there is limited opportunity for the entire team to physically engage with each other. Further mentioning that the lack of physical interaction can lead to feelings of isolation and can hinder cross-collaboration within the team. A notable concern was the emergence of silos within the team, where individuals tend to work closely with the same group of people, often those physically present in the office. The concept of proximity emerges as a recurring theme, with participants emphasising that those in the office tend to interact primarily with their office-based counterparts. This proximity can create a divide between office and remote workers, leading to different forms of interaction, with virtual communication being perceived as more transactional compared to the social interactions that naturally occur in an office setting.

Leaders, in particular, recognised the need for a change in communication dynamics within hybrid environments. The physical visibility of team members becomes a pivotal factor in ensuring that no one is unconsciously left out. This is particularly important when the majority of team members work from the office, as it can be easy to overlook those joining remotely. Research findings also indicate that often, in hybrid meeting settings, conversations gravitate toward the physical room, unintentionally isolating remote participants.

The research findings closely align with existing literature on remote working. This literature emphasises the formalised nature of interactions when using digital platforms (Wang et al., 2021), which corresponds with the formal and sometimes transactional nature of virtual communication mentioned by participants. Additionally, Fayard et al. (2021) also highlight the office as a hub for interactions and inclusion, reinforcing the importance of physical presence and proximity for fostering collaboration. Cropanzano & Mitchell's work (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), further highlights the benefits of physical proximity in facilitating exchange and inclusion, aligning with the concerns raised by participants.

The research findings largely agree with the literature on the subject in the context of teamwork within hybrid environments. Interactions among team members tend to take place more often when individuals are working in the physical office and inclusivity is more attainable. Furthermore, when individuals are working both within the office environment as well as remotely there's a natural tendency to focus on those who are present in the room, isolating those who may be working remotely.

Overall, the research findings allow for deeper insights into the complexity of hybrid environments. These findings are significant because they suggest the importance of a strong link between the physical office and the support structures put in place when working remotely to ensure efficiency in teamwork and collaboration.

### Learning Environment

The research findings shed light on the nature of learning within team settings, highlighting how individuals organically acquire knowledge as they engage with one another and share information. Participants mentioned the way learning opportunities exist in both traditional office settings and remote working environments, though these experiences differ significantly. In the traditional office environment, learning often occurs through informal means, such as overhearing conversations and the ability to readily seek and provide opinions. The act of absorbing information through these casual interactions is a unique aspect of in-office work and is not as prevalent when working remotely. This aligns with the challenges highlighted by Waizenegger et al. (2020) who mention the missed informal learning opportunities remote workers are prone to experience due to the distance in proximity.

However, participants also noted that provides a distinct learning environment. Here, individuals tend to be more self-reliant and autonomous, motivated to seek out information independently by leveraging the available resources. This self-driven learning stems from the perceived effort required to ask for assistance when working remotely. This, however, could add to concerns of feeling isolated when working outside of the traditional office, as remote workers may hesitate to reach out for help.

These research findings contribute to the existing literature on learning in remote working environments. While some prior research, like Waizenegger et al. (2020), has focused on the challenges remote workers face to these missed learning opportunities, the current findings also expand on this by exploring the impact of the effort individuals perceive in seeking assistance. This effort-based learning approach could have implications for teams and

organisations in remote working settings. Moreover, the research uncovers a less-discussed aspect of remote work: the ability of individuals to learn autonomously in remote environments. This aspect is not as extensively referenced in current literature and adds to our understanding of the multifaceted nature of remote work dynamics.

Furthermore, participants highlighted their comfort with digital platforms for sharing information, regardless of their physical location. This indicates that exchange and knowledge sharing can thrive even in remote work settings (Oyefusi, 2022), contrary to the notion that psychological safety is challenging to attain in remote work due to physical distance and differences in communication channels, as suggested by Jha (2019). The willingness of team members to share information in virtual environments is seen as a testament to the existing psychological safety within the team, challenging the conventional view of remote work as psychologically isolating.

The research findings align with existing literature in some areas while introducing new perspectives on learning in remote work environments.

### *Effective Task Management*

Sub-questions 2.5 and 2.6 looked to understand what has been put in place to allow teams to effectively reach team outcomes as well as when and how they reach out to one another even when working in different locations. One key theme that emerged from the research is the strategic use of digital platforms. Teams have increasingly turned to a variety of digital tools and platforms to facilitate communication and collaboration. The adoption of these technologies has been pivotal in enabling seamless interaction between team members, regardless of their physical location. The study further highlighted the significance of having the right technological tools in place, emphasising their role as enablers for efficient cross-location collaboration. This finding reinforces the participant's sentiments, aligning with their perspective on how digital platforms are essential for effective hybrid teamwork.

Another noteworthy outcome of the research is the establishment of new norms within hybrid environments to maintain alignment. In a context where team members may not share the same physical workspace, these norms become a critical aspect of team dynamics. Regular check-ins emerged as a popular practice, serving as a means to keep team members connected and updated on each other's progress and whereabouts. The findings highlight how these check-ins contribute to ensuring that everyone in the team is on the same page, reducing confusion, and minimizing misalignment. The incorporation of Teams as a central



hub for navigation was identified as a valuable strategy to enhance team coordination in a hybrid work environment. This has proven effective in keeping team members engaged and informed, ultimately contributing to overall team performance.

The need to remain agile and flexible to changes in hybrid environments was also highlighted as key to team efficiency, with some noting that technical issues experienced by those working remotely necessitate such flexibility to ensure that work continues to move.

Dulebohn and Hoch (2017) mention that having the right technological tools allows workers to collaborate seamlessly across remote environments, this aligns with the research findings and participants' perspectives. The research findings indicate that teams are adapting to the challenges of hybrid work by leveraging digital tools, implementing new norms, and maintaining regular check-ins, to ensure that everyone has access to information and resources contradicts literature by Waizenegger et al., (2020), that mentions that the different experiences in working environments between remote workers and those working in the office lead to varying level of access to resources and information, making it harder to stay aligned to team goals.

This finding is significant as it expands on current literature on effective collaboration within remote and hybrid environments by looking into the norms and practices adopted to foster effective collaboration within these settings.

### **6.2.1 Research Question Two Conclusion**

The main findings from the research support the notion that in-person office collaboration significantly enhances problem-solving efficiency and issue resolution. The importance of spontaneous conversations, group thinking and the ability to build strong connections when in the office environment is highlighted. It also points out that virtual communication tends to be more formal and transactional, which can lead to increased feelings of social isolation and the formation of silo work when employees work remotely. This concern is further reinforced by leaders who acknowledge the necessity of adjusting communication strategies in hybrid work settings to ensure inclusivity.

In terms of learning, the research highlights that the physical office environment offers unique opportunities for informal learning that cannot be easily replicated in virtual workspaces. However, noting that remote work does allow for self-reliant learning potentially as a result of remote workers being reluctant to seek help. The strategic use of digital platforms in getting

work done within hybrid environments was noted by participants, also mentioning the establishment of new norms and frequent check-ins as measures put in place to maintain team alignment in hybrid environments. Flexibility and adaptability in hybrid working were also emphasised, highlighting the importance of having the right technological tools for seamless collaboration.

Overall, most findings are consistent with existing literature. However, the study contributes to the body of knowledge by shedding light on the learning opportunities available in remote working and exploring the creation of norms for effective teamwork in hybrid work environments, addressing the gap in the understanding of collaboration within hybrid settings.

### **6.3 Discussion of Themes for Research Question Three**

The final research question aimed to explore strategies and actions teams can take to improve their collaboration within hybrid environments by addressing the challenges that were encountered by participants in having some team members working within the office and others working from home. The question aimed to identify viable solutions and offer pathways for fostering more effective team collaboration when team members are working from different locations.

#### *Hybrid Social Engagement and Inclusion*

Bonds and social relationships were mentioned as being critical in how team members engage with one another and allow for enhanced working. Participants in discussions spoke on the importance of building relationships outside the context of work, highlighting that such connections contribute to more effective teamwork. From a Human Resource perspective, the need to be more intentional about in-person bonding so the human element is not lost in working was emphasised. Furthermore, the significance of upfront relationship building when new team members join was stressed as a means of establishing trust, cohesion and mutual understanding within the team.

Although most spoke to the need for in-person meetings when getting to know new people, others alluded to the effectiveness of virtual bonding sessions to achieve the same goal. Most spoke to how these team building sessions can take place sporadically within the confines of the working day, which allows for individuals to get to know one another better and aids in better hybrid working dynamics. Although not mentioned explicitly by all, trust emerged as the key factor necessitating relationship building, as it ultimately leads to better team collaboration.

In literature around trust and teamwork Cheng et al. (2015) note the important role of trust in reducing complexity, further mentioning that when individuals trust one another, the social ties are strong and contribution to knowledge sharing is higher. In how teams collaborate and work together in hybrid settings it was interesting that trust did not come up as often in conversation though. Teams however acknowledged that trust was already present within their teams. This is consistent with literature which notes that when individuals trust each other, they are more prone to share information (Chung et al., 2015).

Teams also mentioned the physical office environment as a place where initial relationships are established and nurtured, confirming findings in the literature that note that the office is likely to become a place for social interaction as opposed to a place where work gets done, as workers continue to work remotely from time to time (Purvanova & Kenda, 2021).

The findings largely confirm what is evidenced in existing literature. However virtual team building and the fostering of relationships through digital platforms provide an opportunity to expand the current body of research and deepen understanding of how relationships are formed and nurtured in the context of virtual settings.

### *Cultivating a Supportive Team Environment*

Research findings on interventions for effective collaboration have highlighted the need for enhanced structure and frameworks to guide hybrid work policies, particularly concerning the balance between in-office and remote workdays. Additionally, participants mentioned the significance of structuring team-wide in-office days to promote team collaboration. The need for more in-office days as a full team was also highlighted as a critical factor in enhancing team collaboration.

This finding offers new insights into the dynamics of hybrid work environments and expands on existing literature, which primarily acknowledges the flexibility it offers without providing detailed guidance. Prior research, such as the work of Van Der Lippe & Lippényi (2020) and Fayard et al. (2021), has recognised the flexibility of working both in a physical office and from home, however, the need for concrete guidelines and structures to support this flexibility has not been extensively addressed.

Participants also highlighted the importance of creating team environments where open communication is encouraged, and individuals feel fully supported in their work. The need for

consistent support, even when things are going well, emerged as a common theme among the participants. Team culture and the establishment of clear goals were also identified as vital elements in fostering effective collaboration. These findings highlight the important role that team goals play in aligning individuals and creating an environment conducive to goal achievement.

In the collaborative team context, Driskell et al. (2018) have previously noted that aligning goals fosters a clear sense of purpose and empowers team members to work together towards shared outcomes. Throughout the research, participants consistently mentioned how having clear, shared goals has positively influenced their ability to work effectively within hybrid environments. This emphasises the importance of individuals being connected to a common goal, as it is a key driver of success in collaborative endeavours.

Overall, the research findings allow for an enrichment of the literature on hybrid work environments by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the structural and cultural aspects necessary for effective collaboration. These insights are important as they offer considerations for organisations navigating hybrid working and allow and contribute to existing research on remote and hybrid working environments.

### **6.3.1 Research Question Three Conclusion**

The research findings spoke to the important role of social relationships within collaborative working, and how individuals are more likely to be cooperative with each other when these relationships are nurtured. These findings aligned with the existing literature (Purvanova & Kenda, 2021), but highlight the potential of virtual team building to expand our understanding of relationship formation in virtual settings.

The need for structured guidelines and frameworks to support hybrid work policies was also identified. The importance of having structured days that allow the entire team to work with one another in the office at the same time was emphasised as being important for effective team collaboration within hybrid working. A strong sense of team culture as well as the establishment of clear goals were emphasised as crucial elements that need to exist within a hybrid team context as these foster effective collaboration. Aligning goals was found to empower team members to work together towards shared outcomes.

Overall, the findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the structural and cultural aspects necessary for effective collaboration in hybrid work environments. They expand on

existing literature by offering insights into how organisations can navigate the complexities of hybrid working to preserve collaboration and enhance team productivity.

#### 6.4 A Model of Hybrid Team Collaboration Based on Results

The proposed conceptual model outlined in the literature review found in Chapter Two will now be discussed relative to the findings outlined in Chapter Five. The model adopted from a study by (Cordery & Soo, 2008), proposed that compared to team members working fully in the office, teams operating within hybrid working environments may face challenges when it comes to (1) accessing, sharing, and capitalising on team information and knowledge; (2) developing a safe space where individuals feel free to share ideas, and (3) experience a sense of collective purpose that is often associated with productivity and performance excellence.

The ability of individuals to engage in exchange relationships in hybrid environments and therefore collaborate effectively was also considered. Figure 9 below was modified considering the findings and is discussed below.

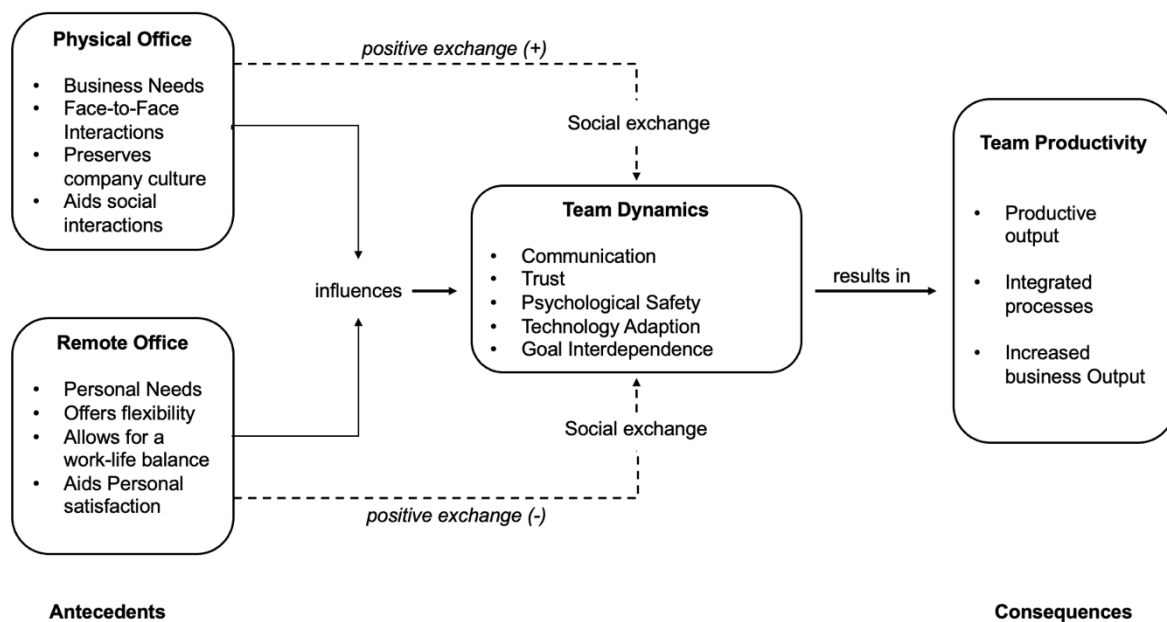


Figure 9: A model of hybrid work collaboration (Adapted from Stutsky & Laschinger, 2014)

The model can be explained as follows: within hybrid working environments, similar to remote working communication is challenging due to individuals working in differing locations (Wang et al., 2021), however differs from remote working in that challenges aren't due to the technical nature of having to use digital tools, but more of a result of conversations being largely concentrated among those within the physical office setting. The way individuals communicate therefore changes within hybrid environments to ensure consistency of information being shared among those working in the office as well as those working remotely. Digital communication tools are used in new ways and are the central platform for communication to ensure communication effectiveness among team members working within a hybrid environment.

Trust and psychological safety remain unchanged within hybrid environments. This is because the physical office environment has become the main place where social interactions and relationship-building take place (Cheng et al., 2015). This has allowed individuals to trust that team members will do what they have committed to do, even when visibility is not present. When individuals know each other, a safe space is easy to come by. Individuals are able to freely contribute to discussions and share ideas regardless of location, due to the relationships that exist (Jha, 2019). However, an increased level of support is needed within hybrid working, especially for those individuals working remotely.

Interestingly enough for introverted team members, the remote environment allows them the comfort to share and contribute more to the team setting than when everyone was working in the physical office environment, adding to the effectiveness of teams. However, within remote environments, the potential for self-isolation and unintentional exclusion is high, especially when the majority of team members are working within the physical office environment with only a few working remotely. This has resulted in the creation of the online office where all team interactions take place online even when individuals are working together in the office. The creation of the online office provides new challenges to hybrid working that haven't been researched before.

Teams have an over-reliance on technology within hybrid environments which necessitates a need for effective digital tools to allow for continuous collaboration. Technology disruptions experienced by those working remotely can cause challenges in decision-making and problem-solving making it harder to collaborate within a hybrid environment (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz (2020). Technology further creates isolation for those working remotely as meetings are less engaging due to the inability to read body language and understand social cues

(Driskell et al., 2018). Individuals are more prone to keep their cameras off in meetings as well, making it harder to remain engaged and effective.

The importance of setting goals and cultivating a team environment that aligns with those goals is highlighted as critical for hybrid working environments, just as is necessary for the physical office environment. However, an understanding and alignment of those goals becomes more important within a hybrid environment as individuals do not always work in close proximity with one another (Davidaviciene et al., 2020). Within hybrid environments, goal alignment is central to teams sharing a collective purpose, these need to be established upfront and re-iterated as part of team norms to allow for consistent working (Driskell et al., 2018).

Social exchanges take place in the same way within the remote working environment as they would in the physical office environment. Individuals have access to the same information and are able to share knowledge and ideas through digital platforms (Oyefusi, 2022). The physical office environment allows for individuals to formulate and nurture relationships which allow for exchange relationships to take place even when working remotely, however, opportunities to cross-collaborate are perceived as being reduced within hybrid working. The physical office has moved to a place where these relationships can be fostered, but teams are also making use of technology to connect with one another through virtual means to keep connections alive.

The overall productivity effectiveness of teams working within hybrid environments could not be determined based on the data collected. Individuals merely feel more productive within the remote environment due to fewer distractions experienced, therefore feel that overall productivity within the team is higher when working remotely. However, the number of days that the team spends together in the office environment was highlighted as something to be explored more as teams emphasised effectiveness in getting work done as being greater when the team is in the office together versus when individuals work sporadically between the office and home.

Overall findings highlight that remote working has both positive and negative implications for team collaboration and the ability for teams to remain productive. This further highlights the complex dynamic of teams working within these environments.

## 6.5 Summary of Results Discussion

This chapter discussed findings in the context of existing literature on team working structures and team dynamics outlined in Chapter Two. While much of the reviewed literature largely applied to hybrid working environments. Findings differed regarding the perceived effectiveness of collaboration within a hybrid work environment. The findings presented in this chapter reveal variations in the perceived effectiveness of collaboration within such environments. These insights offer a profound understanding of the complexities involved in working within hybrid settings, thereby making a valuable contribution to existing literature on hybrid and remote working.

One of the key factors highlighted in this chapter was the significance of the physical office environment in facilitating collaboration. These physical spaces allow for the formation of social relationships and interactions that play a crucial role in building trust and rapport among team members. Moreover, they provide informal learning opportunities that are challenging to replicate within a remote work setting. These relationships forged within the office environment remain instrumental in enhancing collaborative effectiveness. The findings also demonstrate that teams can function just as effectively within a hybrid work environment as they do within a traditional physical office. To achieve this effectiveness, teams employ various strategies, especially concerning the use of digital tools. These tools ensure that teams continue to engage in meaningful interactions and work effectiveness.

New insights gained from findings and not mentioned in the literature, were the distractions caused by in-office interactions which could lead to prolonged debates making decision-making harder and collaboration ineffective. When too many individuals are involved in a conversation, although widening opinion and understanding, it is seen as being ineffective in collaborative efforts.

Remote work allows for self-reliant learning opportunities and different approaches to learning that were not previously available. This newfound flexibility can lead to increased individual growth and skill development, ultimately benefiting the team as a whole. The potential of social isolation and exclusion was cited as the most challenging in navigating how teams operate in hybrid environments. In the absence of physical proximity individuals noted the hindrance of organic bond formation, making it essential for teams to be deliberate in how they approach communication. This highlights the importance of clear and frequent communication within hybrid teams.



An increased level of support for remote workers as well as a team environment that aligns with hybrid working was emphasised as being essential for effective collaboration.

Literature thus far has not explored the inclusivity and empowerment that remote work provides, especially for introverted team members, nor the policies and guidelines needed to foster effective hybrid collaboration. These insights provide valuable contributions to the literature on hybrid and remote working and offer practical considerations for teams navigating these evolving environments.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The purpose of the research study was to understand how hybrid work environments influence team collaboration and the consequent effect on the overall productivity of teams. The Coronavirus pandemic introduced new challenges to the evolving landscape of work, pushing businesses to explore new work structures that blend physical office working with remote work opportunities. This shift has given rise to the concept of hybrid work environments, where employees have the flexibility to work both in the office and remotely from time to time. Chapter One detailed how hybrid working environments offer unique challenges to business effectiveness due to the large-scale movement of employees from the physical office environment to structures that allow for both in-office and remote working (Verma et al., 2022).

Since a large portion of remote working has generally taken place within task teams working across geographical locations (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2018) and is met with its own challenges, a study of working structures in the context of this new environment can help in uncovering new avenues through which businesses looking to move towards hybrid working could draw from.

The study aimed to understand how the sudden shift to this new working environment influences the adoption of new collaboration norms that allow teams to remain effective when adapting to hybrid models. With the ever-increasing demand for flexibility and a greater emphasis on mental health and work-life balance, especially in the context of South Africa, and the ability for individuals to now work anywhere in the world from the comfort of their home, following the learnings gained from the COVID pandemic, individuals are now no longer willing to sacrifice all their time for long hours in the office. This transformation in work preferences has compelled businesses to adapt their work models to allow individuals the flexibility to decide where and how they choose to work, while still ensuring that business effectiveness is still achieved.

As organisations look to adapt to these new evolving working models, an understanding of how a combination of virtual working and in-office presence impacts teams is necessary (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). This understanding is important because communication, trust and mutual respect, which are integral elements of effective teamwork, can all be significantly influenced by the presence or absence of team members. These factors can deeply affect team dynamics and influence the cohesive nature of teams as well as overall performance (Bilotta et al., 2017).

The literature outlines the challenges faced by remote working teams due to the physical distance associated with these environments. The greatest challenge of working remotely is the inability to socialise and engage in spontaneous conversations with is due to the formalised nature of interactions via digital platforms (Wang et al., 2021). This challenge further leads to issues of uncertainty, tension, and resistance among team members often resulting in dysfunctional teams (Lippe & Lippényi, 2020; Dulehon & Hoch, 2017).

Conversely, traditional team settings have long been favoured for their capacity to foster face-to-face interactions. These interactions allow for team members to pick up on social cues that allow for more organic collaboration (AlZaabi et al., 2021). Furthermore, the physical office presence allows for immediate and more effective problem-solving, as individuals are in close proximity, which directly contributes to enhanced team productivity (Fayard et al., 2017). While highly favoured, traditional team settings inhibit worker flexibility relating to time spent in the office and the actual productivity of workers working in the office in relation to remotely cannot be known (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

However, moving towards hybrid environments introduces its own unique set of challenges, especially for teams as little is known about collaboration in this working model. Team dynamics has traditionally relied heavily on the co-location of team members within the physical office environment, and the consequences of teams functioning both in the office and remotely, specifically regarding communication and collaboration, remain largely unexplored (Nazzaro & Strazzabosco, 2009). Nonetheless, hybrid work environments do offer individuals the desired flexibility of working outside of the office while still benefiting from the resources and infrastructure provided by the physical office environment, thereby increasing personal satisfaction and overall employee engagement (Tse & Dasborough, 2008).

Collaboration within the physical office is commonly perceived as more effective as it allows for spontaneous and quick idea generation (Waizenegger et al., 2020), which could be hampered in hybrid environments due to the reliance on technological resources. Resulting in the need for more formalised collaboration interventions. Furthermore, those working remotely could experience a decreased sense of support and missed learning opportunities that typically occur within the physical office, leading to feelings of social isolation and exclusion (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

The willingness of individuals to share information and knowledge within remote settings is also unknown due to the reduced opportunity for social engagement which often allows individuals to engage in exchange relationships (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

The objectives of the research were to understand: the factors influencing the formation of new collaboration norms within hybrid working environments, the perceived role of team dynamics in negotiating and implementing these norms, and how these collaboration norms lead to continued team productivity and organisational success.

To address these objectives, an inductive approach to qualitative content analysis was used. This method was chosen to allow for a deeper understanding of the perceived opinions of individuals working in hybrid working environments. By adopting a phenomenological strategy, the research looked to explore the lived experiences of participants working within hybrid working environments. Due to the limited time available for the study, a cross-sectional time horizon was applied. Purposive sampling using maximum variation was applied when selecting the 15 participants for the study. All participants operated within the financial services industry. Although 15 participants were identified, only 14 took part in the study.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed and used as the measurement instrument for collecting data from the sample. Prior to interviews taking place, a pilot test was conducted to ensure that all questions were easily understood (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). Participants were also briefed on the purpose of the research study. Once interviews had been conducted, they were transcribed and analysed through a thematic analysis approach to identify patterns and themes of importance or interest within the data (Braun & Clark, 2006).

A total of 216 unique codes were generated and further organised into 49 categories, which led to the emergence of 13 themes. To prioritise the most influential aspects of team collaboration within hybrid work settings, a Pareto analysis was conducted. 10 themes were identified as being most important in influencing team collaboration within hybrid work environments. The research met the objectives set out and has further contributed to providing greater insights into the intricacies associated with working within hybrid work environments.

The research also uncovered further aspects of collaboration that are influenced by hybrid environments that were not previously mentioned within the existing literature. In this way, the study has contributed to the growing body of literature on organisational behaviour and has expanded the understanding of the complexities of hybrid working models.

## **7.1 Conclusion of Findings**

While much of the reviewed literature largely applied to hybrid working environments. Findings differed regarding the perceived effectiveness of collaboration within a hybrid work

environment. The findings presented in this chapter reveal variations in the perceived effectiveness of collaboration within such environments. These insights offer a profound understanding of the complexities involved in working within hybrid settings, thereby making a valuable contribution to existing literature on hybrid and remote working.

One of the key factors highlighted in this chapter was the significance of the physical office environment in facilitating collaboration. These physical spaces allow for the formation of social relationships and interactions that play a crucial role in building trust and rapport among team members. Moreover, they provide informal learning opportunities that are challenging to replicate within a remote work setting. These relationships forged within the office environment remain instrumental in enhancing collaborative effectiveness. The findings also demonstrate that teams can function just as effectively within a hybrid work environment as they do within a traditional physical office. To achieve this effectiveness, teams employ various strategies, especially concerning the use of digital tools. These tools ensure that teams continue to engage in meaningful interactions and work effectiveness.

New insights gained from findings and not mentioned in the literature, were the distractions caused by in-office interactions which could lead to prolonged debates making decision-making harder and collaboration ineffective. When too many individuals are involved in a conversation, although widening opinion and understanding, it is seen as being ineffective in collaborative efforts.

Remote work allows for self-reliant learning opportunities and different approaches to learning that were not previously available. This newfound flexibility can lead to increased individual growth and skill development, ultimately benefiting the team as a whole. The potential of social isolation and exclusion was cited as the most challenging in navigating how teams operate in hybrid environments. In the absence of physical proximity individuals noted the hindrance of organic bond formation, making it essential for teams to be deliberate in how they approach communication. This highlights the importance of clear and frequent communication within hybrid teams.

An increased level of support for remote workers as well as a team environment that aligns with hybrid working was emphasised as being essential for effective collaboration. Literature thus far has not explored the inclusivity and empowerment that remote work provides, especially for introverted team members, nor the policies and guidelines needed to foster effective hybrid collaboration. These insights provide valuable contributions to the literature

on hybrid and remote working and offer practical considerations for teams navigating these evolving environments.

## **7.2 Contribution of Findings**

The findings of the study provide insights into the various aspects that affect team dynamics and collaboration within hybrid working environments. The findings highlight that the perceived effectiveness of collaboration in hybrid teams can vary. This insight challenges the notion that hybrid work environments are better or worse than traditional office settings. This is important in contributing to studies on team dynamics in hybrid teams because it highlights the need to look beyond generalisations and explore the specific factors that influence collaboration. The physical office environment is still considered important for collaboration as findings indicate that these spaces play a role in building trust, rapport and informal learning opportunities. This contributes to the scholarly debate on the role of the office environment (Fayard et al., 2021), by emphasising that hybrid work should not completely replace physical offices, as there are unique benefits to maintaining a physical presence for certain aspects of collaboration.

The mention of teams effectively using digital tools to support collaboration in hybrid environments highlights the role of technology in shaping team dynamics, this contributes to the ongoing discussions on the adoption of technology to enhance collaboration (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020), further highlighting the need for research on how technology can be leveraged optimally in hybrid teams considering the varied dynamics involved. Additionally, the observation that in-office interactions can sometimes lead to prolonged debates and ineffective collaboration, This perspective acknowledges that physical environments come with their own set of challenges, indicating the potential downside to physical environments, which challenges the current notion that in-person interactions are always more productive (Purvanova & Kenda, 2021).

Findings further indicate that remote work can offer an inclusive and empowering environment for introverted team members, challenging conventional wisdom about the need for physical presence in teamwork (Krzywdzinski, 2022), and opens up the discussion on how to harness the benefits of remote work for different personality types.

A multifaceted perspective of team dynamics and collaboration in hybrid teams is highlighted by the findings and contributes to the understanding of how team dynamics and collaboration as a key factor in team dynamics, operate in hybrid working teams.

### **7.3 Business Relevance of Findings**

The findings provide insights for businesses, in considering how teams can navigate the complexities associated with collaborating in hybrid work environments. Businesses can use this knowledge to make informed decisions about their work arrangements, team structures and communication strategies. The emphasis on the role of the physical office environment for collaboration effectiveness highlights the need for businesses to rethink their use of office spaces, which could lead to a more strategic approach to office design and utilisation in future, in order to ensure that they continue to foster social relationships and trust among team members.

It is suggested that teams can remain effective in both remote and traditional office settings. This knowledge allows companies to employ differing strategies in bringing these two worlds together. Businesses need to find the right balance between in-person and remote work and provide the necessary tools to facilitate effective collaboration in both environments. The role of digital tools in facilitating collaboration in hybrid environments highlights the importance of businesses to ensure that their teams have access to and can effectively utilise the latest digital collaboration tools.

Organisations may also need to implement guidelines and policies to manage distractions in in-office interactions as a result of prolonged debates to maintain productive collaboration. These distractions may point to the fact that the office environment may not be as effective for productivity and offers an avenue for businesses to further explore. The challenge of potential social isolation highlights the importance of employee well-being in working within hybrid environments. Companies need to consider ways to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion even when working remotely to ensure constant employee satisfaction. This further links to the need for increased support for remote workers. This awareness allows organisations to explore different alternatives to ensure that their employees feel supported.

Recognising the benefits of remote work for introverted team members can lead to more inclusive and empowering work environments and add to employee satisfaction. The development of policies and guidelines that address the unique challenges and opportunities presented by hybrid working can help teams navigate these environments more effectively.

These findings provide insights to businesses on how to optimise collaboration, workplace design, technology adoption, and employee well-being to remain effective within this ever-changing landscape.

## 7.4 Suggestions for Future Research

Much of the existing literature on team dynamics and collaboration has primarily focused on understanding these in the context of remote working environments (Oyefusi, 2022; Driskell et al., 2018; Bosua et al., 2017). However, the recent COVID-19 pandemic prompted a significant shift toward large-scale remote working, necessitating further research into how teams are influenced by this shift. More recently, hybrid working has been introduced as a flexible approach to allow employees the flexibility to balance work and home life. This evolution in working arrangements offers an opportunity for deeper exploration into the intricacies of hybrid working environments and how they impact teams.

The study identified a balanced need for time spent in the office and working from home, and the importance of team members spending time together in-office simultaneously, to aid collaboration. Prior research has not looked into this balance. Future research could be conducted to explore how specific policies and guidelines influence team collaboration in hybrid working environments.

Additionally, the study highlights the inclusivity and empowerment of introverted employees working remotely. Introverts often thrive in more solitary environments. Future studies could focus on the contribution aspect of introverts in hybrid working and the effectiveness of teams. Furthermore, the study shared insights on in-office distractions and how they prolong collaboration effectiveness. Further research could focus on understanding the role of the physical office environment in hybrid collaboration effectiveness. Lastly, most studies have focused on exploring team productivity in the context of remote working. As productivity forms a crucial component of teamwork, there is an opportunity to broaden the scope of research in this area. Future studies can focus on understanding team productivity within hybrid environments. This could encompass aspects such as task distribution, time management, and the impact of the physical office environment on productivity.

The shift towards hybrid working environments, prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, has opened up new avenues for research on team dynamics and collaboration. Further research in this field could provide a more comprehensive understanding of team functioning in this new work setting.



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## 9. APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### Phenomenological interview

**1. How are social relationships developed and maintained between colleagues within a hybrid working structure?**

- What was your experience in joining your team?
- What support has been given to assist you in getting to know your team members better?
- How accessible is support provided to you in performing daily functions?
- How have you experienced interactions/communication across the team?

**2. What is the perceived importance of developing and maintaining social relationships between colleagues within a hybrid working structure?**

- How do you experience your team members when working from home?
- How do you experience your team members when working in the office?
- How are team interactions nurtured and maintained?
- What has been put in place to ensure that team outcomes are achieved?
- In what ways and when do you reach out to others in the team when performing team functions?

**3. What can be done to improve the social relationships between colleagues within a hybrid working structure?**

- What do you think needs to be improved in how team members relate to one another?
- What do you do to support others in the team?
- What other interactions would you recommend to aid in building better relations between members of a team?



## 10. APPENDIX B

### SAMPLE LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear \_\_\_\_\_(participant name),

I am conducting research on the influence of hybrid working structures on team collaboration and would like to interview you as part of my study. The interview is expected to last approximately one hour and will help me understand in what ways collaboration is altered in working within hybrid environments. Your participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time without penalty.

By signing this letter, you are indicating that you have given permission for:

- The interview to be recorded.
- The recording is to be transcribed by a third-party transcriber, who will be subject to a standard non-disclosure agreement.
- Verbatim quotations from the interview to be used in the report, provided that they are not identified with your name or that of the organisation.
- The data to be used as part of a report that will be publicly available once the examination process has been completed; and
- All the data is to be reported and stored without identifiers.

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

Researcher name: Katlego Motiang      Research supervisor name: Dorothy Ndletyana

Email: 22957228@mygibs.co.za      Email: NdletyanaD@gibs.co.za

Signature of participant:

Date: .

Signature of researcher:

Date:

## 11. APPENDIX C

### PARTICIPANTS LIST

<b>Name</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Additional information</b>
<b><i>HRM</i></b>	HR Manager	30-40	Female	Financial Services	HRM is a Human Resource Manager with over 10 years of experience in HR. She is new to the financial services industry, having only worked with her current employer for 8 months now, but has a good understanding of business needs as well as human nature, having worked in different companies and industries within HR over the years.
<b><i>HRB</i></b>	HR Business Partner	30-35	Female	Financial Services	HRB is an HR business partner who has been in her role for the last 4 years. She works in a team of four and services the IT spaces in her company terms of HR needs
<b><i>Team Leader 1</i></b>	Team Leader	35-40	Male	Financial Services	Team Leader 1 is a Discretionary Operations Team Leader. His been a team leader for 7 years and looks after a team of between 7-10 entry level consultants
<b><i>Team Leader 2</i></b>	Team Leader	35-40	Female	Financial Services	Team Leader 2 is a Prime Team Leader and works in Key accounts. She's been a Team leader for 6 years and is responsible for a team of 5-9 skilled consultants
<b><i>Team Leader 3</i></b>	Team Leader	35-40	Female	Financial Services	Team Leader 3 leads a specialist team within Operations. She has been a leader for 5 years and is responsible for a team of 7-9 specialised consultants.
<b><i>Respondent 1 - focus group 1</i></b>	Operations consultant	20-30	Female	Financial Services	Respondent 1 is an operations consultant. She has been working for 2 years now and started just as we moved out of fully remote working. She has no working experience pre-COVID. Her context of work has fully been remote and now moving into hybrid

<b>Respondent 2 - focus group</b>	Operations consultant	20-30	Female	Financial Services	Respondent 2 is an operations consultant within the financial services industry. She has been in this role for 5 years and has experience. She understands team settings both pre as well as post-COVID.
<b>Respondent 3 - focus group 1</b>	Operations consultant	20-30	Male	Financial Services	Respondent 3 works as an operations authoriser. He has been working within Operations for the past 6 years and has an understanding of team settings both pre- and post-COVID
<b>Respondent 4 - Focus Group 1</b>	Operations consultant	20-30	Male	Financial Services	Respondent 4 is a Prime consultant. He has been working at his current employer for the past 4 years. He started working a little before COVID started. He has some experience in the pre-COVID environment but most of his learnings within team settings has mainly been when working fully remotely and now moving into Hybrid working
<b>Respondent 5 - focus group 1</b>	Operations consultant	35-40	Male	Financial Services	Respondent 5 is an operations consultant with over 15 years of experience and has an in-depth understanding of team settings pre-COVID. He has also been a huge source of support within his team when remote working was enforced and has helped significantly in supporting his team through the transition into hybrid environments.
<b>Respondent 1 - focus group 2</b>	Operations consultant	20-30	Male	Financial Services	Respondent 1 (FG2) is an operations consultant. He has been working for 4 years and understands team settings both pre and post COVID.
<b>Respondent 2 - focus group 2</b>	Operations consultant	35-40	Female	Financial Services	Respondent 2 (FG2) is an operations consultant, who has over 10 years' experience within the financial service industry. She has extensive knowledge on team settings and understands collaboration both pre and post COVID

<b>Respondent 3 - Focus Group 2</b>	Operations consultant	25-30	Female	Financial Services	Respondent 3 (FG3) is an operations consultant who has over 6 years' experience working within the financial services industry. She joined her recent employer 2 years before enforced lockdown and understands working environments both pre and post COVID
<b>Respondent 4 - focus group 2</b>	Operations consultant	20-30	Female	Financial Services	Respondent 4 (FG4) is a Prime consultant within Operations. She has been working for just over 4 years now.

## 12. APPENDIX D

### CODES AND CATEGORIES CREATED FOR DATA ANALYSIS

CATEGORIES	CODES	NO.
<b>Adjustment to communication styles</b>		<b>1</b>
	Needing to adjust to communication styles as a result of team changes	1
<b>Agility in terms of working around disruptions</b>		<b>1</b>
	team needs to adapt to remote scenarios in order to remain effective	1
<b>Alternative collaboration tools</b>		<b>4</b>
	look into other collaborative resources outside of Teams	1
	Making use of other project platforms and tools for effective hybrid collaboration	1
	shared collaboration systems that allow others to see what everyone is doing	1
	Transparency on virtual platforms on what others a doing	1
<b>Benefits of face to face communication</b>		<b>4</b>
	Communication is easier when working in the office	1
	Interactions and communication is easier when everyone is in the office	1
	More productive when able to be with colleagues	2
<b>Benefits of in office interactions</b>		<b>2</b>
	easier to see when others need help in the office.	1
	Things get done quicker when in the office	1
<b>Benefits of remote working</b>		<b>2</b>
	hybrid mix provides opportunities when people are working late	1

	team members can choose the way they work	1
<b>Benefits of working remotely</b>		<b>3</b>
	Introverts communicate easier when WFH	1
	More comfortable to communicate / collaborate when WFH	1
	More productive when working from home	1
<b>Business norms</b>		<b>2</b>
	business culture was well suited for remote working	1
	team works according to set company guidelines in getting this done	1
<b>Business versus personal preferences</b>		<b>2</b>
	Business insistence on WFO conflicts with personal preference to WFH affects employee attitudes	1
	There are nuances between preferences of where to work	1
<b>Collaborative learning</b>		<b>2</b>
	Different points of view are available when working in the office	1
	Tactics for sharing information within a hybrid environment	1
<b>Comfortability within communication channels</b>		<b>1</b>
	the generation now is more comfortable with virtual communication so it's not that big of an adjustment	1
<b>Communication channels varied</b>		<b>1</b>
	When working remotely communicate on platforms, when in office have face to face interactions	1
<b>Communication differences</b>		<b>1</b>
	Communication takes place more when working remotely	1
<b>Communication is easier</b>		<b>1</b>

	people sit next to each other so you can just turned around to someone and ask a question	1
<b>Communication is isolated</b>		<b>4</b>
	communication doesn't need to happen with others who are not in your immediate team	1
	It's easier to reach out to those in office then engaging with those at home	1
	Team is more productive when working with immediate members in the team	1
	Team office day is the only day where everyone in the team is in the office at the same time	1
<b>Comparisons pre-and post-Covid</b>		<b>2</b>
	Little difference in engagement and communication between pre and post Covid	1
	Saw colleagues more before Covid	1
<b>connection sessions</b>		<b>2</b>
	sessions that allow for team members to better relate to each even when working remotely	1
	team-building that allow for better team cohesion	1
<b>creating a sense of inclusion</b>		<b>3</b>
	Having new people who join the team work in office for easier adjustment	1
	team norms when new members join the team	2
<b>cross-collaboration across departments</b>		<b>2</b>
	sharing ideas across departments on what's working regarding hybrid working	1
	sharing on what's working and not working across the business	1
<b>cross-collaboration across the team</b>		<b>1</b>
	team members should work on different things together which would allow them to interact more frequently	1

<b>Differing working hours</b>		<b>1</b>
	Flexibility can cause disruptions in a work day	1
<b>Differing team needs</b>		<b>2</b>
	everyone seems to be working well within the model due to independent department rules set	1
	teams that are business sensitive would probably spend more time in office versus other teams	1
<b>Face to face interactions are more effective</b>		<b>1</b>
	interactions and communication are better in office because of ease of proximity	1
<b>Feeling safe within the environment</b>		<b>1</b>
	creating space for all personalities to talk and hold each other accountable	1
<b>flexibility depending on business function</b>		<b>1</b>
	offering differing flexible arrangements based on business needs	1
<b>Having team goals</b>		<b>1</b>
	create a common understanding within the team	1
<b>Hybrid socialisation</b>		<b>2</b>
	using virtual platforms for team buildings and engaging teams	1
	using zoom as a platform to engage and build relationships	1
<b>In person correspondence beneficial</b>		<b>8</b>
	conclusions are reached quicker as thinking happens as individuals can help one another think	1
	Dealing with problems is easier in the office due to proximity	1
	help is easier to come as people are readily available in the office	1



	in office presence helps with building relationships and makes interactions easier	1
	More team interactions take place within the office environment	2
	one can move their screens to show what they are talking about when next to each other	1
	People are more involved in conversations in the office	1
<b>In-office interactions</b>		<b>1</b>
	communication when working in the office	1
<b>inclusion of differing alternatives</b>		<b>6</b>
	allowing teams to decide for themselves what flexibility looks like	1
	Business has a one size fits all solution to hybrid working	1
	decisions are made at the top and communicated downwards without consideration of others	1
	managers need to consider the views of others regarding working from home	1
	people need to have a choice with regards to where they are able to work	1
	solutions can also come from teams regarding work from home options	1
<b>Inclusive conversations</b>		<b>2</b>
	ensure for distributed responsibility across the team so that there's not an overreliance on those working in office	1
	when asking questions pose it in the chat so everyone has an opportunity to see and respond. In that way it feels more like an office environment	1
<b>Increased and regular communication</b>		<b>2</b>
	Had daily Teams meetings to check in on each other	1
	WFH meant we needed to overcommunicate to check in and manage boundaries	1

<b>Increased communication</b>		<b>1</b>
	The need to re-iterate the message	1
<b>Independence in thought</b>		<b>1</b>
	More motivated to find answers for yourself when working remotely	1
<b>independence in working</b>		<b>1</b>
	individuals are able to work autonomously because they know what's expected of them	1
<b>Interactions amongst team</b>		<b>1</b>
	more frequent interactions to improve team relations amongst individuals	1
<b>Interventions take place quicker</b>		<b>2</b>
	collaboration takes place more frequently within the office environment	1
	Frequent communication allows for things to get resolved as and when they come up.	1
<b>Leadership support available for collaboration</b>		<b>2</b>
	Leader available when required	1
	On calls, seniors coach and help with technical or personal issues	1
<b>Learning from one another</b>		<b>3</b>
	individuals are able to learn from one another	1
	Information is accessible simply from listening to conversations taking place around you	1
	learning is more interactive and opinions can be shared across the team in discussions that take place in the office	1
<b>Learning happens more organically</b>		<b>1</b>
	Individuals are able to learn from one another's scenarios and apply in future within the office environment	1

<b>Learning is more intentional</b>		<b>1</b>
	Individuals would choose to spend time finding the answers and enhance self-learning as opposed to having to send a message to someone	1
<b>Learning new things about others</b>		<b>1</b>
	Working in the office allows you to get to know others in a more connected way.	1
<b>less frequent interactions</b>		<b>2</b>
	Check-ins are reduced when working remotely due to people being more focused on work	1
	people don't interact as much when working remotely	1
<b>Limitations of working remotely</b>		<b>1</b>
	Complacency makes communication and collaboration harder	1
<b>Limitations to communication with those working remotely</b>		<b>12</b>
	Difficult to develop relationships with new members online	1
	If struggling, one must be intentional about sending out signal to ask for help, otherwise could miss it.	1
	Interactions take longer in the office	3
	It is sometimes difficult to get information	1
	It takes longer to get responses	1
	Miss emotional cues leading to taking messages out of context	1
	Team members have different access to internet	1
	When working in the office we hardly interact with those WFH	1
	When working online it is possible not to communicate with colleagues all day	1
	When working the office, we do huddles and exclude those WFH	1

<b>Loss of spontaneous interactions</b>		<b>1</b>
	Getting through things happens a lot quicker when everyone is working in one place	1
<b>Meetings for purpose</b>		<b>1</b>
	Ensuring that team meetings are purposeful	1
<b>More interactions happen within the office environment</b>		<b>1</b>
	People take opportunities to step away from their desk and socialise with others in the office	1
<b>More learning opportunity</b>		<b>1</b>
	More dependence on certain individuals versus others for assistance	1
<b>More online presence</b>		<b>3</b>
	communication takes place online even when sitting next to someone	1
	Meetings still happen online even when everyone is in the office	2
<b>More options for learning</b>		<b>2</b>
	learning is now more readily available regardless of where you are	1
	opportunities to learn are increased in office	1
<b>More options to working</b>		<b>1</b>
	More options are available regarding how we work as a result of hybrid	1
<b>More willingness to reach out to others</b>		<b>1</b>
	Engaging with others is simpler in the office, so there's more likelihood to ask for help	1
<b>Office interactions can cause distractions</b>		<b>3</b>
	in office debates can sometimes prolong action mode	1
	too many people working on the same issue can result in less effectiveness	1

	when everyone in office less work seems to get done	1
<b>Opportunity for differing perspectives</b>		<b>1</b>
	The office environment allows for the sharing of different perspectives and one to apply their mind	1
<b>peer support</b>		<b>4</b>
	checking-in on one another to build rapport	1
	Co-workers should check up on each other more frequently	1
	Having a buddy system within the hybrid function	1
	having someone check-in on you when working remotely	1
<b>Performance measures for effectiveness</b>		<b>1</b>
	KPIs as a guided measure to productivity	1
<b>Potential for remote exclusion</b>		<b>3</b>
	Interactions only happen with immediate team members	2
	People in the office tend to only interact with those in the office	1
<b>Prefer face-to-face communication</b>		<b>5</b>
	Better communication when WFO, helps with relationships	1
	Difficult to collaborate, therefore deliberate focus on team building leads to face-to-face interaction	1
	face-to-face interactions work better	1
	Leader must insist on team meetings and interactions	1
	Tactics for face to face collaboration	1
<b>Prefer online communication</b>		<b>2</b>
	Communicating on Teams is more effective because can discuss facts and solution	1
	Easier to focus when online and to generate solutions.	1

<b>Preferred communication channels</b>		<b>7</b>
	Chats and calls are mostly what is used for team interactions	1
	Team members create own communication channels	1
	Teams and outlook are the main communication platforms	1
	Teams is the main channel to communicate even when WFO	2
	Teams is the main channel to communicate when working from home	1
	When working remotely calling someone is more effective but is based on the need	1
<b>Preferred communication channels</b>		<b>1</b>
	Online communication and emails used most frequently	1
<b>Preferred working environment</b>		<b>1</b>
	preference for remote working	1
<b>Problem-solving effectiveness</b>		<b>5</b>
	ability to resolve issues more quickly when everyone is in the office	1
	impact on sorting things out is faster in the office	1
	Messaging someone on teams can take longer at times then phoning someone.	1
	when sharing work, its more effective to put everyone in one conversation to resolve the issue	1
	when working through problems it takes longer in a remote setting	1
<b>Purposeful meeting interactions</b>		<b>2</b>
	Need to be more deliberate in getting teams together to interact	1

	remote working allows for more opportunity for individuals to prep for meetings as agendas need to be set in advance	1
<b>Quicker response rate</b>		<b>1</b>
	More people are accessible in an office setting	1
<b>Remote isolation</b>		<b>4</b>
	Cameras in virtual meetings are always turned off, can see individuals. Makes for reduced engagement	1
	Interactions don't happen as frequently when working remotely	1
	Team office days allow for interaction amongst the team, as team could go for several days without talking to each other when working remotely	1
	there's an everyone for themselves mentality in remote working	1
<b>Richer communication when face-to-face</b>		<b>2</b>
	Team meetings are held in the office biweekly - that is collaboration time	1
	We can get into detail on cases which helps with future cases	1
<b>Rules of engagement</b>		<b>1</b>
	guidelines drawn up on how we approach one another and conduct ourselves within the team environment	1
<b>Seamless collaboration between those WFH and WFO</b>		<b>3</b>
	Even if effectiveness varies, communication and collaboration is seamless	1
	Not necessary to postpone meetings because of absence	1
	Those WFH can get help from those WFO	1
<b>Set roles and responsibilities</b>		<b>2</b>
	everyone has assigned portfolios that create direction for the day	1

	everyone has assigned tasks that are communicated upfront	1
<b>Shared learning</b>		<b>1</b>
	Reaching out to others in order to share knowledge or resolve issues outside of project work	1
<b>Shared responsibility</b>		<b>1</b>
	A buddy system allows for quicker access to individuals and quicker help	1
<b>Social interactions</b>		<b>5</b>
	building relationships aids in getting to know others	1
	doing things as a team outside of work to get to know one another	1
	mini-gatherings that allow for more interaction across the team	1
	teambuilding activities that allow for better relationship building	1
	understanding the importance of team buildings in building relationships across the team	1
<b>structured in person bonding</b>		<b>1</b>
	being intentional about team bonding when everyone is in the office	1
<b>Structured office days</b>		<b>2</b>
	Being more deliberate about getting everyone into the office	1
	having more than one team office day for more effective team collaboration	1
<b>structuring meetings</b>		<b>1</b>
	being deliberate about when and where team members interact	1
<b>Support needed</b>		<b>2</b>
	check-ins should happen even when one is working remotely	1
	Creating psychologically safe environments for communication	1
<b>tactics for collaboration</b>		<b>1</b>
	Having to be intentional in getting people in the office for collaboration	1
<b>Tactics for communicating on platforms</b>		<b>4</b>



	interactions take place on virtual platforms when working remotely	2
	When communicating online had to be more polite / respectful and patient	1
	When communicating online had to be more polite to make colleagues comfortable	1
<b>Tactics for communicating on platforms</b>		<b>4</b>
	Communicated on platforms even if all were in office to ensure all were aware	1
	Even if in office, used platforms to include those working remotely	1
	Had to be intentional about communicating on Teams so all had access	1
	Sharing screens on Teams led to more interaction	1
<b>Tactics for communicating when in office</b>		<b>1</b>
	Had to plan when people would be in office to collaborate	1
<b>Tactics for working together</b>		<b>1</b>
	team norms for effective collaborative working	1
<b>Task coordination</b>		<b>8</b>
	Creation of new norms within the teams that allows individuals to go back to basics	1
	Different group chats exist for differing reasons making collaboration easier throughout the day	1
	Frequent morning catch-ups that allow teams to set the tone for the day	1
	More online interactions to assist in getting things done	1
	Shared capacity planning that allows the team to structure their day	1
	tasks rotated in the team and being transparent in sharing that information	1

	Team norms created for hybrid working that are housed on communication platforms	1
	Team sharing in terms of workload and work outcomes	1
<b>Team check-ins</b>		<b>1</b>
	quick check ins and catch ups have helped break the ice and build relationships	1
<b>Team culture</b>		<b>4</b>
	assess what is needed within the team environment	1
	Creating a team culture that aligns with goals and what we want to achieve	1
	How the team has been setup	1
	Rules for virtual working	1
<b>Team member exclusion</b>		<b>5</b>
	Awareness to include everyone in the conversation regardless of where they are	1
	communication has changed to accommodate remote workers as its easier to forget about someone working from home	1
	conversations tend to become one sided with those in office	1
	individuals working remotely when most of the team are working in office can be excluded from task allocations	1
	more intention needs to be given to include those at home, pro-longing effectiveness	1
<b>Tendency to leave people out</b>		<b>1</b>
	those working in office more frequently tend to work better with each other.	1
<b>The need for social activities</b>		<b>1</b>
	social activities or events to build social relationship	1
<b>The need to communicate is more</b>		<b>1</b>
	lack of visibility requires a greater need of communication	1

<b>Transactional interacting</b>		<b>1</b>
	Remote conversations tend to focus more on work whereas office interactions are more inclusive	1
<b>Transparency in communication</b>		<b>2</b>
	Being clear in the way we communicate the message around hybrid	1
	Being clear in the way we communicate the need for in office presence	1
<b>Understanding social cues</b>		<b>1</b>
	communication needs to be more open and there needs to be more awareness of the message communicated	1
<b>Upfront communication on what is happening in your day so the team is better able to plan and assist</b>		<b>1</b>
	Knowing which communication channels to use when is essential for team effectiveness	1
<b>Using expert knowledge</b>		<b>1</b>
	Teams allows the opportunity to still access knowledge through individuals	1
<b>Various communication channels</b>		<b>1</b>
	different ways of communication are used depending on the need and preference	1
<b>virtual relationships</b>		<b>1</b>
	online team buildings that cater for introverts and extroverts	1
<b>Working in office has become a platform for socialisation</b>		<b>2</b>
	more catchups happen in office as a result of people seeing less of each other.	2
<b>Working is faster in the office</b>		<b>4</b>

	everyone can get on the same page quicker when working in the office	1
	Pace of working seems to be greater in the office	1
	Responses are quicker and easier to come by in the office	1
	team is more productive in getting things done	1