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

Acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment

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A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

01 November 2023

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges for talent acquisition, management, and retention within organisations, shedding light on the vulnerabilities of traditional office-based onboarding strategies. This study delves into the adaptive measures taken by organisations in South Africa to reshape their onboarding strategies in response to the emergence of a hybrid work environment in the post-COVID era.

This exploratory research focuses on the acculturation and embedding of new hires in a hybrid work setting through a comprehensive literature review, qualitative data collection via interviews with human resources practitioners and newly onboarded employees, and subsequent thematic analysis. The study aims to draw meaningful conclusions from this multifaceted investigation.

The study's finding reveals that, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, only a minority of companies in South Africa had developed specific strategies for onboarding within a hybrid work environment. However, in the aftermath of the pandemic, a significant shift occurred as most organisations began to design and implement onboarding strategies tailored to the hybrid work model. These strategies garnered particular attention among younger, technologically savvy employees, reflecting the adaptability of the emerging workforce.

Furthermore, the study uncovers the adverse consequences of hybrid working on new hires, notably encompassing mental health concerns and challenges in adapting socially to a corporate environment. These challenges underscore the importance of holistic onboarding strategies that consider not only technical aspects but also the psychological and social well-being of new employees.

In addition to these key findings, the research sheds light on potential areas of future exploration, recognising the evolving nature of hybrid working. The study provides valuable insights for organisations seeking to adapt their onboarding strategies in an evolving work landscape and offers a foundation for further research.

KEYWORDS
hybrid work environment, organisational culture, onboarding, new hires, employee socialisation strategies

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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ABBREVIATIONS

GIBS: Gordon Institute of Business Science

HM   Hybrid Model

HR: Human Resources

HWE: Hybrid Work Environment

IT: Information Technology

MBA: Master of Business Administration

M&A: Mergers and Acquisitions

MNCs: Multi-national Corporations

NERSA   National energy Regulator of South Africa

PCI: Professional Chinese Immigrants

SHRM: Society for Human Resources Management

UAE   United Arab Emirates

CHAPTER 1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1. Introduction

The study explored *how organisations acculturate and embed new hires in the company in a hybrid work environment (HWE) that emerged post-COVID. Onboarding* is a multifaceted procedure firms employ to effectively introduce and assimilate newly hired personnel into their professional environment. The objective of onboarding extends beyond the mere familiarisation of new employees with their work responsibilities (Racherla, 2020). Its purpose is to facilitate their assimilation into the organisational culture, values, rules, and procedures. Understanding the adaptability of organisations in a hybrid work environment is linked to the purpose of this research study.

Research studies published before the COVID-19 pandemic established that about 80 per cent of workers in developed economies could effectively work remotely (Fayard et al., 2021). Furthermore, studies show that after months of working remotely, employers also saw the effectiveness of remote working (Fayard et al., 2021). While these statistics highlight the positives of hybrid working, in this study, they are balanced with the understanding of the negative consequences of it for the employee and the organisation.

Post-pandemic, the impact of a hybrid work environment on acculturation and employee engagement began to gain prominence in the academic sphere and consultants, as noted by publications by consultants such as McKinsey, who did a study of 800 corporate executives that indicated hybrid would be a norm in future (Stanier et al., 2022). However, Stanier et al. (2022) cautioned that hybrid working is more complex than deciding on days to be in-office or remote. In their experience consulting with companies pre-COVID, Stanier et al. (2022) posit that for hybrid culture to thrive, it is essential to treat everyone as remote - that is, everyone must have access to the same information, people, tools, and opportunities to succeed regardless of their location. Stanier et al. (2022) observed equal treatment of employees in hybrid working as an enabler of organisational culture. Likewise, Howard (2022) asserts that some companies saw increased productivity due to remote working. However, innovation was also negatively impacted due to a lack of team collaboration and brainstorming in remote working (Howard, 2022). This study has tried to find a balanced view of the outcome of hybrid working.

1.2. Background to the Research

The challenge organisations face with hybrid working is acculturating and embedding new hires into the company culture. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the workplace is evolving into a hybrid working environment. Traditionally, the in-office work was the schoolhouse for embedding the organisation's culture in new employees (Fayard et al., 2021). New hires learned how to behave in the organisation – "how things are done around here" – from their superiors and colleagues (Fayard et al., 2021, p. 5).

This study assumed that successful acculturating and embedding of new hires would lead to their success over the long term in the organisation. However, the traditional methods employed to onboard and orientate them may be better in a hybrid work environment that emerged post-COVID-19. Therefore, this study explores organisations' strategies to acculturate and embed new hires in a hybrid work environment.

Organisations, like any group functioning as a purposeful unit, such as tribes or clans, have a natural culture – this natural culture is their essence. The natural culture is who they are and how they do things. Hofstede (1997) posits that culture is the software of the mind. *Culture* is defined "as a shared set of values (what we care about), beliefs (what we believe to be true), and norms of behaviour (how we do things)" (Hollister et al., 2021, p. 5). Van Pottelsberghe (2022) characterise organisational culture as unique values, beliefs, assumptions, and traits exhibited by members of the organisation. By accumulating and embedding culture in new hires, organisations are wiring the minds to regulate how members think, feel, and act within the framework of that organisation (Christensen, 2006). Achieving this cultural commonality in a hybrid work environment is the challenge that leaders must grapple with in a post-COVID epoch; as Christensen (2006) argues, culture is dynamic; it evolves with new experiences. Hollister et al. (2021) argue that post-COVID, the organisation must implement new ways of working, leverage technology and develop new business models, and failure to adapt quickly risks the organisation becoming obsolete.

1.3. Theoretical Relevance of the Research

The theoretical frameworks on organisational culture by scholars such as Edgar Shein (1992) face challenges due to transitioning from a traditional work environment into hybrid

working. For example, Schein (1992) outlines the primary culture embedding mechanisms and the reinforcement mechanisms that prevail in a traditional work environment.

The primary embedding mechanisms from an organisation leader's perspective include:
1. What they pay attention to, measure, and control on an ongoing basis
2. How they respond to critical events such as COVID-19 and internal organisational crises
3. How the leader is allocating resources
4. Deliberate role-modeling, teaching, and coaching
5. How they allocate rewards and status in the organisation
6. Criteria for recruitment, selection, promotion, performance management and dismissal

Moreover, the secondary mechanisms align with the primary mechanism, which, according to Shein (1992), can evolve into primary embedding mechanisms. Organisational design and structure
1. Organisational systems and procedures
2. Rites and rituals of the organisation
3. Design of physical space and buildings
4. Stories and myths about key people and events
5. Formal mission statement, charters, and ethical code

In the broader context of this research, it is essential to discuss the generalities of organisational culture before exploring the concept of acculturating and embedding new hires in an HWE. For organisational culture, we reference Edgar Shein in his seminal work on Organisational Culture and Leadership (1992). Shein's work on organisational culture has been widely cited for its scholarly merits, contributing to a deeper understanding of the interplay between organisational culture and leadership.

According to Schein (1992), the organisation's culture is shaped and maintained by the leadership. It follows that leadership, be it managers who lead teams, must set the tone on cultural matters for new hires in the organisation. In essence, Shein posits that leadership is a tool for acculturating employees to the organisation. Shein (1992) applies a pyramid framework that introduces three levels of organisational culture: artefacts and

behaviours, espoused values, and underlying assumptions. In Figure # below, we present Shein's framework.

Figure 1. Shein Organisational Culture Model
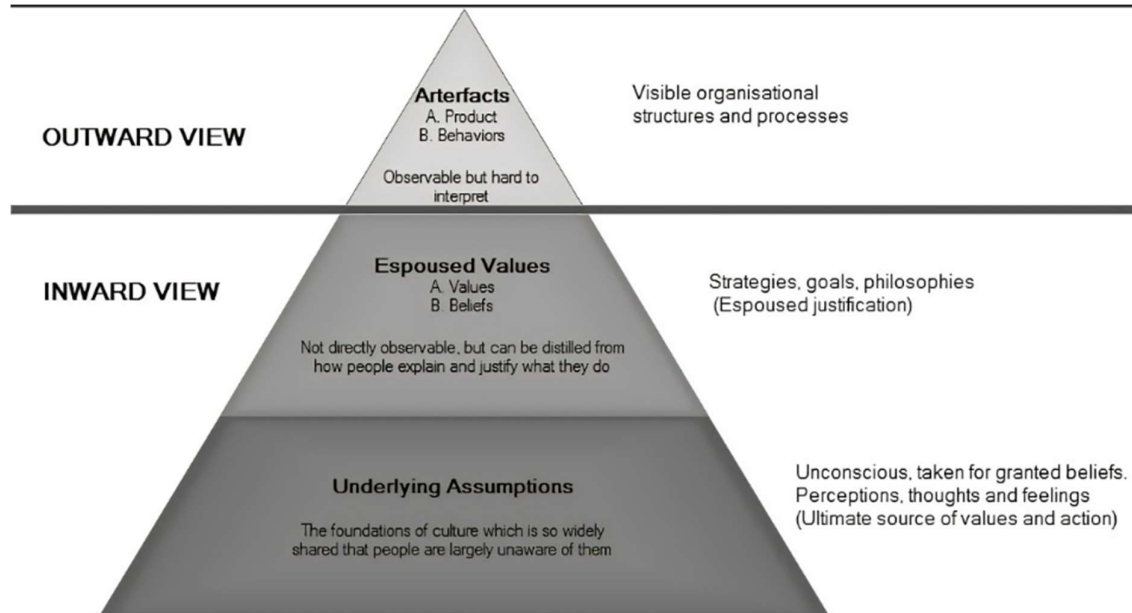
Schein work on organisational culture is significant to this study when contextualised with the post-COVID pandemic transformation organisations face. Schein's model can act as a guide for leadership to analyse and manage the organisations' culture during shifts from traditional in-office work to an HWE.

Applying the Shein's Organisation Culture Model to the context of this study, we deduce the following observations:

1. **Underlying Assumptions:** For new hires to achieve this level represents a successful acculturating and embedding process. At this level, the new hire is culturally in sync with the organisation. New hires as organisational outsiders need to accumulate sufficient knowledge to understand the cultural cues and values of the organisation compared to insiders who accept "the way things are" (Bolinger & Burch, 2020, p. 352).

2. **Espoused Values:** A new hire may get literature or guidance tools about the organisations that explicitly detail "the qualities or norms preferred by the

organisation" (Bolinger & Burch, 2020, p. 352). An example of an espoused value will be Nike's *Just Do It* slogan.

3. **Artefacts:** These are observable organisation characteristics, including the dress code, décor, logos, and brands. A new hire can quickly get acquainted with the organisation's artefacts and use them for guidance. According to Bolinger and Burch (2020), characteristics of an organisation, such as myths/stories about the organisation's history and its rituals. For example, in banking circles in South Africa, a red tie may be synonymous with ABSA bank, a green tie symbolises Nedbank, and blue is Standard Bank.

We have outlined Schein's Organisational Culture model relevance to the study regarding managing and maintaining culture from the traditional in-office work setting to an HWE from the leadership perspective related to acculturating new hires to the organisation. Furthermore, the study explored the evolving nature of work environments, the challenges organisations face in integrating new hires in a hybrid work situation, and an understanding of how organisations can adapt their acculturation and embedding processes to support new hires effectively.

The study also considered several factors to evaluate whether the traditional methods of acculturating and embedding new hires are relevant enough in the post-COVID hybrid work setting.

Among these factors are:

1. **The hybrid work environment (HWE):** We argue that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of hybrid work models. Virtual settings offer anytime, anywhere work environments, which break down the geographical barriers and temporal limitations of traditional socialisation (Gupta et al., 2022). However, Gupta et al. (2022) noted that scholars such as Walther and Bunz (2005) have cautioned about the learning challenges of virtual settings, such as the communication of social knowledge and behaviour control mechanisms. Other scholars, including Berry (2011) and Nydegger and Nydegger (2010), have also raised the difficulties of acquiring information and learning cultural and social norms in a virtual setting.   The shift from physical office spaces to remote working

changed how organisations operate and collaborate. The study aims to understand the implication of this new work environment on the acculturation and embedding of new hires from a South African perspective.

2. **The effectiveness of traditional methods:** Traditional methods involve face-to-face interactions, mentorship, coaching, and team collaboration. Ostroff and Kozlowski (1993) found that a newcomer with a mentor can learn more about organisational issues and practices [culture] compared to non-mentored newcomers. In addition, Ostroff and Kozlowski (1993) suggest that co-workers can be heavily utilised as information sources during workplace socialisation to overcome this mentorship deficiency. However, in a hybrid work setting, these traditional methods may not be applicable (for example, no co-workers are sitting next to you), and they will need to be modified, or new methods should emerge to accommodate remote work settings. Therefore, the study seeks to identify existing practices' strengths and weaknesses and find alternatives.

3. **Adaptation of onboarding processes:** The study gained insights into innovative approaches, strategies, and technologies organisations use to enhance new hires' acculturation and embedding process in hybrid work settings. Mutual adaptation occurs between the new hire and the organisation (Moyson et al., 2018). Organisations should not hold on to a narrow view of socialisation stages in a virtual setting context (Gupta et al., 2022). Gupta et al. (2022) found that pre-entry experience is a stronger predictor of accommodation for new hires in a virtual work setting than other variables, such as group work involvement and involvement in professional activities such as coaching and mentorship. The finding by Gupta et al. (2022) lays a foundation for this study to propose a *fit-for-purpose* onboarding model for virtual work settings in South Africa.

   Adaptation to HWE by organisations is vital in ensuring that new hires feel connected, supported, and aligned with the organisation's culture, primarily when they work remotely.

4. **Employee performance:** A successful acculturation and embedding process impacts the individual and the organisation's performance. The study explored how different approaches to acculturating and embedding new hires influenced employee engagement and wellness retention, attrition in a hybrid work setting and the overall impact on organisational success.

5. **Implication on management:** This is the caveat of the study; there needs to be more guidance for organisations on how to adapt their managerial practices to support new hires in hybrid work environments. The study aims to identify best practice strategies in the South African context and recommendations for managers responsible for onboarding and integrating new employees. Gupta et al. (2022) have found that communication in virtual settings is a significant source of conflict between new hires and managers because of a lack of training to use the medium. The receiver decodes the message without the benefit of virtual cues and clarifications from the sender.

We conclude that the theoretical relevance of examining the traditional methods of acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work setting has significance for this research, and the outcomes from this study will add value to decision-making and policy development, leading to more effective onboarding activities in a hybrid work environment.

1.5. Objectives of the Research

1.5.1. To explore organisations' challenges in acculturating and embedding new hires in an HWE post-COVID.

1.5.2. To identify the strategies (employee engagement measurement) used during onboarding to acculturate and embed new hires in an HWE.

1.5.3. To evaluate the effectiveness of the identified strategies in acculturating and embedding new hires in an HWE.

1.6. The Rationale of the Research

South Africa has high unemployment rates among its population, particularly those in the age group 18 – 35 years old (Stats SA, 2022). This age group has high technology adoption, making them amenable to work in a hybrid work environment, which emerged post-COVID as new hires. Many tertiary graduates in South Africa are from previously disadvantaged communities, far from urban centres with large industries and employment opportunities. However, new technologies and experiences post-COVID have created opportunities for new working methods – remote or hybrid working. Therefore, this new

normal of hybrid working is creating challenges for leaders and managers of organisations in how they Acculturate and embed new hires. Understanding how organisations handle these challenges is critical from a theoretical and practical viewpoint.

1.7. Purpose Statement

The study aims to determine *whether traditional acculturating and embedding new hires are relevant enough in a hybrid work situation that emerged post-COVID*. Thus, the study centres on exploring new strategies to onboard and orient new hires in a hybrid work epoch by focusing on how they are acculturated and embedded.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the literature review that we conducted, which centres on the key constructs of the study: *acculturation* and *embedding* of employees – with an emphasis on *new hires*, the *hybrid work environment (HWE)*, *effective strategies*, and *challenges* with acculturate and embed new hires *post-COVID*. In addition, the study reviewed the underlying theoretical model and frameworks relevant to the research topic.

2.2. Overview

The acculturating and embedding process of new hires into an organisation requires them to successfully adjust to their new work environment by learning the behaviours, attitudes, and necessary skills to discharge their responsibilities (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). New hires adjust to a specific role in the organisation, a process referred to as organisational socialisation (Chao et al., 1994), discussed in detail in this chapter, by transitioning from organisational outsiders into insiders (Bauer et al., 2007). Furthermore, Bauer et al. (2007) emphasise the vitality of organisational socialisation because of the high career mobility of employees.

Some scholars have argued that a successful organisational socialisation experience leads to higher retention rates and a better chance of organisational culture endurance – even as the organisation grows (Gupta et al., 2022; Yarbrough & Salazar, 2023; Gifford, 2022). The changing organisational landscape towards an HWE challenges organisations to pay more attention to onboarding activities to facilitate new hires' learning and adjustment effectively.

2.2. Theoretical concepts relevant to the study

2.2.1 Onboarding

The process of acclimating new hires to and integrating them into an organisation is known as "onboarding" in theory (Sibisi & Kappers, 2022, pp. 44-46). It includes a range of exercises and procedures intended to assist new hires in getting acquainted with their coworkers, duties, and organisational culture. Making the transition easier for new hires

and helping them to become contributing members of the team rapidly is the main objective of onboarding.

During the onboarding process, new employees experience the distinct dynamics of a work environment that blends in-person and remote work (Sibisi & Kappers, 2022). It entails preparing them for remote work, guiding them through the difficulties that come with this arrangement, and teaching them about the technological tools and communication platforms utilised in a hybrid situation. Acclimating new hires to the organisation's culture, beliefs, and customs is another vital onboarding function. It is crucial to come up with innovative strategies to embed the corporate culture and make sure that remote workers feel linked to the organisational ethos in a hybrid work environment when in-person interactions may be limited (Sibisi & Kappers, 2022).

Technology is essential for onboarding, particularly in the context of hybrid work. Digital tools such as project management software, video conferencing, and collaboration platforms need to be mastered by new hires (Sibisi & Kappers, 2022). Employee comfort with these technologies enables effective onboarding, critical for success in a hybrid work environment.

Building connections and promoting socialisation between new hires and current staff members should be a key component of onboarding in a hybrid environment. Regular check-ins, mentorship programs, and virtual team-building exercises can all support remote workers in keeping a feeling of engagement and belonging.

Onboarding procedures and their effects on employee embedding in a hybrid work environment can be a significant area of focus in relation to the research question of the study, which asks about the efficacy of strategies and practices. Researchers can look at how companies onboard new employees and evaluate how well such strategies work to help them adjust to the hybrid work paradigm, fit in with the team, and start producing results immediately.

To summarise, this study on acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment was particularly relevant to the theoretical concept of onboarding. It provided a fundamental framework for comprehending how businesses onboard new hires into this

work environment, particularly post-COVID. It also provided insightful information about the strategies that work well in this situation.

2.2.2 Acculturating

American geologist John Wesley Powell first used *acculturation* in a study for the U.S. Bureau of Ethnology in 1880 (Powell, 2022). According to his definition, it is the psychological alterations brought about by cross-cultural imitation and interactions with other cultures. *Acculturation* is a theoretical notion that describes how people from diverse cultural origins interact and encounter one another, changing their cultural norms, values, and beliefs in the process (Powell, 2022). This idea is frequently discussed in relation to international relations or migration, as people or groups adjust to a new culture while preserving elements of their native one.

Using the study "Acculturating and Embedding New Hires in a Hybrid Work Environment," the concept of acculturation was applied to comprehend how recently hired staff members adjust to the distinct customs and culture of a hybrid work environment, which blends aspects of in-person and remote work.

Unlike traditional in-person or entirely remote work settings, a hybrid work environment has a unique culture and set of norms. New hires must adjust to this culture, which encompasses expectations, communication methods, and technology usage in addition to job procedures. The notion of acculturation provides insight into integrating new hires into the current work environment (Joshi & Rose, 2021).

Employees hold on to some elements of their prior work culture, much like in conventional acculturation situations, for example, their preferences for communication styles, work-life balance, or remote employment. It is essential to comprehend whatever aspects of the old culture remain and how they fit into the new work culture. Acculturation has a substantial impact on the performance and well-being of employees (Powell, 2022). Workers in a hybrid workplace who have trouble assimilating feel stressed out, have less job satisfaction and are less productive. On the other hand, people who can adapt well flourish in this kind of setting.

In an HWE, new hires' onboarding and training programs are designed with insights from acculturation theory. These are programs that organisations can customize to better assist newcomers in assimilating into the hybrid culture.

In conclusion, the idea of acculturation offered a useful framework for researching how new workers adjust to and integrate into a hybrid work environment. It enabled scholars to investigate the cultural facets of this shift, comprehend its consequences for people and institutions, and create plans to support effective acculturation within the framework of hybrid work.

2.2.3 Embedding

In the context of acculturating new hires in a hybrid work environment, the theoretical idea of *embedding* refers to smoothly integrating new employees into the company culture, practices, and procedures (Garrison et al., 2021). This integration involves more than just getting new employees up to speed on their duties; it also entails giving them a sense of belonging to the company, where they comprehend and adhere to its standards, conventions, and values. By ensuring that workers not only adjust to new roles but also form a solid emotional and cultural bond with the company, embedding can increase workers' job happiness, productivity, and loyalty over the long run.

Fostering a feeling of belonging and organisational identification presents additional problems in a hybrid work environment where workers work both on-site and remotely. When it comes to assisting new recruits in navigating the intricacies of this environment, embedding is essential. Regardless of where they are physically located, embedding aids in a new hire's alignment with the organisation's culture (Garrison et al., 2021). It guarantees remote employees experience the same level of societal integration as their colleagues in the office, fostering unity and shared ideals.

A key component of productivity and retention, staff engagement is intimately related to embedding. New personnel are more engaged and dedicated to their roles and the company when successfully integrated. Higher employee retention rates can be attributed to effective embedding (Garrison et al., 2021). Employee turnover and related costs are decreased when workers have a strong sense of belonging to the company.

The effectiveness of an organisation is enhanced by embedding. Employees can contribute to the company's success when they are well-integrated and aware of its objectives and procedures. Virtual team-building exercises, mentorship programs, frequent communication and feedback channels, virtual onboarding programs, and technological solutions that promote a sense of connection between in-person and remote workers are a few examples of these (Garrison et al., 2021).

In conclusion, the study benefited greatly from the theoretical idea of embedding since it tackled the crucial problem of making sure that new hires, particularly in mixed work environments, not only adjust to their responsibilities but also fully integrate and link to the organisation. Improved work satisfaction, engagement, and retention are all possible with effective embedding techniques, which eventually helps the organisation and its people.

2.2.4 Hybrid Work Environment (HWE)

A workspace configuration that incorporates aspects of both remote and in-person work is known as a hybrid working environment (Gurchiek & Gurchiek, 2021). Employees in such a setting are free to carry out their duties from anywhere, including their homes or other off-site locations, in addition to the actual office. With the introduction of cutting-edge communication technology and the global pandemic of 2020, which compelled many businesses to implement remote work policies, this idea became increasingly popular.

Organisations have procedures that are both flexible and adaptable in a hybrid work environment. New workers need to quickly adapt to this flexible work style, where they may work electronically on some days and interact in person with colleagues. This called for the growth of adaptive abilities and the capacity to transition between various job modes. Many technologies are utilised in hybrid work, including communication platforms, project management software, and video conferencing (Gurchiek & Gurchiek, 2021). To properly collaborate with their peers, new hires are adept at using these technologies. For new workers to succeed in this setting, it is imperative that they feel at ease using the technology.

Acculturation here refers to a new hire becoming a part of the company's culture. The culture in a hybrid environment may show itself differently in real-world and virtual contexts

(Gurchiek & Gurchiek, 2021). The study investigated how recently hired staff members integrated into the organisation's culture without in-person exposure.

In a hybrid work environment, efficient communication and teamwork are even more critical. Whether they work in a remote or co-located environment, new hires must know how to interact with their teams, managers, and fellow employees. The best communication strategies for facilitating successful acculturation should be the subject of the study. An essential component of any workplace is employee engagement. Sustaining high levels of engagement becomes a particular issue in a hybrid setting, as workers only sometimes engage in face-to-face interactions with supervisors and peers (Gurchiek & Gurchiek, 2021).

In conclusion, a study on acculturating and embedding recruits in a hybrid work environment benefited greatly from a theoretical understanding of a hybrid work environment. It served as the cornerstone for comprehending the difficulties and chances that emerge while onboarding staff members in a workplace that blends natural and virtual elements. The study's examination of the consequences of a hybrid work environment offered insightful analysis and helpful suggestions for companies looking to onboard and train new hires in this dynamic workplace successfully.

2.3. Theory on employee socialisation using traditional methods

The theoretical frameworks that have traditionally dominated the discourse on the acculturation of employees are Socialisation Theory (S.T.), Organisational Socialisation Model (OSM), and Social Identity Theory (SIT). There is an overlap in some of the theories, but the overarching strand between them is the outcomes of a successful acculturation and embedding process. This study avoided regurgitating these theories or defining them, but we merely noted their relevance in employee socialisation. Socialisation is used broadly, whereas acculturating and embedding are used in a specific sense. In this report, we refer to acculturation, embedding, and socialisation or acculturate, embed, and socialise as interchangeable constructs of onboarding activities.

Socialisation is the process of internalising the norms and ideologies of society (Zhang, 2022). Socialisation encompasses both learning and teaching and is thus "how social and cultural continuity is attained" (Zhang, 2022, p. 173). Socialisation has a solid relation to developmental psychology. Humans need social experiences to learn their culture and to

survive (Traeger et al., 2022), sometimes labelled moral as regards the society where it occurs. Society's consensus influences individual views and usually tends toward what that society finds acceptable or "normal". Socialisation theories explain the process of the individual development of a human personality within a social environment with specific living conditions (Hurrelmann & Bauer, 2015). The six different theories of socialisation are the Psychoanalytic Theory, the Cognitive Development Theory, the Moral Development Theory, the Gender and Moral Development Theory, the Social Self-Theory, and the Eight Stages of Development Theory.

Organisational socialisation is the process by which people learn about, adjust to, and change the knowledge, skills, attitudes, expectations, and behaviours needed for a new or changing organisation (Guhin & Calarco, 2020). More specifically, organisational socialisation describes how new hires acquire the required information and knowledge regarding their workplace to successfully perform in their positions (Bauer & Erdogan, 2017). Feldman's model of organisational socialisation is a three-stage model: anticipatory socialisation, accommodation, and role management, with process variables at each stage indicating the successful completion of events crucial to that stage. While the literature on socialisation varies, in this text, we will consider the four stages of organisational socialisation: anticipatory, encounter, metamorphosis, and exit stage (Jablin, 2020). The third stage of organisational socialisation occurs when individuals become new members and use direct and indirect communication strategies to learn what it means to be an organisational member and what behaviour is appropriate (Heiss & Carmack, 2016).

Social Identity Theory, in social psychology studies the interplay between personal and social identities (Harwood, 2020). The term social identity approach, or social identity perspective, is suggested for describing the joint contributions of social identity theory and self-categorisation theory (Hogg, 2016). Social identity theory aims to specify and predict the circumstances under which individuals think of themselves as individuals or group members. Examples of social identity include race, ethnicity, gender, sex, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, age, religion/religious beliefs, national origin, and emotional developmental disabilities and abilities. Social identity theory assumes that as people categorise others and themselves into groups, those group memberships form the basis

of their social identity (Brown, 2020). People act and react to people based on their own social identity and that of others.

2.4. Theory on the socialisation of new hires in a hybrid work environment

Literature on acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid environment is still in its infancy. The emerging research is untested over a sustained period through longitudinal analysis that produces empirical evidence and a solid theoretical framework. Most of the literature we have reviewed on workplace socialisation in a hybrid work environment leans towards the Social Exchange Theory (SET), the Need to Belong Theory (NBT), and the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT). The SET is the most prevalent of the three from our analysis.

2.4.1. Need to Belong Theory

Belonging is a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). A sense of belonging in a hybrid work environment is vital for new hires who need to feel included in the new environment - it makes them amenable to being acculturated and embedded into the organisation. Belonging is linked to motivation to perform, strong interpersonal relationships, and connection with the organisation or institution [a result of successful acculturation and embedding] (Allen et al., 2021). Whereas 'not belonging' is not viewed in favourable terms. It is equivalent to ostracism, rejection, and social isolation (Allen et al., 2021). Examples of NBT include the need to belong to a peer group at school, to be accepted by co-workers, to be part of an athletic team, or to be part of a religious group. What do we mean by the sense of belonging? A sense of belonging involves more than being acquainted with other people.

2.4.2. Uncertainty Reduction Theory

From the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) perspective, new hires enjoying a successful acculturation and embedding process will likely show a reduced intention to leave the organisation. Inadequate organisational socialisation leads to high employee turnover (Bauer et al., 2007). Traditionally, organisations have used various socialisation tactics to reduce new hires' uncertainty, such as assigning mentors or supervisors for each new hire (Ashforth et al., 2007; Chao, 2007). In a hybrid work environment, the relationship

development process is likely to slow due to the spatial isolation between employees, increasing their unfamiliarity.

Others have found several challenges with enculturating and embedding new hires remotely. For example, Groysberg (2020) found it time-consuming, hindering internal communication, the bonding experience, and the technological fatigue of conferencing tools. Soucie and Patterson (2021) have also recognised that acculturating and embedding new hires seem daunting in a hybrid work environment.

2.4.3. Social Exchange Theory

A theoretical framework called social exchange theory emphasises that people interact with one another with the expectation of reciprocity or mutual gain. It focuses on the dynamics of social connections. It implies that when people believe they are treated fairly and equally in exchange for their contributions, they are more inclined to build and preserve connections. Social Exchange Theory can be used in your research topic, "Acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment," to learn more about how businesses can successfully integrate and engage new workers in this workplace.

SET is widely applied in research on employee behaviour in an online work setting, arguing that an employee's behaviour at work is influenced by the behaviours of another employee (Hou & Zhang, 2021). That is, working side by side has more influence than remote working in shaping the behaviour and attitude of an employee - an important observation considering the risk that an employee without constant guidance and support available in a face-to-face working setting might get disillusioned, leading to a turnover event or low productivity. In addition, SET talk about social loafing, akin to disillusionment. Social loafing is when an individual spends less effort on a task working with the collective than individually (Hou & Zhang, 2021).

According to social exchange theory, there is an exchange relationship between workers and organisations (Yagubov, 2022). The give-and-take dynamics in the context of onboarding new employees in a hybrid work environment can be examined using this theory. While the company offers resources, support, and growth prospects, new hires devote their time and energy to getting to know the business and adjusting to its culture.

The theory holds that people anticipate things to be reciprocated. During the onboarding process in a hybrid work environment, new hires can anticipate equitable treatment, which includes opportunities for advancement, training, support, and clear communication in exchange for their dedication and attempts to fit in with the organisation's work practices and culture (Yagubov, 2022).

The significance of perceived equality and fairness in the trading relationship is also emphasised by social exchange theory. Regarding the opportunities, resources, and support new hires in a hybrid work environment receive during the onboarding process, researchers can determine whether they believe they are being treated fairly and equally.

This idea was used to comprehend how new hires' experience with a hybrid work environment is influenced by the quality of the onboarding process (Yagubov, 2022). The perception of investment from the firm towards the integration and development of new hires increases their likelihood of engagement and commitment to their employment. According to Social Exchange Theory, partnerships that benefit both parties have a higher chance of enduring over time. Within the framework of the study, researchers looked at whether better long-term results, higher retention rates, and stronger employee-organisation ties result from a positive onboarding experience in a hybrid work environment (Soucie & Patterson, 2021).

Companies should give significant thought to the onboarding process's quality. They give new hires the tools, encouragement, and development opportunities to increase their commitment and involvement. In the context of hybrid work, research grounded on Social Exchange Theory assisted in pinpointing particular tactics and approaches that improve the exchange relationship between organisations and new hires. It emphasised the value of individualised training initiatives, online mentorship programs, or transparent communication, for instance. Organisations can evaluate the equity and fairness of their onboarding procedures by using the Social Exchange Theory, which may influence employee retention and satisfaction in a hybrid work environment.

In conclusion, Social Exchange Theory provided a helpful framework for examining the new hire onboarding process in a hybrid work environment. It also sheds light on the dynamics of the relationship between the organisation and its employees, perceptions of

justice, and the variables that affect long-term commitment and employee engagement, which is why it was chosen for the study.

2.5. Empirical Literature

2.5.1 Challenges in acculturating.

Numerous research works have examined the difficulties associated with acculturation, providing valuable perspectives on the experiences of recent hires as they adjust to their positions inside companies. The study conducted by Ma et al. (2020) concentrated on overseas students who are like new hires in an organisational setting. They found that when studying at American colleges, international students—especially those from collectivist countries like Asia—often had difficulties adjusting to American society. These difficulties stemming from disparities in cultural norms and values can lead to stress known as acculturation, which may also be pertinent to adjusting new hires to their workplace. These pressures have the potential to negatively impact mental health if they are not addressed, which emphasises the significance of efficient acculturation procedures in businesses.

To provide comparisons for new employees in the workplace, Lee et al. (2022) investigated the experiences of male Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan's manufacturing sector. Their research examined these workers' perspectives on acculturation, coping strategies for handling work-related stress, and coping methods. These workers faced the same hurdles as new hires: language barriers, financial hardships, and adjusting to demanding work settings. The study focused on the workers' resilience, an essential quality for new hires as they acclimate to their employment.

Takeda et al. (2022) examined ethical value acculturation among Thai workers employed by multinational corporations (MNCs) in Thailand. The study has significance for new hires joining international companies even though it focuses on MNCs. It was shown that workers tend to match their moral principles more closely with the domestic cultures of MNCs. This finding may be necessary for recent hires trying to fit in with the global workplace culture.

The experiences of foreign-born academics going through the U.K. acculturation process were examined by Antoniadou and Quinlan (2020). While academics are not like regular

employees, their experiences of taking the initiative to overcome obstacles during acculturation are relatable to newly hired staff members who frequently encounter a learning curve when joining a company. The study questioned the idea of a linear acculturation process. It highlighted the proactive efforts of academic immigrants, which may also have implications for new hires who actively participate in their integration.

Santos and Hanashiro (2021) examined the dynamics of employment and acculturation among Haitian refugees in Brazil, including the impact of migration and economic changes. Despite its refugee emphasis, this study sheds light on how outside influences affect a person's assimilation and absorption into a community. As with immigrants, new hires may be impacted by broader organisational and economic trends, emphasising the significance of taking outside influences into account during the acculturation process.

Finally, Lee and Flores (2019) investigation into the organisational temporality encountered by foreign workers in the United States is pertinent to recent hires acclimating to their positions inside companies. Their research demonstrated how workers' perceptions of organisational time were impacted by cultural time orientation and acculturation type. Organisations can modify their acculturation procedures to better meet the needs of new hires from various cultural backgrounds by having a better understanding of these dynamics.

Together, these studies provide light on the complex nature of acculturation issues and offer insightful information about how these issues may connect to new hires' experiences adjusting to their positions inside companies.

2.5.2 Strategies that organisations can use to Acculturate new hires.

Acculturation strategies have been the subject of numerous research in a variety of settings, illuminating their applicability to the onboarding of new workers in hybrid work environments.

Xing et al. (2020) investigated Chinese students' acculturation strategies in the U.S. Regardless of demographics, they discovered that integration was the most popular approach, highlighting the significance of linguistic proficiency, cultural affinity, and learning motivation. This knowledge can help firms better align their onboarding

procedures with the requirements of their workforce, resulting in improved mental well-being and social adjustment.

In urban schools, Kumi-Yeboah et al. (2020) investigated the elements that support acculturation techniques among young immigrants from West Africa. The importance of extracurricular activities, media, teachers, parents, and peer support in assisting adolescents in developing their acculturation strategies and achieving academic success was underscored by their findings. These observations are significant for companies trying to facilitate the integration of new hires, especially in hybrid work settings.

In a multicultural setting, Dey et al. (2019) concentrated on the acculturation methods of ethnic consumers about food consumption. The study highlighted the significance of taking host communities' acculturation into account in marketing initiatives and found four unique acculturation strategies among ethnic consumers. Organisations can use this viewpoint to guide the customisation of their onboarding strategies for varied employee groups working in hybrid work environments.

In a multiethnic learning environment, international students' acculturation processes were examined by Akhtariev et al. (2019). Their research shed light on successful methods for integrating international students, which helped to improve the educational process. Organisations looking to onboard international workers in a hybrid work environment should find this helpful research.

Rhee (2019) investigated acculturation tactics used by elderly Korean immigrants residing in ethnic enclaves that are not Korean. The study's findings about the value of embracing both cultures for improved psychological health have ramifications for companies looking to assist diverse senior workers in hybrid work environments. Asian American youth's acculturation tactics were examined by Choi et al. (2018), who also identified subtypes with different results. These results highlight how crucial it is to comprehend workers' acculturation tactics, particularly in mixed workplaces that serve a variety of demographics.

The acculturation tactics employed by unskilled migrant workers in South Korea were investigated by Kim et al. (2018). Their research shed light on the many adaption

strategies used to deal with discriminatory and cultural issues, providing helpful information for companies with diverse workforces. Gurlek (2020) looked at how recruiting decisions made by hotel managers were influenced by acculturation. The study illustrated how candidates' acculturation preferences affect managers' assessments of person-environment fit and hiring decisions, underscoring the significance of cultural sensitivity and reliable evaluation instruments in the hiring process.

In conclusion, these studies offer insightful information about acculturation strategies and how applicable they are to the onboarding of new workers in hybrid work environments. Organisations can design more inclusive and efficient onboarding procedures that are suited to the requirements of their workforce by having a better understanding of the various acculturation patterns.

2.5.3 Impact of acculturation on new employee job satisfaction

Numerous scholarly investigations have explored the impact of acculturation on job satisfaction, providing insight into its applicability to newly hired staff in a mixed work environment. This research investigated this link using a variety of techniques. Au et al. (1998) looked at the relationship between Chinese immigrants' job satisfaction and acculturation when they were employed as servers in New York City restaurants. They used surveys and open-ended questions to poll 65 employees. The findings showed that workers outside of Chinatown, a district with a high concentration of Chinese residents, tended to be more integrated and content in their positions. The study found gender disparities in the relationship between acculturation and occupational satisfaction.

In their study, Jindal and Mittal (2022) examined how acculturation influences new hires' performance and behaviour during mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in the Indian banking industry. They employed 303 recent bank hires who had undergone a big merger for their study. The results highlighted the significance of addressing cultural differences in the banking sector following mergers by demonstrating that acculturation mediated new employee behaviour and M&A effectiveness.

In the Australian workplace, Lu et al. (2012) investigated the connection between professional Chinese immigrants' (PCIs) acculturation practices and job satisfaction. They found that acculturation had a substantial impact on job satisfaction among 220 PCIs, with

those who adopted assimilation reporting the highest levels of job satisfaction. This research offered significant perspectives for companies seeking to create efficient acculturation initiatives for foreign workers.

In the United Arab Emirates, Vihari et al. (2022) investigated the effect of workplace acculturation on expatriate job satisfaction. Employing empirical data from 202 foreign residents, they discovered that aspects of workplace acculturation had a positive relationship with job satisfaction among expats. Their research also shed insight into the mediating functions of self-efficacy and intercultural consciousness, which advances our knowledge of expat experiences in the UAE's service industry.

The study conducted by Coelho and Machado (2022) investigated how the COVID-19 epidemic affected the Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) onboarding process. They surveyed international workers and H.R. experts as part of a quantitative investigation. According to the study, the pandemic caused onboarding procedures to alter, depending more on online resources. However, it was discovered that in-person onboarding was more successful than virtual onboarding regarding SIEs' sociability and acculturation.

The effects of acculturation stress on migrant care workers in Australian residential aged-care institutions were investigated by Adebayo et al. (2021). Their research revealed that acculturation stress was high, especially among nurses, and that essential determinants included English proficiency, occupational roles, and ethnicity. Many respondents reported average to mild levels of anxiety and sadness despite their high stress levels, indicating the possible influence of treating acculturation stress on job satisfaction and retention. Together, these studies highlight the importance of acculturation in determining the job satisfaction of new hires, particularly in diverse and dynamic work environments like hybrid settings.

2.5.4 The effects of technology in acculturation of new employees

It is possible to investigate how technology affects new hire acculturation in a hybrid work environment by taking a close look at several pertinent studies. These studies provide insight into a few acculturation facets and how they affect newly hired workers' job happiness. Research on the impact of new hires' organisational socialisation on team innovation performance was done by Liao et al. (2022). To find out how organisational socialising affects team innovation, they used the Social Information Processing Theory. According to their research, corporate socialisation immediately boosts new workers'

voice behaviour, which promotes team creativity. Servant leadership acts as a moderator in the relationship between prohibited voice behaviour and organisational socialisation. These results provide insightful information about how organisational socialisation and technology impact the acculturation process, which can impact new hires' job satisfaction in a hybrid work environment.

The study by Jindal and Mittal (2022) was centred on social media networking as an acculturation facilitator. They looked at how global corporations support staff acculturation through social media networks. 735 IT workers who used their employers' social networking sites were included in their analysis. Despite regional differences in behaviour, they discovered that social media had a significantly good effect on employees' assimilation. This study emphasises how social media can facilitate new hires' assimilation, leading to increased job satisfaction in a mixed work environment.

In the Indian banking industry, Kumari et al. (2023) examined staff productivity and its connections to open innovation, acculturation, social media networking, and employee vitality. They emphasised how important it is to provide employment resources within the organisation since this has a beneficial impact on employee productivity. This study highlights how employment resources, such as technological tools like social media networking, can lower workplace uncertainty and boost worker productivity. These tools may play a critical role in helping new hires integrate into the workplace and feel satisfied in a mixed work environment.

Yagubov (2022) investigated how international students' use of social media affected their brand loyalty and consumer acculturation. This study looked at the relationship between new hires' work happiness and, acculturation and brand trust. The study, which surveyed 85 international students in the Netherlands, discovered that acculturation was favourably benefited by social media knowledge sharing. Although job happiness was not directly predicted by brand trust, it was considered a favourable influence. The complex interplay among technology, acculturation, and job satisfaction in a hybrid work environment is highlighted by this study.

Finally, the perspectives of Japanese people about intercultural relations and acculturation were investigated by Park et al. (2022). They discovered that the most tolerant acculturation anticipation is predicted by a sense of security over one's circumstances and

national culture. Specific national identities, like internationalism, lessen the negative impact that certain expectations have on mental health. This study underscores the significance of taking psychological health and cultural aspects into account when assessing new hires' acculturation and job satisfaction in a hybrid work environment, even though it has nothing to do with technology.

2.6 Literature Review Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion, the flow chart below summarises the chapter

Figure 2. Pictorial Summary of Chapter 2
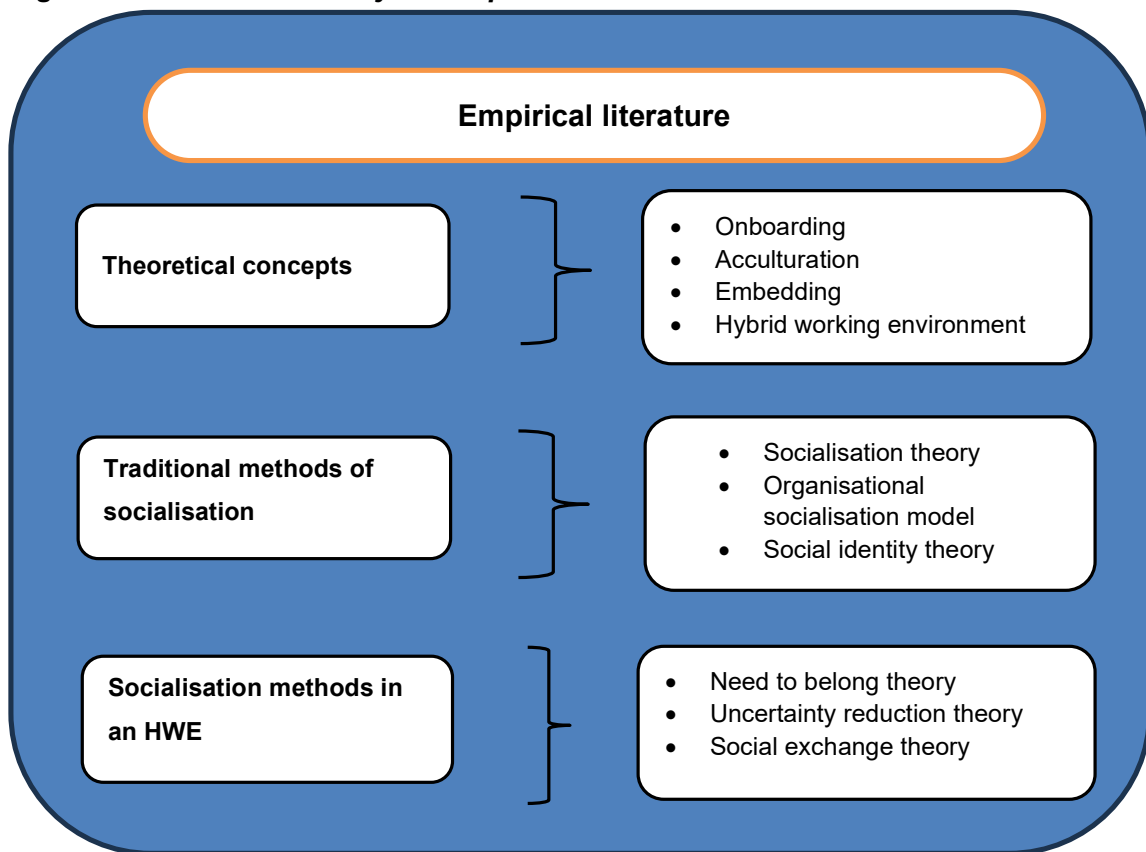
2.7. Areas for future research

The digitisation of the everyday experience is spreading to the workplace. It is plausible that in the future, organisations will employ people remotely without them ever setting foot at the office, and they will continue their employment relationship remotely - creating challenges for organisations in instilling their culture. Strategies for successful onboarding and socialisation within the hybrid work environment must be created and informed by

empirical studies and research to overcome these challenges. The world may face another event similar to or worse than COVID-19; research must continue on how to enculturate and embed new hires in the ever-changing work environment. As Carlos and Muralles (2021) recognised, transitioning to remote work is a forced process.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1. Introduction

The relevance of traditional methods of acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment that emerged post-COVID is the focus of this study. The organisational culture epoch that emerged post-COVID upended the traditional method of acculturating and embedding new hires that emphasised on-the-job direct supervision and mentoring. The changes in work environments forced by the COVID-19 pandemic remain a black box in academic research and literature development, which deals with the acculturating and embedding new hires in organisations. Existing theoretical frameworks grounded in traditional thinking must be evaluated against the new epoch of hybrid working. Where there are gaps or misalignment, new theoretical frameworks that are relevant must be developed for organisations and employees to thrive.

After reviewing the relevant literature on the topic of the study, three research questions were propositioned. –These three questions are presented and elaborated on in this chapter.

Research Question 1 (RQ1):

What challenges do organisations face in acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment post-COVID?

The challenges that businesses have in integrating and acclimating newly hired personnel to a hybrid work environment in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic are not well understood (Yarbrough & Salazar, 2023). In order to learn more about the viewpoints and experiences of the employees in this situation, we conducted in-person interviews with them. Several obstacles are highlighted by a recent study on hybrid onboarding, which has been studied by academics such as Groysberg (2020). One of these difficulties is that integrating new hires requires more time from organisations, making it more difficult for information to flow internally and for employees to build close friendships. On the other hand, a great deal of study has been done on conventional in-person onboarding procedures. Yarbrough and Salazar (2023), for example, cite the research of Gallaguer and Sias (2009), who found that new hires use a variety of strategies as part of their socialisation process, including information-seeking through observation, discreet conversations, explicit questioning, interactions with third parties, and evaluation of their

work. We explored the difficulties businesses encounter while integrating and acclimating new workers to a post-COVID hybrid work environment using this information.

Research Question 2 (RQ2):

What are the strategies and practices that organisations can use to acculturate and embed new hires in a hybrid work environment, and how effective are they?

The second research question focused on the first-hand strategies and practices of recently hired staff members and examined the internal operations and protocols within the company. This stage entails determining whether expectations and reality coincide. For example, a 2020 study by Groysberg found that new hires go through a cognitive strain during hybrid onboarding, mainly due to using technological tools like video conferencing. This effect of hybrid work was explored in interviews with leaders of the company as well as staff members. Furthermore, the study sought to acquire a more profound comprehension of hybrid work and its enablers, namely the critical function of technology in supporting the acculturation process and augmenting employee involvement.

Research Question 3 (RQ3)"

How effective these strategies and practices are in enculturating and embedding new hires in an HWE

The third research question investigated the systems and processes inside the organisation by focusing on the experiential feedback from the new employee(s). At this stage, the expectations are meeting with reality. For example, research by Groysberg (2020) found a mental drain on new employees during hybrid onboarding, which is caused by using technology tools like video conferencing. The interviews with employees and leaders in organisations explored this consequence of hybrid working. Furthermore, the critical role of technology in facilitating acculturation and employee engagement was explored for a deeper understanding of hybrid working and its enablers.

3.2. Conclusion

The research questions informed the research design regarding the instruments and scope of the study, and the data collected through interviews was analysed according to the research questions. Any relevant learnings from the study falling outside of the research questions shall be the basis for further research and the development of new theoretical frameworks for the research topic.

Figure 3. Research Model
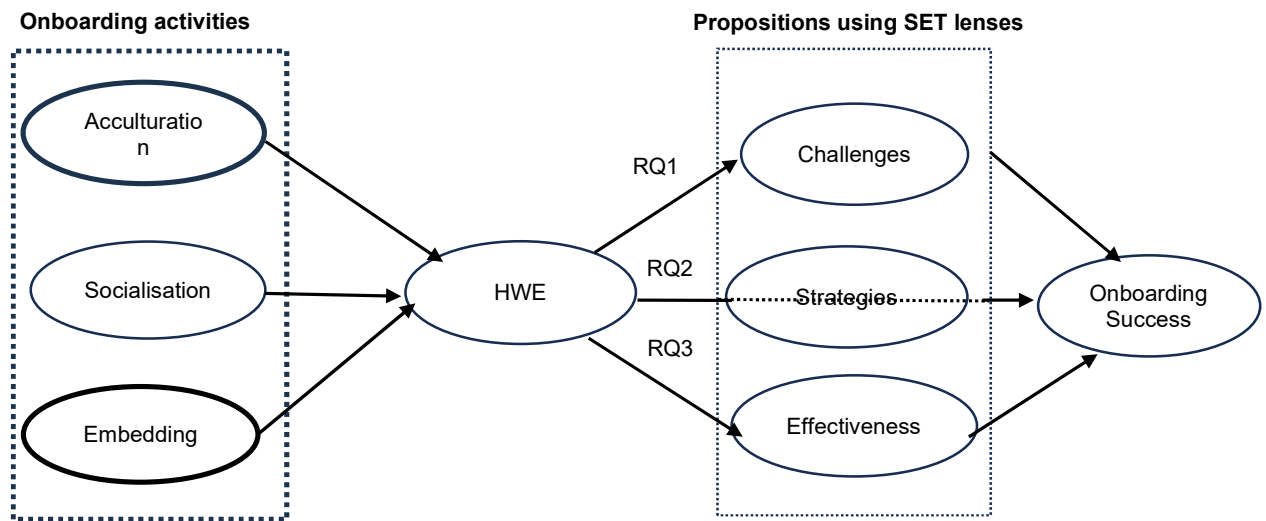
Figure 3 above presents a research model we followed for this study (we used the dotted lines to emphasise the lack of mediated relationships between the propositions and the outcomes/onboarding success) for the exploratory study.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Philosophy

A *research philosophy* is a framework that provides guidelines for conducting research (Nadine, 2018). Similarly, Sanchez et al. (2022) highlight that a research philosophy is an opinion about the best ways to gather and examine data or information about a topic. A *research philosophy* can be defined as a way of thinking and research traditions, according to Sanchez et al. (2022). A set of presumptions or beliefs used to generate information about a study topic is known as the research philosophy. There are several ideologies that a researcher can adhere to when doing the study. According to Saunders et al. (2016), a scientific investigation can be founded on a research philosophy or method of thinking that is interpretivism, realism, positivism, or pragmatism. Bless et al. (2013) asserts that realism philosophy constructs presumptions and beliefs to resemble the actual feelings and experiences that people have. The foundation of positivism is that science is the sole path to knowledge. Obtaining precise data, scientific testing, statistical evidence, and measurements is the primary goal.

Moreover, positivists typically employ a sizable number of big sample sizes in order to provide precise results (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The anti-fundamentalism ideology of interpretivism holds that there is no right or wrong way to learn. The knowledge and reasoning of pragmatic researchers acknowledge that there can be both consistency and inconsistency in the truth across various observers (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Christian (2019) maintains that there are two main philosophies, positivism and interpretivism, notwithstanding the abovementioned philosophies. Interpretivism applies in this study. Interpretivism is the study of interpretation theory and practice that contributes to the understanding of human life (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). It is associated with the use of qualitative approaches.

Therefore, interpretivism research could uncover fresh perspectives by analysing replies regarding successful acculturation strategies and challenges and how they affect hybrid performance. Interpretivism's ontology holds that social construction underpins reality, but epistemology holds that knowledge is subjective, socially created, and dependent on individual minds. According to the interpretivism methodological perspective, research must be conducted in its natural environment to comprehend people's experiences (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Deductively, this study maintained an interpretative research philosophy by integrating human interests into the investigation, emphasising how reality is socially produced, and disputing the objectivist theory that believes meaning is inherent in the world. As a result, the study maintained an interpretivism perspective, according to which reality is elusive and varies depending on the respondent. More specifically, respondents expressed their satisfaction with the degree of acculturation challenges, the efficacy of acculturation strategies, and the impact of acculturation strategies on organisational performance in a hybrid working environment. This information was gathered using the interpretivism philosophy. Respondents were, therefore, not required to limit their responses to a pre-structured questionnaire; instead, an open-ended interview questions guide approach was followed to guide the informants on the nature and scope of the probe.

4.2. Research approach

Inductive thematic analysis was conducted for the study. According to Eisenhardt et al. (2016), the inductive method was the most appropriate approach for situations with limited theory and problems without clear answers. The interest of the research was to understand the acculturation and embedding strategies in the emerging epoch of hybrid working. Furthermore, the study categorised the prevailing themes and sub-themes for a meaningful analysis of the data collected from the informants. From the thematic analysis, relationship and deduction were established concerning what is in the literature about the research topic and to identify any comprehensive trends that may be useful for future exploration. According to Doabler et al. (2012) proposition, an inductive methodology can yield insights into the implications of the study's setting.

4.3. Research methodology

Three general categories of research methodology exist, according to Saunders et al. (2012). These are mixed, qualitative, and quantitative research. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), a qualitative study involves the researcher relying on the respondents, asking open-ended questions, receiving well-worded responses, and then subjectively describing and analysing these words into themes. According to Yin (2016), the primary objective of qualitative research is to examine people's daily lives as they are observed in their natural environments. Conversely, researchers who design their studies with quantifiable data collecting and processing that produces reliable statistics are said to be conducting

quantitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2014). According to Gavin (2017), to evaluate its results, quantitative research looks at various variable aspects, statistics, and measurements. According to Ranganathan and Aggarwal (2018), quantitative research is widely employed in science; its general framework is predicated on the scientific method, which employs logical reasoning to facilitate the formulation of hypotheses. Combine the two research options on the extreme mixed method. Reasons for selecting a qualitative design are provided after the choice of qualitative research in this instance.

To characterise and investigate how new hires are acculturated and embedded in a hybrid work environment, qualitative research was used. This research decision aligns with the findings of Creswell and Poth (2014), who claim that a qualitative research approach looks for the views and meanings of the informants. According to Loraine et al. (2020), qualitative research is exploratory and always tries to find answers to issues like how something happened or why a particular circumstance happens. Lesley (2020) suggests that the qualitative research approach was selected as a fitting strategy because it aims to determine people's viewpoints and the process by which they arrive at that specific opinion. According to Patrik and Ugo (2019), qualitative research is an appropriate option when the study's goal is subjective rather than objective or quantitatively focused.

The qualitative data collection and analysis methods were employed in the research study to build a conceptual framework regarding how new hires are acculturated and embedded in a hybrid work environment. Interviews with informants were used as the primary data collection tool for the entire study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Using a single data collection agency like interviews for qualitative research on a topic that is not widely developed or researched may be risky. However, given the possible complexities of using multiple agencies and the limited timeframe in the MBA course, we decided to take the risk of only doing interviews with informants.

To supplement the data collection through interviews, we also consulted academic literature widely. We attended public and private engagement platforms such as the GIBS career fair and the Global Module itinerary to meet and engage with companies exposed to the study topic. During the GIBS Career Fair, we engaged with companies such as McKinsey, BCG, BTS, Kearney, and IFC – a division of the World Bank on the topic of this research. These engagements were informal and anecdotal. We found the interlocutors

from these organisations open and willing to share their views on a wide range of discussion points relating to the research topic, and the insight gained from there was vital in shaping the study's approach.

Another layer of the research which contributed to the insights on the research was the engagement with companies such as Google and PWC during the New York immersion as part of the global module. These engagements, although not initially part of the research scope, contributed immensely in shining the light on the strategies employed by organisations in acculturating their new hires.

4.4. Research strategy

Grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology are the other three noteworthy approaches. From a qualitative research standpoint, Yin (2016) proposed that ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology are the most often employed research strategies. At first, it can be not easy to distinguish between the various qualitative strategies. Creswell and Poth (2016), however, contend that it is honourable to distinguish between these kinds of qualitative research procedures in terms of goal, methods of data collecting, and analysis.

A phenomenon is described as an essential world component by a phenomenologist (Yin, 2016). Consequently, the goal is to examine each person's actual experiences closely. Since it restricts the researcher's inventiveness, the data collection process cannot be clearly described (Saunders, 2016). As a result, phenomenology searches for people willing and able to describe their inner experiences and feelings through written or oral data collecting. Carefully reading each description, recognising changes in a person's ideas, and segmenting ideas are all parts of data analysis (Campbell, 2002). A synthesis of the essences that have emerged in participant living experience reports is part of the analysis in phenomenology.

Conversely, ethnography uses fieldwork to provide a scientific account of specific human civilisations, usually implying "living with and living like those studied" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p.13). Thus, the goal of ethnography is to comprehend native people's worldview and describe human characteristics. This approach applies to anthropological research, including chimpanzee studies.

Data gathering includes conducting formal and informal interviews with people regularly (Yin, 2016). Identifying culture and studying the literature are two more alternative ethnographic procedures (Collins, 2010). Finally, according to Creswell and Poth (2016), "theories to emerge from the collected data" are made possible by grounded theory design. As a result, in grounded theory, hypotheses are developed based on the available data rather than the researcher beginning with a preconceived theory in mind (Yin, 2016). Sentiments of phenomenology were employed as a qualitative research design in the current study. The unique character of phenomenology could explain this. Through the distribution of an interview guide, the researcher employed phenomenology as a research approach to create contextual meaning regarding the scope and effects of retention strategies.

The phenomenological approach was distinctive in that it made it possible to gather data regarding the respondents' actual experiences. The exploratory research design is ideally suited for the phenomenological research strategy, which investigates how new hires are acculturated and embedded in a hybrid work environment.

4.5. Time horizon

The time horizon of the study was cross-sectionalised due to the MBA program completion requirements. The research period covered started from the proposal submission in February 2023 and proceeded to the receipt of the proposal approval in April 2023. In July 2023, the ethical clearance was received, thus commencing the data collection phase of the research, which spans until the earlier parts of September 2023 – this was probably the difficult part of the research phase due to the challenges experienced in getting the right participants for the interviews or the difficulties in coordinating diaries, and with some participants deciding not to participate after initially agreeing to the interviews. Alvi (2016) states that the total number of participants chosen for data collection using a desired sampling technique can be considered the sample size. Creswell and Poth (2016) assert that a qualitative investigation can be considered valid if it includes between one and thirty interviewees. However, according to Creswell and Poth (2016), the number of informants needed for the investigation to ensure that research questions are addressed will dictate how many informants are needed. Saturation theory, which implies no more data will be gathered beyond a particular sample size, supports this (Yin, 2016).

Following data collection, However, follow-up research that tracks the evolution of the emerging strategies used in acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment will be beneficial from both academic and commercial points of view. Therefore, for the MBA program, the study will be cross-sectional. However, a longitudinal study over 12 – 18 months is also ideal for capturing the impact and evolution of hybrid work on new hire acculturation and embedding. Research has shown that new hires quit within 18 months in a new organisation, which is attributable to the failures in the acculturation and embedding process. During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher sought insight into the participants' perspectives on the world. As a tool for gathering data, the semi-structured interview guide offers a multi-perspective comprehension of the topic and facilitates access to the participants' concealed perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Participants expressed their deeper emotions and emotional testimonies about emerging strategies and challenges used in acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment during the semi-structured and open interviews.

Participants can describe challenges and their effects in seemingly delicate and emotional detail during semi-structured interviews. Participants would be encouraged to be forthcoming in a qualitative study with standardised questions and replies. Participants can communicate their repressed emotions thanks to the researcher's open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview guide (Yin, 2016). Additionally, focus-group interviews that require participants to speak in front of others would only be able to accommodate this element.

They were educated individuals who participated actively in the organisation as members of the technical team and management, respectively. Because the participants were knowledgeable about semi-structured interviews, including their execution and rationale, it was beneficial for the researcher to conduct interviews with them. The respondents were more inclined to answer questions honestly and candidly because they felt more at ease and secure. The duration of the interview was thirty to forty minutes. The researcher first described the purpose of the study with the respondents informally during the first few minutes of the conversation. To maintain the interview's flow and the respondents' enthusiasm, the foundational questions were followed by a shift from more general to more

focused questions (Bell et al., 2018). Despite the earlier inquiries, the researcher also followed up with inquiries that investigated replies given in the earlier queries.

4.6. Research design

The research was designed to collect qualitative data from informants that are relevant to the topic of the study. The informants were approached from professional platforms like LinkedIn and from the HR practitioner's database, as well as through acquaintances. The data collected from the informants was the base upon which the exploration of the research topic and research questions was analysed – the effectiveness of traditional methods, organisational performance, and perceived challenges and benefits of hybrid work.

4.6.1. Target population

Grove and Gray (2019) define the research population as a collection of people or things that have a standard set of attributes. In a similar vein, Glen (2019) characterises the target population as a group of individuals who have a common interest with the researcher. The entire population or a specific group that the researcher plans to study, examine, and draw conclusions from is known as the target population (Saunders et al., 2016). A targeted population, according to Creswell and Poth (2016), is the total number of potential participants that the study may choose to include. According to Bell et al. (2018), the targeted population comprises possible participants (i.e., objects or research subjects) who help create a sample from which data would be collected. The demographic that the researcher ideally wants the results to come from is referred to as the target population. Initially, the target population was informants working in the services sectors such as banks, insurance, and consulting firms, where we planned to draw our sample for the interviews. However, following the challenges outlined above in section 4.6, we decided to expand the target population to any sector on the condition that it had a hybrid working setup. Therefore, in the participants that we interviewed, we have people working for governments, public institutions, corporations, and entrepreneurs. However, most informants we interviewed are employed in the services sectors, particularly banks.

While we aim to strike a balance between the number of informants from both sides: new hires and managers; ideally, we preferred twenty informants with ten from each side, we

settled for a total of ten due to challenges such as cancellations and delays by the informants.

4.6.2. Unit of analysis

Informants who were interviewed provided the data for the study on the onboarding process in a hybrid work environment. The interviews were the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis is primarily determined by the research questions (Eden & Nielsen, 2020). The "unit of analysis" is a crucial component in research that establishes the central area of interest, effectively characterising the objects or subjects that will be the subject of analysis. The unit of analysis is crucial in determining the breadth and depth of the research in this study, which investigates acculturation and embedding techniques in a mixed work environment.

In conclusion, the study's unit of analysis includes recently hired staff members. To fully comprehend how acculturation and embedding take place in the context of hybrid work, it was imperative to align the focus of the study with the research topic and objectives.

4.6.3. Sampling method and size

According to Alex (2017), *sampling* is defined as a subset of the population that a researcher is studying with specific characteristics that, depending on the type of sampling, may be further generalised to the entire population and result in conclusions or outcomes for the entire target population. Furthermore, according to (Saunders et al., 2016), sampling is a technique for expediting the gathering of data from people, things, or events so that meaningful conclusions can be made. More precisely, sampling is choosing a suitable subset of units to represent a larger group, testing those units, and then drawing conclusions about the group (Saunders et al., 2016). Probability and non-probability sampling are the primary sampling techniques (Saunders et al., 2016). Participants in the sample are not chosen equally in non-probability. Quota, snowball, and convenience sampling are examples of non-probability sampling methods. Convenience sampling collects data from individuals of the available population. It is used to choose people who can provide helpful information. A sample known as quota sampling requires that specific characteristics of the population be represented equally. According to recommendations from other participants, the researcher begins with one subject and works their way up to the next in a process known as snowball sampling (Bless et al., 2019).

Four options are available for a probability sample where each participant has an equal chance of being selected: basic random, systematic, stratified, and cluster sampling. With simple random sampling, every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected for sampling. The probability of each element occurring is 1/N (Saunders et al., 2016). A random element between 1 and n is drawn at the start of a systematic sampling technique, which draws every kth subject in the population. A population is divided into strata, or subgroups, based on shared characteristics using stratified sampling. It is interesting to note that cluster random sampling divides the population into clusters, from which sample components are randomly selected (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Convenience sampling was utilised in the study, and respondents were chosen only based on their availability. Convenience sampling, according to Creswell and Poth (2016), is the process of choosing respondents based only on accessibility. Hence, even though it is frequently called "haphazard sampling," this becomes the fastest sampling strategy because the researcher used whoever was available (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 234). If a subject is willing to engage in convenience sampling and is readily available, they form part of the sample by consent.

Alvi (2016) states that the total number of participants chosen for data collection using a desired sampling technique can be considered the sample size. Yin (2016) asserts that a qualitative investigation can be considered valid if it includes between one and thirty interviewees. However, according to Creswell and Poth (2016), the number of informants needed for the investigation to ensure that research questions are addressed will dictate how many informants are needed. Saturation theory, which implies no more data will be gathered beyond a particular sample size, supports this (Yin, 2016). Saturation theory led the researcher to conclude that it was fair to interview 13 informants and pose open-ended questions about the nature, scope, and effects of retention methods.

Purposive sampling is the suitable sampling method for the research question study. Purposive sampling involves selecting subjects with specific characteristics and organisations in the financial services sector. The approach to the purposive sampling process starts by defining the population of interest – in the case the study, services organisations in the financial sector. The next stage of purposive sampling is to define the inclusion criteria. For example, the organisation must have a hybrid work method. A final

inclusion criterion is to consider that the organisation has established new hire acculturation and embedding methods – and get the documentation for review where applicable.

4.6.4. Measurement instruments

Interviews were used as a primary source to collect data from managers, HR practitioners, and new hires. These interviews were conducted virtually and recorded for transcription and then coding for data analysis and reporting. Each interview participant was sent an informed consent form to complete or was asked at the start of the interview to accept the conditions stipulated in the informed consent form. An example of the informed consent form is in Appendix 6. The interviews were the primary instruments of measurement for the entire study. Participation in extracurricular activities such as the GIBS Career Fair was also essential in helping to guide the data collection approach.

4.6.5. Data gathering approach.

The primary data was gathered from informants through virtual interviews. The interviews were scheduled with each informant, and a questions guide was sent to the informants prior to the interview so that they could familiarise themselves with the scope and areas of interest of the research. The overall approach used for the data gathering was the mono-approach. Any ambiguities in the questions were addressed during the interviewing stage through the open-ended questions, which enabled the informants and the interviewees to follow up on areas that needed clarity. The method of rethinking and re-tooling the data-gathering strategies throughout the research project is consistent with the inductive approach (Bansal et al., 2018). Furthermore, open-ended questions were designated to encourage the informant to engage during the interview fully. Knight et al. (2022) posit that inquiry using open-ended questions can help deepen the phenomenal probing as findings emerge.

Literature reviews on the research topic and company documents on onboarding and socialisation of new hires – where they are available – were used for deeper exploration of the relevance of traditional methods of new hire acculturations and embedding in the HWE, post-COVID—the literature and documents served as secondary data for the study.

4.6.6. Analysis Approach

ATLAS.ti software was used to analyse the qualitative data. Furthermore, the analysis focused on attributes like challenges, strategies, and their effectiveness – all these being the key constructs related to the study's objectives in line with the research questions in chapter 3. Thematic analysis was applied to analyse the qualitative data by through the data output and looking for patterns that were categorised into meaningful themes (Terry et el. 2017).

A thematic analysis conducted on these attributes (dependent variables) in relation to the acculturation and embedding of new hires in a hybrid work situation post-COVID (the independent variable) is the end-results of the analysis stage. Awareness of the tri-factor of levels, context, and time when analysing data is critical in any research (Eden & Nielsen, 2020). In relation to this study, *level* refers to the data sources: managers, HR practitioners, company documents, and literature review. *Context* refers to the emergence of the hybrid work situation across industries and geographical locations, and *time* refers to the epoch post-COVID. The COVID pandemic has abated but has not been eliminated; its effects are still being felt presently, and the study was cognisant of that in accordance with Eden and Nielsen's (2020) tri-factor assertion.

The process of analysis we followed is centres on *reflexivity* – where the researcher's subjective experience is central to making sense of the data. The thematic analysis steps in fig. 4 below guided the process we followed in the analysis:

The results of the data analysis are presented in chapter 5 and their discussion is detailed in chapter 6. In chapter 7, we conclude by discussing the implications of the findings for organisations in general and we recommend strategies or new frameworks for acculturation and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment.

Figure 4. Data Analysis Process

STEP 1:

We familiarise ourselves with the primary data by reading and re-reading the transcripts to understand key themes.

STEP 2:

The transcripts were uploaded into the ATLAS.ti software and processed to generate initial codes to organise our data in a meaningful and systematic way.

STEP 3:

We then categorise the codes to search for themes that have significant characteristics with the objectives of the study, such as challenges, strategies, effectiveness of onboarding activities: acculturating, embedding or socialisation.

STEP 4:

The themes were reviewed, modified, and developed into the preliminary themes.

STEP 5:

The themes were defined to identify the essence of what each theme tells us in relation to the research objectives.

STEP 6:

Write-up.

4.6.7. Quality controls

To ensure the quality of this research, the primary data was professionally transcribed, and the transcription was compared with the transcription generated during the virtual interviews on Microsoft Teams, and in Otter transcription software. Ultimately, we had three sets of transcriptions for each interview that allowed for checks for consistency, validity, and reliability of the research. The data was also triangulated against information from the organisations of the informants such as review of HR policies and search for any literature related to onboarding. For example, after interviewing an informant from a well-known local bank, we then followed up by checking for any information, articles, that can give us more information in corroboration of what the informant discussed during the interview.

According to Saunders and Lewis (2018), quality control is achieved when the researcher triangulates by corroboration the findings with two or more data sources. The results were validated by anecdotal evidence form engagements such as the GIBS Career Fair and during the MBA Global Module, and where the informants were happy to give feedback, we sent them the transcripts to check that the information provided and recorded is accurate. According to Bansal et al. (2018), data sets from multiple data strategies can either support what is being theorised or understand the phenomena studied or be different, raising mixed explanatory variables.

4.6.8 Validity and Reliability

Criticism and evaluations are not antithetical to the research process; instead, they examine the dependability of the study design or approach employed (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The concepts of validity and reliability pertain to how an instrument produces consistent and accurate results when administered repeatedly under the same circumstances (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Bansal et al. (2018) posit that the association between combined reliability and validity is indicative of the trustworthiness of a study. Scholars utilise the criteria of dependability, credibility, transferability, and conformability to assess the veracity and consistency of research outcomes. The researcher provides a concise analysis of the factors of trustworthiness that have been implemented.

4.6.8.1 Credibility

According to Bansal et al. (2018), the credibility of research results is contingent upon their believability to external readers. To establish credibility, the researcher took measures to ensure that all data-gathering procedures adhered to research ethics guidelines, which outline the standards and protocols necessary to produce high-quality and acceptable results for Regent College. In addition to enhancing credibility, triangulation and respondents' verification also contribute to the overall validity of the study. *Triangulation* is a research method that involves the utilisation of multiple sources of data to investigate and resolve identical issues. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), the member verification technique enables participants to validate their assertions and address any missing information that may have arisen from prior interviews.

4.6.8.2 Transferability

"Transferability" pertains to extrapolating research findings and using them in other situations and settings (Bansal et al., 2018, p.273). Transferability refers to the extent to which study findings can be used in a different context or location. The concept of trustworthiness might be likened to how the results can be generalised (Creswell, 2016). **To** enhance the potential for generalizability, the researcher provided a comprehensive and explicit account of the contextual factors, criteria for subject and object selection, and the characteristics of the research participants and data collection methods. Additionally, the researcher outlined the techniques employed for data analysis.

4.6.8.3 Dependability

According to Eden and Nielsen (2020), dependability refers to the degree to which future researchers can reproduce the findings of a study. To guarantee dependability, the pilot study involved collecting data for the final data collection process utilising a sample of three respondents. This facilitated the implementation of tweaks and alterations to ensure that the survey participants encountered no difficulties in responding to the questions. According to Saunders et al. (2016), once credibility has been established, there is no need to demonstrate dependability individually. In order to ensure the dependability of the present study, meticulous attention was given to employing a research technique that facilitates a comprehensive comprehension of the subject matter. A data audit is additionally employed to assess the reliability of data.

4.6.8.4 Conformability

According to the research conducted by Eden and Nielsen's (2020), conformability mostly pertains to the aspect of demonstrating objectivity or neutrality in the data. This suggests that the validity of the findings is contingent upon the provision of accurate responses by the participants. The attainment of research conformability is accomplished through the provision of corroborating evidence for all assertions made and the presentation of a comprehensive account of the research technique. The task was accomplished through the process of archiving audio recordings obtained from the study participants. In brief, the investigator utilized the principles of dependability, credibility, transferability, and conformability to assess the veracity and consistency of the research outcomes. As a result, the reliability of the collected information was ensured. From a deductive standpoint, it may be inferred that the process of analysis should provide the reader with adequate and essential information to ensure a comprehensive comprehension of the many stages of analysis, including both its limitations and strengths.

4.6.8. Limitations

Although strides have been made in acculturation and embedding research, particularly research focusing on socialisation, more research on acculturation and embedding of new hires in a hybrid work environment still needs to be undertaken to gain deeper insights. The hybrid working phenomenon is still a developing construct that has recently gotten scholars' attention in industrialised economies. However, economies are digitising, with developing economies having potential in demographics and technology adoption, thus making them an ideal area to focus this research on. Acculturation issues may develop when one immigrates or relocates to an unfamiliar environment. This can have an emotional and psychological impact on navigating new cultures and practices. A new school or new job in a foreign province or country can trigger stress and anxiety.

Stress during the process of acculturation can result in psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, and feelings of uncertainty, as well as behavioural problems such as aggression and delinquency. The opposing acculturation theory interprets duration patterns through the lens of cultural integration, which results in more exposure and is thus more integrated into its social environment.

In this study, the reliability of the data is a limitation because we are studying an uncommon phenomenon in South Africa – organisations, in general, have not indeed developed strategies and processes to socialise new hires in a hybrid work environment. Therefore, reliability concerns the consistency of the findings and the data-gathering methods (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

CHAPTER 5. RESULTS

5.1. Introduction

The findings of this study on how organisations acculturate and embed new hires in the company in a hybrid work environment that emerged post-COVID are presented. The first goal is to investigate how acculturation in a hybrid environment impacts new employee job satisfaction. An exploration of organisational challenges in acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment post-COVID is the second research goal. Identifying the strategies and practices that organisations can use to acculturate and embed new hires in a hybrid work environment is the third goal. Evaluating how effective these strategies and practices are in acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment is the fourth goal, and lastly, evaluating the role of technology in enhancing acculturation and employee engagement in a hybrid work environment is the fifth objective.

Exploratory examination of interviews or text data is the focus of qualitative analysis, as suggested by Creswell (2014). Based on ten interviewees who provided qualitative answers to the interview guide questions, the current analysis was conducted. Text searching, references, co-occurrence, and network analysis of answers utilising the ATLAS.ti program were used.

5.2. Demographic Information

Before the research findings and interpretation, the participant's demographic Information is provided below. Respondents were asked about their roles or positions to tailor the questions to their organisational responsibilities. Table 5.1 presents the characteristics of key informants in the interviews.

Table 1. Characteristics of key informants to the interviews.

Participant	Position	Experience category	Experience
1	HR Executive – Financial Services	24 years	HR Manager/Supervisor
2	Senior manager – Energy sector	13 years	HR Manager/Supervisor
3	HR Manager	17 years	HR Manager/Supervisor
4	HoD HR - Mining	16 years	HR Manager/Supervisor
5	HR Specialist	9 years	HR Manager/Supervisor
6	HR Consultant/Entrepreneur	14 years	HR Manager/Supervisor
7	Finance Manager	2-3 years	New Hire
8	Banking	13 days	New Hire
9	Fintech/telecoms	2 years	New Hire
10	Banking	9 years	New Hire

Most informants interviewed are senior managers who occupy diverse key professional positions and are directly involved in organisational recruitment. The interview was also conducted with new hires as well (4). Our participant professional credentials show the choice of balanced views from both new hires and HR managers and Supervisors to get how organisations acculturate and embed new hires in the company in a hybrid work environment. Next, we explore themes based on each research question.

5.3 Results on Research Q1

Challenges encountered while adapting to the new work arrangements during onboarding.

This theme examines the challenges organisations encounter while adapting to new work arrangements during onboarding. The following are 3 participants' responses.

Participant 6 [P6] said,

> "…face a sense of resistance from a selected few people or groups... but there's people who will find it a bit difficult that you are now there, especially because people have a notion of thinking perhaps, they are more deserving…"

Participant 7 [P7] said,

> "…Isolation can be a challenge for those who live alone in remote work arrangements, People may be less likely to take sick leave when working from

home due to the comfort and convenience, building relationships and collaboration can be challenging in remote work, Information gathering about team members is less efficient when not in the office, and casual conversations that help understand colleagues are limited…"

And Participant 9 [P9] views were,

"…. but for me, I went from a more structured environment to a less structured environment. Because I came from a more structured banking environment coming into a less structured telecommunications environment, that transition was a bit difficult, mainly because of where I'd come from and the expectations I already had."

The results show that the challenges new hires encounter while adapting to the new work arrangements during onboarding have to do with perception by current co-workers [P6]. The implication is that people may run across resistance from co-workers who think they need to be more worthy or who have pre-set ideas when adjusting to new work arrangements.

The results also show challenges in forming connections, staying isolated, and obtaining Information when working remotely. A hybrid work approach that blends in-person and distant interactions is valued by Participant 7 [P7]. Such a hybrid approach highlights how critical it is to address Isolation and foster teamwork in distant work environments. The advantages of remote work and face-to-face interactions could be balanced using a hybrid paradigm. The results show the challenges of moving from a more structured banking environment to a less structured telecom setting, as covered by Participant 9 [P9]. P9 suggests that some workers may find it challenging to adjust to a shift from highly structured to less structured work environments, especially in comprehending and adjusting to the new work culture and standards.

The informant [P7] mentioned needing more personal interaction and support during the onboarding process. The interviewee also discussed the challenges of hybrid working, including the negative impact on mental health and the difficulty of readjusting to the office environment. The mining industry is an example of an industry that needs to focus more on improving HR processes and being more people-focused, according to P5. The interviewee also mentioned the Isolation and rushed nature of the onboarding process in a hybrid setting. Additionally, the interviewee discussed the potential impact of COVID on

the mining industry, suggesting that it may push the industry towards more mechanised mining and potentially result in job loss.

Some participants [P1 and P4] emphasised the importance of providing support and creating a sense of seniority for employees in training. Finally, the interviewee mentioned that the mining industry was heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and had to catch up on production. In summary, the interviewees discussed the challenges of remote work on employee engagement and wellness. They mentioned that high sick leave and employee turnover can indicate disengagement and unhappiness. The importance of communication and building relationships with employees was emphasised. The onboarding process needed to be more structured, and face-to-face interaction was necessary for new joiners to assimilate into the organisation's culture. The interviewees also mentioned the negative impact of Isolation and the need for support structures for employees working remotely. Face-to-face training was seen as more effective than online training. Finally, turnover and sick leave were mentioned as metrics to measure employee happiness and engagement (see the following figure).

Figure 5. Mapping of the Informants' Output on the Challenges Theme

In summary, each participant offers distinct perspectives regarding the difficulties and benefits of adjusting to new work arrangements during onboarding, even though there are certain recurring elements. According to these answers, organisations should consider issues like resistance, Isolation, and the shift from highly structured to less structured work environments when integrating new hires into various work contexts. These responses answer the second research objective, which was an exploration of organisations' challenges in acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment post-COVID, which is the second research goal. This is supported by Groysberg (2020) and Soucie and Patterson (2021), who highlighted the importance of a hybrid work paradigm for encouraging team members' understanding and cooperation. For instance, participant 6 [P6] showed self-doubt and a lack of training. However, in some instances, these challenges would co-occur (as shown with arrows).

5.4 Results on Research Q2:

To identify the strategies and practices that organisations can use to acculturate and embed new hires in a hybrid work environment.

This theme looks at the strategies and practices that organisations can use to Acculturate and embed new hires in a hybrid work environment. This enables the identification of the strategies and practices organisations can use to acculturate and embed new hires in a hybrid work environment. While identifying specific strategies for onboarding, we have a schematic representation of key components that illustrates how participants pointed out that any HWE Onboarding practice or strategy has a system, process, regional version, and online or in-person training.

Figure 6. Mapping of the Informants sentiments on the Onboarding Strategies
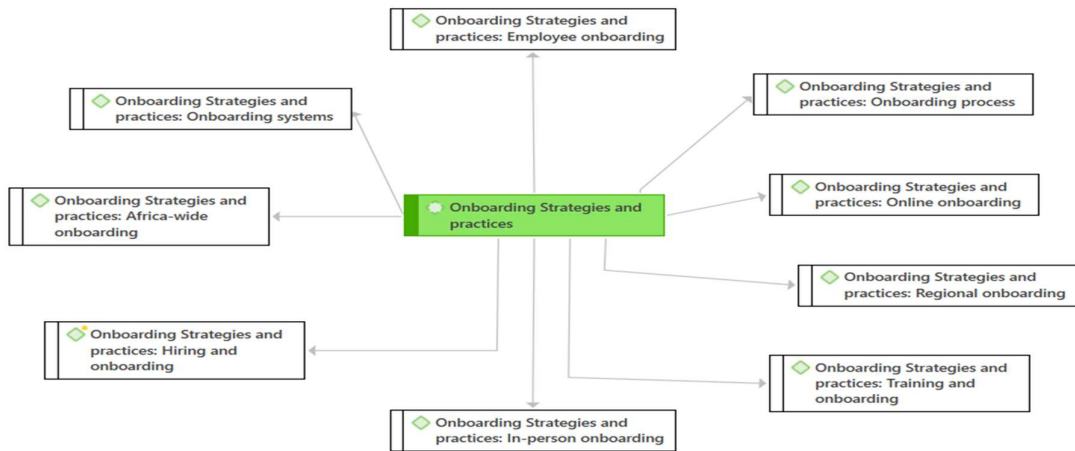
The figure (fig. 6) clearly shows that onboarding systems play a role, with traditional methods being less effective than virtual and hybrid systems that allow individuals to learn at their own pace and be more productive in a technologically advanced working environment. Regarding an Africa-wide Onboarding in HWE, participants would explain that they have a hybrid onboarding process, where some participants attend in person at the office. In contrast, others join online from different regions and countries in Africa. Regarding the onboarding program, participants pointed out that their organisations have different weekly activities to help new employees understand the business and receive role-specific skills training. They also train in identifying key stakeholders within the organisation. In some instances, they mentioned the importance of having measurable metrics, such as attrition rate, to track progress and make any necessary adjustments. Importantly, the onboarding process includes e-learnings, some of which are mandated by the company, to ensure new employees receive the necessary training.

The participants discuss the practices and strategies of onboarding in a remote and hybrid work environment. They pointed to the virtual engagement, regular check-ins, and utilising video cameras for connection. They suggest providing an onboarding manual or training site and introducing new hires to the company culture. They also mention assigning a buddy and mentor to assist new hires and conducting monthly check-ins during probation. At the end of probation, a decision is made on whether. The following are the relevant responses to establish strategies and practices from Participant 4 [P4].

Participant [P4] said:

"…the practice of holding visual felt leadership meetings every Wednesday, during which artisans and supervisors conduct toolbox talks. Senior management then attends these meetings to reaffirm the seniority of the employees leading the meetings and support their efforts. While this practice promotes a certain culture and includes senior management, it does not specifically address support and mentorship strategies for new hires in a hybrid work environment.…

Additionally, Participant [P6] said:

"*…the use of e-learning, which is designed to introduce new employees to the organisation's culture. These e-learnings may include both standard content and mandated content specified by the company itself. New employees are encouraged to complete these e-learnings within a designated time frame, which helps them acclimate to the organisation's culture and expectations…"*

Furthermore, Participant 6 [P6] said.

"*...the combination of the buddy system, mentorship, HR support, and structured probationary period helps the organisation assess the effectiveness of onboarding efforts and gauge the success of new hires in the hybrid working setting. Regular check-ins and support systems are in place to ensure that employees are acclimating well to their new roles and the work environment...*"

The results show that four participants provided accurate answers to the question about mentorship and support techniques for recent recruits in a hybrid work environment. Participant 4 [P4] shared Information about a procedure that entails having Wednesday meetings for visual felt leadership. Supervisors and craftspeople undertake toolbox talks at these meetings. To support and reinforce the seniority of the staff members spearheading the conversations, senior management also shows up to these meetings. Though senior management is involved in this practice and fosters a particular culture, it must address new hire assistance and mentorship tactics in a hybrid work environment, suggesting that while the response focused on tactics especially designed for recruits in a hybrid situation, it also provided insights into a practice that may have cultural importance.

The results also highlight what Participant 6 [P6] said by bringing up the utilisation of e-learning as a strategy to acquaint new hires with the company's culture. These e-learnings

contain both required content set by the company and standard content. To adjust to the organisation's culture and standards, new hires are urged to finish these online courses within the allotted period. The results also show that the divergent answers suggest that only some participants concentrated on the methods and procedures in place for guiding and assisting new hires in a mixed work environment.

A more thorough grasp of the strategies being used and their effects is necessary to assess how well these practices and strategies are fostering and integrating new hires into a hybrid work environment (Powell, 2022). In this instance, Participant 6 [P6] reaction helps evaluate the efficacy of onboarding procedures for recruits and the hybrid work environment more directly. This provides an answer to the research objective, which is to identify the strategies and practices that organisations can use to Acculturate and embed new hires in a hybrid work environment.

The results show that technology is significant, and its part in updating the workplace is acknowledged by both participants [P1, P2]. They admit that younger workers—Gen Z and Millennials, for example—are more tech-savvy and favour technology-driven and digital procedures over conventional ones. Generation Z is considered the most accurate label for youngsters of today. The results also emphasise how important leadership and organisational culture are to the success of acculturation. They stress that organisations must be flexible to embrace new methods of operation and meet the demands of their younger workforce.

5.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Employee Engagement Strategies and Practices of Acculturation and Embedding

The interview discusses the importance of unity and adaptability in South Africa, as well as the role of culture in bringing people together. They emphasise the big role played by technology and the significance of employee engagement and onboarding processes in organisations. The conversation then shifts to the topic of hybrid working environments and the potential benefits and challenges they bring, particularly considering existing technology. Lastly, the interview emphasises the importance of engagement, communication, and relationship-building in organisations to ensure employee satisfaction and a sense of belonging. The participants prefers face-to-face training because they feel it is more impactful and dedicated. They have noticed that technology based remote work leads to people frequently checking their emails. This therefore meant that if any training is done online, the person wants to ensure that participants have their cameras on to

prevent distractions and maintain engagement. The focus in the mining industry has been primarily on investing in machines rather than improving people and systems. HR is still seen as an administrative role in the industry, rather than as a strategic business partner. This lack of emphasis on people has led to disengagement high levels of sick leave and employee turnover. The division setup does not lend itself well to hybrid work arrangements, which further contributes to disengagement and distraction among employees.

From the preceding sub-themes, we can show the relationship between them and how they technology itself enhances acculturation and employee engagement in the hybrid working environment.

Figure 7. Mapping the Informant Output on the Technology Utilisation Theme
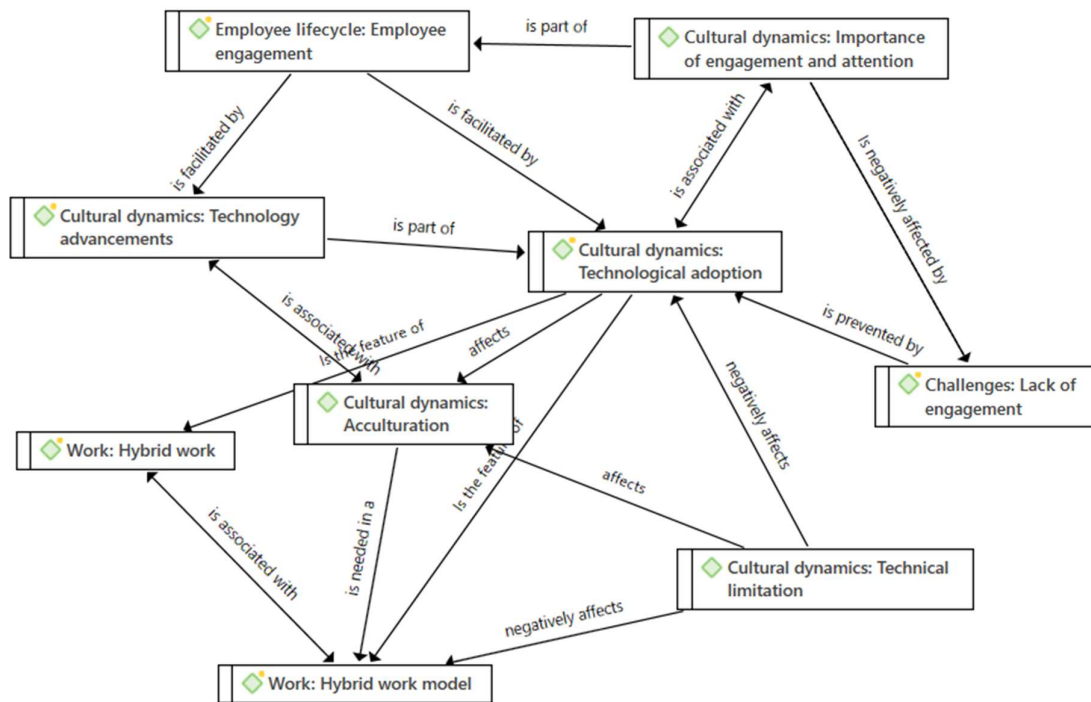
The network of relationships shows that with technological adoptions and advancements, the acculturation needed in the hybrid work environment will be easy-going, which means any technical error will negatively affect the proper functioning of the hybrid working environment. The technology prevents any form of hiccups in employee engagement as technology is associated with high employee engagement in a hybrid working environment. The research aims to establish the role of technology in employee

engagement during acculturation and embedding of new hires in a hybrid work environment by promoting new employee engagement in a new culture brought post-COVID. Before presenting what role technology brings about, we analyse the narrations made, which are technology, acculturation and employee engagement related in a hybrid work environment. This theme looks at the influence of technology and virtual tools during onboarding and assimilation into the organisation. The following is the relevant response from Participant 9 [P9]

"…technology tools are available and are part of everyday work, including team meetings, notes, and presentations. The use of technology can facilitate communication even when in-person meetings are not possible…"

The results show that only 1 participant [P9] out of the four new hire managers answered how technology and virtual tools affect new hires' integration into the organisation during onboarding. The only respondent in this instance who directly addressed the usage of virtual tools and technology was Participant 9 [P9].

The results show that just 1 participant [P9] correctly answered the question, raising the possibility that the other participants misunderstood it or that the question needed clarification. It might also mean that the participants should have addressed the question about technology and virtual tools but instead chose to share material they thought was pertinent to the onboarding topic.

The findings also show that the majority of the participants did not specifically address how technology and virtual tools were used during the onboarding process, which may indicate that this was not a significant factor in their onboarding experience or that they were not aware of the role that technology played in their integration into the organisation and this answers the research objectives 2 and 3 (strategies and effectiveness of strategies) which said to evaluate is the role of technology in enhancing acculturation and employee engagement in a hybrid work environment.

The three participants who chose not to answer the question explicitly had one thing in common: They all talked about various parts of their onboarding experiences that had nothing to do with virtual tools or technology, which suggests that the participants did not acknowledge the significance of technology to the question, or they did not consider it to be a significant element in their integration. Participant 9 [P9], on the other hand, emphasised the value of technology tools in day-to-day work, particularly considering the

COVID-19 pandemic, and suggested that these tools be included in the onboarding procedure. This answer recognises that even when face-to-face meetings are not feasible, technology can play a significant role in fostering teamwork and communication, supported by Sibisi and Kappers (2022).

The replies show that while one participant [P4] acknowledged the value of technology and how it was incorporated into the onboarding process, most participants still needed to view technology or virtual tools as a large part of their onboarding experience. Companies should stress the use of technology throughout the onboarding process and ensure staff members know its importance to their integration into the company.

All the informants believed that all companies have had to react and adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic, and there are pros and cons to the hybrid work model. Technology was generally considered a key factor by the majority of the informants. However, some informants admitted that it was not a significant factor in their onboarding process for various reasons, such as the organisation's need to focus on technology in the onboarding strategies. This study intention was to understand how organisations have incorporated technology post-COVID-19 in their hybrid work settings. The respondents highlighted that the advantages of hybrid work include technological adaptation. The interviewee acknowledges that while the mining industry has slowly adopted advanced technology, other industries, like banking, have been more proactive in implementing technological advancements.

The COVID-19 pandemic has catalysed organisations to invest in technology and equipment to improve productivity and stay ahead of the curve. The interviewee believes the hybrid work setting has equalised opportunities, allowing candidates from different backgrounds and locations to access recruitment processes through technology. The interviewee also mentions that government organisations have specific compliance and regulatory requirements that may limit their ability to adopt technology fully. However, systems are in place to minimise manual processes and improve efficiency.

The tools and technology for hybrid working are available, and people have become comfortable using them. They are now an integral part of everyday work and communication, which enables employee engagement. The challenge is to integrate these tools with the rest of the team and ensure effective interactions. Participants highlighted that the new generations of employees prefer using technology and are interested in

something other than traditional ways of doing things. The attributes of a company with no staff turnover and a culture that makes work easier are desirable, but they must be supported by suitable systems and tools. In industries like mining and large-scale industries, hybrid working may be emphasised less. The participants agree that the future of work is heading towards hybrid working, but it requires a balance between in-person and virtual interactions.

5.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Onboarding Systems and Adaptability/ or Technological Adaptability

The results about this theme show that all the respondents should have specifically addressed how to modify onboarding procedures/systems for a hybrid work environment. Instead, their answers concentrate on their organisation's recruitment and retention tactics, which is indicated by less co-occurrence between the onboarding system and adaptability and even no co-occurrence with technological adaptability.

Figure 8: Co-occurrence between the Onboarding Systems and Adaptability/ or Technological Adaptability

	Adaptability 21	Cultural dynamics: Cultural adaptation 2	Technology adaptation 1
Employee lifecycle: Onboarding systems 1	1		
Work: Hybrid work 23	1	1	
Work: Hybrid work setting 1			1

Participant 1 [P1] states that their recruitment strategy includes peer referrals and internal job ads to draw applicants who are eager to join their team, share their values, and complement their strategic objectives. This recruitment technique also aids their long-term staff retention. However, no specific information is given on how onboarding tactics might be modified to meet the unique opportunities and challenges of a hybrid workplace. The results prove that this response did not specifically address the issue, and more details about the respondent's onboarding practices in a hybrid work environment are required.

Regarding the subject of modifying onboarding techniques for the hybrid work environment, the results show that Participant 4 [P4] does not directly address it in the material that is provided. Rather than that, the response talks about the technology and administrative procedures used in various businesses, emphasising the distinctions between the mining sector and other industries. The participant contrasts the mining business, which they believe needs to catch up in terms of technological adoption, with other industries that have sophisticated HR information systems, electronic onboarding, and automated procedures like leave management.

This shows that Participant 4 [P4] still needs to answer about modifying onboarding procedures for a hybrid work environment. The response needs to provide insights on onboarding tactics unique to the hybrid work environment instead of concentrating primarily on technology and administrative procedures across different industries.

The findings also show that Participant 5 [P5] did not directly address the theme in the provided material. The response talks about the backgrounds of people who joined the company in various areas. It lists individual new hires, both from within and outside the company, emphasising that one of them started in January after joining from NERSA.

All Participants should have addressed in their response to the study's theme if onboarding tactics should be modified for a hybrid work environment. Rather than discussing onboarding tactics for a hybrid work environment, the response summarises the histories of people who have just joined the company.

The study concludes that 6 participants' [P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6] responses omitted any discussion of modifying onboarding procedures for a mixed work environment. Instead, their answers are more concerned with the practicalities of having new workers participate digitally in the onboarding process than with customising onboarding tactics for a hybrid work environment.

5.5. Results on Research Q 3:

To evaluate how effectiveness of strategies and practices are in acculturating and embedding new hires in a HWE

This theme looks at the effectiveness of onboarding efforts in the HWE. The following are the relevant responses from Participant 4 [P4], Participant 5 [P5], and Participant 6 [P6].

Participant 4 [P4] said,

"…while turnover is generally a positive way to introduce fresh perspectives and talent into the organisation, excessive turnover can be concerning."

Participant 5 [P5] said,

"…By incorporating wellness check-ins, fostering open communication, and promoting boundaries, the organisation assesses the effectiveness of onboarding efforts in the hybrid work setting. These practices help gauge the well-being and satisfaction of employees, contributing to a successful onboarding process…"

And Participant 6 [P6] said,

"...the combination of the buddy system, mentorship, HR support, and structured probationary period helps the organisation assess the effectiveness of onboarding efforts and gauge the success of new hires in the hybrid working setting. Regular check-ins and support systems are in place to ensure that employees are acclimating well to their new roles and the work environment..."

The results show that 3 participants mentioned the performance of onboarding initiatives in a hybrid work environment. The results show that both Participants 4 [P4] and 5 [P5] emphasise the significance of turnover as a measure of the efficacy of onboarding. They both believe a certain amount of turnover is good for bringing in new ideas, but more churn is needed. Increased sick leave because of dissatisfaction with the onboarding process can indicate unhappiness and negatively impact job satisfaction.

The results also show that the significance of employee well-being and wellness is emphasised by participants 5 [P5] and 6 [P6] when assessing the effectiveness of onboarding initiatives. Participant 5 [P5] suggests how to make the onboarding process successful: wellness check-ins and open communication demonstrate the organisation's dedication to the happiness and well-being of its employees. Participant 6 [P6] brings up

the idea of routine check-ins during the probationary term to make sure workers are settling in nicely to their jobs and surroundings.

The results also show that Participant 6 [P6] emphasised the value of mentorship, the buddy system, and HR assistance as support structures. These frameworks are essential for evaluating onboarding success and guaranteeing that new hires are easily supported in the mixed work environment.

The results also show that Participant 4 [P4] places much attention on the unhappiness and well-being of employees and mainly uses turnover and sick leave as metrics. Participant 5 [P5] even suggests a proactive approach to employee happiness and well-being by highlighting limits, open communication, and wellness check-ins as evaluation methods. Participant 6 [P6] even went on to offer a more structured approach, making sure that new hires are successfully adjusting to the company through buddy systems, mentorship, probationary periods, and HR support.

The results emphasise how crucial it is to consider employee happiness, well-being, and support systems when evaluating how successful onboarding initiatives are in a hybrid work environment. Increased sick leave and excessive turnover are red flags of discontent that must be carefully watched. The emphasis placed by participants 5 [P5] and 6 [P6] on wellness check-ins, transparent communication, and organised support networks demonstrate a more proactive and all-encompassing approach to successful onboarding. Organisations can improve the onboarding process and job satisfaction of new hires by fostering employee well-being and offering organised support.

One of the critical resources is an onboarding package provided to new employees. This package includes detailed Information about the organisation's values, mission, and vision, as well as different teams and departments. The theme looks at the impact of HWE on acculturation into the company culture. To show this, the study drew a co-occurrence table on the Hybrid work environment and organisational culture and cultural dynamics (see figure).

Figure 9. Co-occurrence on HWE and Organisational Culture and Cultural Dynamics
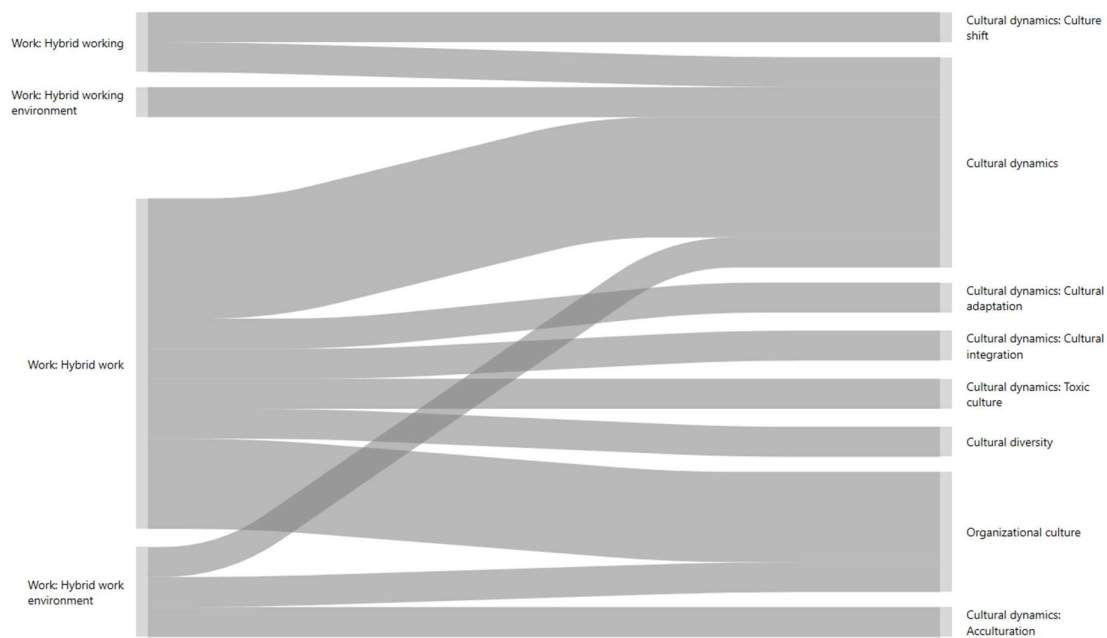
The diagram above (fig. 9) shows that HWE, the acculturation environment, co-occurs with organisational culture, ensuring cultural dynamics. To get to know the verbatim statements. The return on investment for companies in South Africa's corporate environment in promoting unity and employee engagement is seen in improved teamwork, understanding, and a culture of unity. By allowing employees to voice their concerns and provide input on how the current and future culture can promote unity, companies can create a more inclusive and cohesive work environment. This, in turn, leads to more productive teams and ultimately benefits the organisation as a whole. The participant concluded by discussing the need for cultural change and the potential issues that can arise when new hires have conflicting values and principles.

The following is Participant 9's response.

Participant [P9] said:

"…So, their assimilation took longer than it should have, in terms of my understanding that this is how they work here. Because I came from a more structured banking environment coming into a less structured telecommunications environment, that transition was a bit difficult, mainly because of where I'd come from and the expectations I already had."."

The results show that only 1 participant [P9] mentioned the impact of HWE on acculturation into company culture. The fact that just 1 participant discussed how the hybrid work environment affected their assimilation into the company culture raises several intriguing issues and consequences of the onboarding practices.

The results show that based on the few replies to this theme, only some employees believe the hybrid work environment dramatically influences their assimilation into the company culture. It can mean that certain workers do not think their workplace is the main thing influencing their assimilation.

The results also show that the 1 participant who did address the impact did so by emphasising the value of support services. This suggests that there may be variations in the resources and help that employees receive during the onboarding process. It implies that different employees may demand different levels of adaptability or different quality of support services.

Results show that the participant's [P9] remarks regarding the accessibility of support services and the difficulties encountered while completing the online onboarding process imply that, despite the existence of resources to aid new hires, there are still difficulties related to a hybrid onboarding process, such as the requirement for immediate support.

The results also suggest that given that most of the participants needed to address how the hybrid work environment affected their assimilation expressly, it is possible that they were not very concerned about this issue or that they were more interested in other onboarding-related issues. If this is an ongoing trend among the staff, it could be worthwhile to investigate more.

HR departments and organisations may interpret this as a call to enhance systems of support and communication during the onboarding process, particularly for employees who work remotely or in hybrid environments. They may consider offering more thorough instructions and improving online assistance to deal with the difficulties encountered during virtual onboarding.

In summary, the scant discussion of how the hybrid work environment affects acculturation raises the possibility of variation in employee experiences. As a result, companies should carefully evaluate and modify their onboarding procedures to guarantee a more seamless

transition for all staff members, regardless of whether they work in a fully remote or hybrid environment.

5.5.1. Sub-theme 3: Experience with Onboarding in HWE

This subtheme looks at the experiences of new hires with onboarding processes in the hybrid work environment as compared to traditional methods. The following is participant 7 [P7] and 10's [P10] responses:

Participant [P7] said:

> "…In terms of the induction process, yes, again, being online is a problem because you have to ask a lot of questions in the middle of time, Teams calls. So, in terms of support, I think they do well in terms of support to you in terms of induction, but I think there is that issue around the person."

Furthermore participant [P10] said.

> "…So, a lot of the onboarding, some of the sessions were online in terms of virtual meetings with very few being in person. So, in terms of intensity, I can't say it was a bit of a mixed bag of both. So, it was very haphazard if I am to be honest. And because it was mostly haphazard in that nature, they also sort of, it was one of those hit-the-ground-running situations."

Figure 10. Mapping of Output of Informants HWE Onboarding Experience
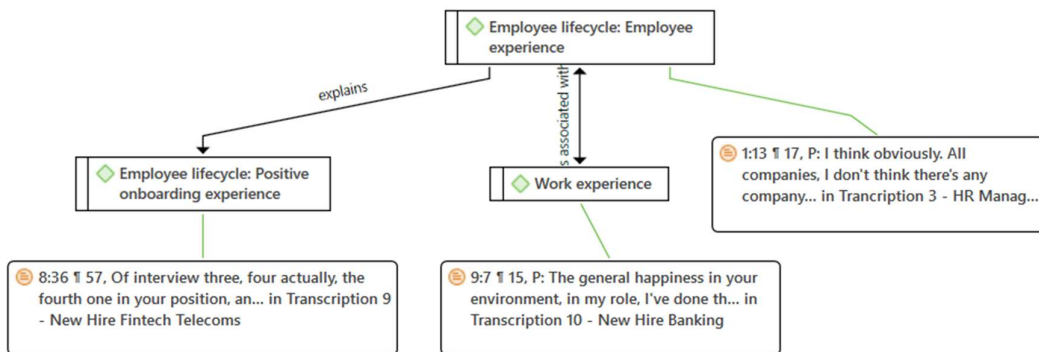
The results show that during the onboarding process in the hybrid work environment, 2 Participants [P7; P10] stated that their organisations offered significant support and help. They emphasised that help was available and that there was a call centre where employees could get answers to queries and concerns about onboarding. This encouraging feedback suggests that the organisations have established reliable onboarding support tools to help new hires navigate the virtual work environment. Help and support must be given during the onboarding process, especially in a remote or hybrid work environment. It implies that these companies take the initiative to see that new hires have a seamless onboarding experience and that their demands are met. For new hires, this support can create a great onboarding experience and a sense of community.

The results also show that 2 participants, one of the participants [P10], voiced displeasure with the hybrid work environment's onboarding procedure, citing problems with the procedure's organisation and clarity. They talked of a general feeling of 'haphazardness' in the process, unclear communication about what to expect during onboarding, and no established timeframe. This criticism highlights the difficulties in offering a well-organised and planned onboarding process in a hybrid environment. There is serious concern in the negative feedback on the onboarding process's need for more structure and clarity. It recommends that businesses streamline their onboarding procedures for hybrid work environments in terms of organisation and communication. New hires may experience uncertainty and dissatisfaction due to a disjointed onboarding process, affecting their early job satisfaction.

In summary, the answers paint a conflicting image of what it is like to be onboarded in a hybrid workplace. While some respondents were pleased with the help and support they received, others drew attention to problems with the process's need for more organisation and clarity. The question comparing hybrid and traditional onboarding experience received no answer, which could mean that some people need help finding the difference between the two to be substantial or that the issue needs more explanation.

5.5.1 Sub-theme 4: Differences between Onboarding new hires in an HWE and traditional methods.

The process of integrating recruits into the company is known as onboarding. The purpose of onboarding is to thoroughly integrate recruits into the business by examining its culture, mission, vision, values, and strategy. It goes beyond a quick

introduction. This theme tries to find the differences between traditional onboarding methods and onboarding new hires by looking at onboarding systems, the onboarding process, and onboarding and how they relate to the general onboarding process.

Figure 11. Mapping of the Informants Output on the Onboarding Processes theme: Traditional vs. HWE systems

The network shows that the onboarding process mainly characterises the traditional onboarding of new hires, while the onboarding process is complemented and is associated with onboarding systems. Also, onboarding systems complement the online onboarding of new hires in HWE. Online onboarding of new hires in HWE has some elements of traditional onboarding of new hires. Online onboarding of new hires in HWE is also characterised by an onboarding process that respects existing traditional onboarding of new hires.

The networks show that the onboarding process traditionally includes

- assigning a supervisor or coach to assist new employees for three months
- taking them to the plant for hands-on learning

- introducing them to the engineering team.

Traditional onboarding involves filling out paperwork manually. However, participants highlight that there are e-learnings and onboarding materials available for new employees to complete. Specifically taking verbatim statements, this theme looks at the differences between onboarding new hires in an HWE and Onboarding new hires using traditional methods from the following statements.

Participant 4 [P4] said.

"…. In the current organisation, administrative onboarding, such as filling out forms, is manual. In some past organisations, advanced HR information systems allowed for online form-filling…Safety training is conducted online, including video-based content. It covers equipment, safety hazards, risk prevention, and incident reporting. The system includes tests and certification after each module. Initially, new employees receive laptops and access to online materials…

Participant 6 [P6] said: I think they are subtle differences. The reason why I say that is because we try our best to make the onboarding, the onboarding has to be in person for anyone, yes, for everybody. But still, we on-board not only for the office in Gauteng, but we on-board for regionally and Africa-wide on the same day. So, you'll find that those participants will be online. So, you see the mix of hybrid and in person in a way."

Participants show that supervisors may need to be more involved and aware of the onboarding process and systems that apply to both onboarding methods, given the limited supervisor insights on the distinctions between hybrid and standard onboarding strategies. Participants 4 [P4] and 6 [P6] sentiments highlight that the hybrid approach provides efficiency and saves on regional onboarding costs and consistency, and its focus on safety, inclusion, and cultural integration adds to the overall onboarding experience.

The narrative statements show that onboarding is usually done in person, but in some cases, it may also include online participants, creating a mix of hybrid and in-person experiences. In summary, the attributes of technology and staff turnover are influenced by organisational culture, leadership, and adaptability. If an organisation embraces new ways of doing things and adapts to technological advancements, it is more likely to retain the

new generation of workers. The onboarding process in both traditional and online onboarding plays a role, with traditional methods potentially hindering active participation and productivity compared to virtual and hybrid onboarding systems that allow individuals to learn at their own pace. Ultimately, organisations must keep up with technological advancements and create a modern working environment to attract and retain new talent.

The participant's statements believe there are indirect differences in onboarding processes. They mention that while onboarding is typically done in person, it is also done online for participants located in other regions and Africa as a whole, which creates a mix of hybrid and in-person onboarding. The results show that 2 participants ([P4] and [P6]) gave a thorough explanation when asked how onboarding new workers in a hybrid work environment differs from traditional procedures. Participant 4 [P4] explained how their company uses a hybrid onboarding procedure that combines advanced online safety and cultural training with more conventional manual administrative onboarding. The participant's answer stressed the value of using video resources to improve the onboarding process and the significance of safety training in their mining setting.

The results also show a commitment to inclusion in onboarding processes and systems, as seen by network and verbatim quotes. A comprehensive strategy for onboarding that goes beyond online training is indicated by the addition of team presentations and in-person introductions by heads of departments (HODs) to improve cultural integration. The necessity of yearly refresher training underscores the value of lifelong learning and compliance with corporate guidelines.

The results show that Participants 4 [P4] and 6 [P6] were the only ones to answer the question, and this implies that the other responses lacked supervisory knowledge or expertise. This may suggest that managers either needed to be made aware of the subtleties of hybrid onboarding or more actively participate in the onboarding procedures in some firms.

5.6 Chapter Summary

A mixed picture emerges from the replies on onboarding in a hybrid workplace. While some participants identified problems with the onboarding process's organisation and clarity, others expressed happiness with the support they received during it. Interestingly, there was no response to the question comparing hybrid to traditional onboarding experiences, suggesting that there may be fewer differences than thought or that a more

thorough explanation is required. The scant attention given to the impact of the hybrid work environment on acculturation raises the possibility of a wide range of employee experiences. Therefore, whether an employee works in a hybrid environment or remotely, businesses should carefully evaluate and modify their onboarding processes to guarantee a smoother transition for all employees. This aligns with the study's objective of investigating the impact of acculturation in a hybrid workplace on the job satisfaction of new hires, highlighting the significance of employee well-being for a smooth onboarding process and overall contentment.

In conclusion, participants provide a range of viewpoints regarding the benefits and difficulties of adjusting to new work arrangements during the onboarding process. When integrating new workers into varied contexts, organisations should consider elements including resistance, Isolation, and the transition from highly structured to less structured work environments. These results underscore the necessity of modifying workplace policies and onboarding practices to accommodate changing employee demands and preferences, and they also address the research purpose of identifying strategies and practices for acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment.

The replies also highlight how important technology is becoming in hybrid work environments. Although employees are used to using tools and technology for hybrid work and are easily accessible, it might be challenging to incorporate these technologies into team interactions successfully. The millennial workforce favours technology over conventional ways of communication, so businesses need to ensure that their tools and procedures facilitate minimal employee turnover and the culture they want. Hybrid work arrangements are the way of the future, but it is essential to balance in-person and virtual connections.

In a hybrid work environment, employee engagement can be adversely affected by technological faults, which makes seamless technology adoption necessary for effective acculturation. Thus, to support employee engagement, firms should give top priority to the adoption of technology and make sure it runs smoothly. The replies indicate that just a small number of participants gave thoughtful answers, indicating that only some of them thoroughly answered the subject, which may suggest that certain managers are not actively involved in onboarding processes inside their firms or that they need more in-depth knowledge of hybrid Onboarding.

The study concludes by highlighting the necessity of customised onboarding processes in a hybrid work environment and the contribution of technology to employee engagement. It also emphasises how crucial it is to comprehend and consider the advantages and disadvantages of hybrid work arrangements for recent hires.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1. Introduction

The last chapter presented research results; this chapter aims to reflect and discuss the findings following the research objectives stated in Chapter One. The results will be discussed in line with the research questions and the literature from other related studies.

6.2. Research objective 1:

To explore organisations' challenges in acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment post-COVID.

The first objective of this study was to explore organisations' challenges in acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment post-COVID. Many challenges are associated with acculturating and embedding new hires in hybrid working conditions.

One of the challenges identified is the perception of the current co-workers; the current co-workers think that it might not be suitable for them to adjust to new work arrangements that may have been made available to them as it is known that, in general, people are resistant to change.

The other challenge in forming connections is that workers might work in different environments. There might be no bond that may help people to interact and share ideas, problems and other necessary things that might be useful for the betterment of the company, and connections help people to help one another when one is facing challenges in executing some tasks. Some challenges have been identified, like staying isolated and obtaining information. One of the best ways of achieving goals is through teamwork; when people are isolated, this cannot enable them to work as a team and working in a team can make workers find a better way of doing a job as people learn new ideas from others daily (Maddox-Daines, 2023). The other challenge is difficulty in managing a hybrid workforce; there are circumstances in which some managers need to manage workers while seeing what they are doing, which might not be possible in a hybrid working environment. The idea of difficulty in managing a hybrid workforce is supported by Alexander et al. (2020,

p. 24), "managing personnel and procedures to accommodate employees who might work in-person or remotely on any given day presents the true difficulty of hybrid work environments. Negative effects on output, engagement, and well-being could result from ineffectively addressing this issue; it may even raise employee turnover".

Low morale among the workers is also one of the challenges encountered in acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment post-COVID. The morale of the people is boosted when people are working together as a team. There are ways in which managers motivate their subordinates while they learn as they do the work; some of the work needs people to be available in person for them to master how it is done rather than communication via telephone or other means of communication. The challenge of low morale in a hybrid workforce environment is supported by Racherla (2020, p. 21), when he says, "A fractured culture brought on by a mixed approach to work results in disconnection, a dearth of career conversations, and low morale. Employee performance suffers without a strong culture, which lowers productivity, net income, produced revenues, employee retention, and return on investment. Therefore, in order to improve the way a hybrid work environment functions, tactics like increased transparency, uniting teams, and inclusion are needed".

Lack of emotional support is also another challenge of a hybrid workforce. In a working environment, people face different challenges that may need some people to help them overcome those challenges, and people need to be shown love and assurance that in their problems, they are not alone. Emotional support includes hugging a person to show love. When people work remotely, they may feel isolated to the extent that when they are going through difficulties, they may think that no one loves them or cares about their problems. For instance, when one loses his or her relative, there is a need for people to console that person while showing sympathy rather than making some calls. If people are not emotionally supported, these might reduce the inability to operate daily. Identifying the triggers and using stress-reduction measures are typically part of the therapy (Griffiths, 2015).

Lack of engagement is another challenge in acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment post-COVID. Employee engagement is improving the workplace culture and atmosphere to motivate staff to commit more to the mission and core values

of the organisation. Sometimes, when there is hybrid working, there will be no employee engagement, and people tend not to focus on the company goals and values. Workers are motivated by being involved in every activity, which leads to an increase in efficiency and productivity. Engaging with their work, employer, and co-workers is crucial to the general experience and contentment of individuals who work a regular schedule. Workers show increased energy and productivity, exceeding expectations in their work. They can have a beneficial impact on individuals around them, including customers and co-workers, and it naturally affects their mental health at work. Enhancing work culture, decreasing attrition, raising output, fostering stronger connections with co-workers and customers, and impacting profitability are all benefits of employee engagement (Racherla, 2020).

The other challenge associated with hybrid working is the need for guidance. In most cases, new workers need people whom they look up to for guidance, and this cannot be easy if people are working remotely as it is not proper for one to always seek guidance through using other means of communication. Positive outlooks on life can be obtained from guidance. They can aid in worker's ability to see the good in others and the goodness that lies inside them. When workers are having a hard time or do not feel good about themselves, this is helpful. Having a purpose in life can also come from obtaining guidance. Observing someone fulfilling their aspirations and reaching their objectives may motivate workers to follow in their footsteps (Alexander et al., 2020). This may remind workers that they, too, may be happy and successful when they take guidance from their superiors. And lastly, seeking guidance can help a worker become a better socialiser. Workers might catch the confidence and extroversion of others around them when interacting with them.

Lack of relationship building is also a challenge of a hybrid workforce. Interactions with coworkers and employees are referred to as workplace relationships. Workers will find it challenging to show up and be productive if they do not trust each other. Good work relationships can guarantee that employees feel engaged and connected. When people are working remotely, they need to establish the necessary company relationships that enable them to know one another comprehensively. Some worker's morale is enhanced by the relationship that is established at the workplace. Positive relationships among coworkers increase the likelihood of good performance when collaborating on a project. Respected coworkers can inspire one another to give their best effort, and open

communication can facilitate everyone's ability to do various duties more quickly. When a team collaborates, there is usually less room for miscommunication and greater clarity regarding individual responsibilities (Nadeem, 2022).

Self-doubt is another challenge of a hybrid workplace; some workers may need clarification on what they are doing when they are not working with others, and they need to confirm whether they are doing the right thing. Self-doubt can also be referred to as low self-esteem; workers sometimes may not have the confidence to think that they can perform specific tasks without the involvement of other people, and this may create the biggest challenge, especially when people are working remotely. Workers find it difficult to admit to themselves that they are excellent at what they do could be difficult. However, this is important as it is believed that everyday praise and positive affirmations help one's brain feel capable of carrying out tasks assigned to them. According to Sharma & Ganjigatti (2023), In the era of remote work and internet communication, self-doubt is more challenging to identify and conquer. Managers and employees must recognise the warning signals, look out for unusual work practices, and get to the root of people's concerns before these oppressive thoughts and sentiments overwhelm them.

Lack of structure is another challenge associated with the hybrid working environment. Structure helps people to understand the channels in which things must be done in the organisation. Roles, duties, and regulations may be a part of these activities. The organisational structure also determines information flow across levels inside the corporation. The idea that lack of structure is a challenge in a hybrid working environment is supported by Sharma & Ganjigatti (2023), who say there is a lack of organ organisational structure in the hybrid working environment and structures are essential for remote and hybrid work because it establishes the parameters for teamwork, accountability, and decision-making. It is easier to identify roles and responsibilities and make sure that everyone is aware of their responsibilities when there is a clear structure in place.

A hybrid working environment also has the challenge of needing more clarity. According to Radonić et al. (2021), when implementing a hybrid work model, one common mistake made by businesses is to neglect to create clear guidelines and expectations for the team. This leaves the team unclear about what they are expected to do and are not allowed to

do, such as what constitutes appropriate scheduling and collaboration practices, whether flexitime is permitted or not, and whether they must adhere to office hours when using Slack or if they can check messages only occasionally throughout the day. Workers need clarity in terms of the tasks that they perform daily, which may not be possible when workers are working remotely, and as it is known that managers are the busiest people in the organisation, sometimes may not have time to state the objectives of the day clear to the people who may be working remotely.

Perception of being seen is another challenge that emanate from hybrid working, some of the workers have the perception of working under the watch of their managers; working with them may be pointless if no one is watching them, and these kind of people need motivation all the time and need to be served as examples when the managers are giving references to people who are doing well in a particular project.

In acculturating and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment post-COVID, there are several challenges raised; among those challenges are lack of investment in people, sympathy, dislike of distractions, disgruntlement, adversity, feeling rushed, unhappiness, job loss, complaining, job scarcity, regret, lack of planning and coping.

6.3. Research objective 2:

To identify the strategies that organisations can use to Acculturate and embed new hires in a hybrid work environment.

The results also investigated several techniques and practices to facilitate the acculturation and integration of newly hired employees in a mixed work environment. One of the primary tactics examined involved onboarding systems specifically developed to provide a more adaptable and technologically advanced approach to familiarising new employees with the organisational culture and job requirements. These systems enable employees to acquire knowledge at their preferred speed, utilising virtual and hybrid techniques that are widely regarded as more efficient compared to conventional processes, which is supported by Radonić et al. (2021), who highlighted that this approach not only optimises the onboarding procedure but also mitigates the administrative and managerial challenges by implementing a uniform protocol. Moreover, the utilisation of

digital dashboards facilitates the monitoring of the development of newly hired employees and aids in fostering communication among various teams within the organisational structure.

The results also highlighted the conventional practice of employee onboarding as a crucial approach that aims to acquaint newly hired individuals with the policies, duties, and overall corporate ethos of the organisation. Implementing a standardised onboarding process guarantees uniformity and fosters a favourable employee experience across diverse teams, regardless of their individual preferences for work arrangements. This is also supported by Nguyen (2015), who highlighted that the implementation of a well-designed employee onboarding process can enhance new employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention rates. This is especially significant in the context of remote and hybrid work arrangements.

The in-person onboarding was a supplementary approach to establish significant and immediate linkages between newly recruited employees and the employing institution. This method frequently incorporates interactive demonstrations, engagements with human resources personnel, senior leadership, question-and-answer sessions, and introductions to crucial persons. Within a hybrid work environment, this approach offers an avenue for deliberating and introducing the intricacies of the organisation's policies and procedures about remote work. This is also supported by Linder (2017) and Xue and Zhou (2017), who suggested that tailoring the onboarding procedure to accommodate the unique requirements of individuals can substantially augment their perception of affiliation and rapport with the team.

Training was identified as an additional crucial activity, emphasising the ongoing enhancement of job competencies and skills. The onboarding process frequently functions as the principal training occasion, playing a crucial role in equipping newly hired individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of a hybrid work environment, characterised by a combination of remote and in-office work arrangements. This is supported by Xue and Zhou (2017), who highlighted that the implementation of a comprehensive training program has the potential to significantly enhance the confidence and competence of newly hired individuals, thereby equipping them with the necessary

skills and knowledge to effectively meet the requirements and challenges associated with their respective positions.

Regional onboarding was discovered to be a unique approach that seeks to enhance social integration and foster relationship development, particularly when employees are geographically spread across multiple sites. This methodology enables newly recruited employees to create professional relationships with their peers and familiarise themselves with the area culture, customs, and work practices of the firm (Racherla, 2020). The establishment of regional links can facilitate collaboration, the sharing of information, and mutual assistance, even within a remote work setting, augmenting the process of acculturation.

Online onboarding was also discovered to be a complete strategic approach aimed at accommodating the evolving nature of onboarding processes, specifically in response to the increasing prevalence of remote and hybrid work setups. Online onboarding utilises digital platforms and technologies to facilitate virtual team-building events, interactive webinars, and training sessions (Racherla, 2020). These digital solutions facilitate the smooth integration of new employees into the firm, promoting a sense of community and inclusion, irrespective of their geographical location.

Moreover, implementing African-wide onboarding initiatives was discovered to be a strategic approach specifically designed to address the unique needs and characteristics of culturally diverse workforces. The firm emphasises providing cultural orientation training that is specifically tailored for African staff members. These courses aim to solve cross-cultural challenges and foster collaboration and communication inside the organisation, mainly when employees are geographically separated. Additionally, this technique provides mentorship possibilities, boosting the whole acculturation process.

The findings highlight the importance of technology, participation, communication, and relationship development in promoting employee engagement, a sense of belonging, and overall job satisfaction within a hybrid work setting. The study additionally emphasises a predilection for in-person instruction and underscores the necessity for online training approaches that are dynamic and captivating.

In conclusion, the research offered a thorough examination of several tactics and practices that firms can utilise to successfully assimilate and integrate new employees within a hybrid work setting. The tactics mentioned above comprise a range of approaches, including technology-driven onboarding, traditional and in-person methods, training initiatives, and online solutions. These strategies place a significant emphasis on cultivating employee engagement and establishing a sense of belonging inside the organisation. Furthermore, the significance of a strategic human resources (HR) role in enhancing employee happiness and tackling difficulties within hybrid work environments is emphasised. The diverse range of ideas and practices shown highlights the necessity of employing a comprehensive strategy for onboarding within the contemporary and dynamic work environment.

6.4. Research objective 3:
To evaluate how effective these strategies and practices are in enculturing and embedding new hires in a hybrid work environment.

When evaluating the efficacy of initiatives and procedures aimed at integrating and immersing newly hired employees into a hybrid work setting, numerous crucial factors came to light. To begin with, onboarding tools are crucial in familiarising new employees with the intricacies of a mixed work setting. These systems provide essential resources, information, and assistance to assist newly hired individuals in overcoming the obstacles they may encounter. The establishment of a well-implemented onboarding program is crucial for achieving effective integration, which has support from Sibisi and Kappers (2022), who suggested that the program ought to integrate a combination of online and in-person resources in order to address the varied requirements of employees effectively. It is imperative to conduct regular assessments and modifications of onboarding protocols to ensure their congruence with the ever-changing business dynamics. This practice facilitates cultivating a favourable employee experience, job contentment, and sustained achievement in the long run.

The results also show the importance of virtual and hybrid onboarding systems, as emphasised by the participants. They contend that by using these techniques,

onboarding new hires can learn at their speed without the stress of a traditional classroom setting. This is supported by Powell (2022), and Joshi and Rose (2021), who highlighted that strategy could raise output and engagement levels among staff members. The results also highlight the importance of coaches, managers, or leaders in providing early guidance to newly hired employees. They also stress the significance of acclimating new hires to the team and making sure they understand their roles and duties within the company.

The responses emphasise how urgently businesses must incorporate cutting-edge technology into their onboarding procedures and workplaces to accommodate the desires of younger workers. If this is done, turnover rates could stay the same, especially for younger workers. Businesses should make a concerted effort to match their culture to the demands and inclinations of their changing labour force. By fostering a sense of belonging and professional happiness, this alignment can lower the likelihood of employee turnover. As the participants pointed out, employers must consider implementing more adaptable and technologically advanced onboarding procedures. Approaches to onboarding that are virtual or hybrid enable workers to participate actively while considering their unique learning preferences. One should pay attention to the assistance supervisors, mentors, and coaches provide in assisting new hires with their transition into the company. These people are essential to the process of acculturation and making sure workers settle in at work.

The results show how critical it is to modify workplace procedures and onboarding techniques to accommodate the evolving needs and preferences of recent workers, especially in a mixed work environment. Ignoring these issues may lead to problems with staff acculturation and retention. This section managed to address the research objective of identifying the strategies and practices that organisations can use to Acculturate and embed new hires in a hybrid work environment.

The participant emphasises the importance of cultural fit in an organisation. They mention that even if employees have qualifications and experience, they may not be a good fit if they cannot adapt to the organisation's culture. The participant agrees that high turnover can indicate unhappiness and discusses metrics that can be used to

assess employee satisfaction, such as staff turnover and employees wanting to move within the organisation.

Moreover, in assessing the extent of employee onboarding comprehensiveness, the results showed that it becomes evident that the program should provide recruits with the necessary skills, information, and assistance to thrive in their positions and conform to the organisational culture. To cultivate relationships and promote the efficacy of a hybrid work environment, it is imperative to incorporate essential components such as mentorship programs, training sessions, orientation seminars, and job shadowing. Nevertheless, the implementation of hybrid work models brings out distinctive obstacles, such as the possible impediment to the establishment of social connections and the absorption of cultural norms, mostly stemming from the restricted opportunities for face-to-face encounters. The problems mentioned above underscore the necessity of flexible and inventive onboarding strategies.

From the results, in-person onboarding continues to be a fundamental strategy for fostering interpersonal connections, cultivating collaborative efforts, and establishing a shared sense of organisational cohesion. In light of the increasing prevalence of remote work, it is noteworthy that the in-person aspect plays a substantial role in facilitating the comprehension of business values, standards, and expectations among newly recruited employees. This is supported by Powell (2022) and Joshi and Rose (2021), who suggested that in-person interactions play a vital role in fostering robust networks and mentorship relationships, essential for promoting the successful assimilation of newly recruited employees within the organisational context. Nevertheless, the process of modifying conventional in-person onboarding techniques to suit a hybrid work setting necessitates the careful integration of both in-person and remote elements, hence demanding a reassessment of pre-existing strategies.

Regarding training and onboarding tactics, the utilisation of virtual orientation programs, online onboarding platforms, and remote training sessions offers an efficient approach to assist newly hired individuals in comprehending their responsibilities and the organisational context. Mentorship programs play a crucial role in facilitating networking and collaboration, hence enhancing the process of successful

integration within a hybrid work environment. Evaluating the level of employee engagement and satisfaction is crucial in comprehending the efficacy of various onboarding strategies. A high level of engagement indicates a robust dedication to the job and the organisation, whilst a high level of satisfaction denotes employee contentment. This is supported by Groysberg (2020) and Soucie and Patterson (2021), who highlighted that through the systematic observation of these measures, employers can assess the effectiveness of their onboarding and training initiatives in establishing a work environment that is both accommodating and inclusive for newly hired individuals within a hybrid context.

Furthermore, the assessment of regional onboarding techniques underscores the significance of customising onboarding initiatives to correspond with the distinct cultures, values, and expectations of various regions within a hybrid work setting. The implementation of tailored regional onboarding, in conjunction with comprehensive global training, has the potential to acquaint newly hired employees with the organisation's core values and regional intricacies, thereby cultivating a strong sense of affiliation and promoting collaborative efforts across different locations. Evaluating the effectiveness of regional onboarding is crucial in guaranteeing a seamless transfer into a hybrid work environment.

In the context of evaluating online onboarding tactics, the collection of feedback and the implementation of satisfaction surveys among newly hired individuals who have completed the onboarding process provide significant information regarding their encounters and difficulties. This input assists companies in enhancing the quality of online training content, improving platform accessibility, and optimising the degree of support offered. Additionally, it facilitates the evaluation of the assimilation of recently recruited employees into the organisational culture and their level of affiliation with the team. This is supported by Groysberg (2020), who suggested that organisations can consistently enhance their digital onboarding procedures to align with the requirements and anticipations of newly recruited individuals within a hybrid work setting.

In conclusion, to address the research inquiry about the efficacy of strategies and practices for integrating and assimilating new employees in a hybrid work setting, it is imperative to assess the thoroughness and flexibility of onboarding protocols, employee orientation procedures, face-to-face orientation sessions, training endeavours, localised integration processes, and virtual integration methods. A complete evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of new hires can be achieved by analysing several variables such as employee engagement, satisfaction, retention, and integration into the organisational culture within a hybrid work environment.

6.5. Chapter Summary

The primary research objectives of this study were to provide insight into the difficulties encountered by companies in the process of assimilating and integrating newly hired employees within a hybrid work setting following the COVID-19 pandemic. The identified obstacles encompass a range of complexities, encompassing factors such as limited access to training opportunities, decreased morale, feelings of isolation or invisibility, self-doubt experienced by newly hired personnel, the necessity for emotional support, and differing levels of preparedness for work, among other factors.

A notable obstacle that arises in a hybrid work environment pertains to the constrained availability of training opportunities. Implementing remote work might provide challenges in delivering essential training and facilitating skills development for newly hired employees. The efficacy of face-to-face instruction is frequently perceived to surpass that of online alternatives. Hence, it is imperative to prioritise the implementation of inclusive training approaches that effectively address the distinct requirements of hybrid employees. It is imperative for organisations to actively investigate novel methodologies in order to effectively administer training programs, whether in remote or in-person settings.

One notable obstacle is the presence of diminished morale, as implementing hybrid work arrangements may curtail employees' ability to engage in meaningful interactions, participate in conversations, and effectively cooperate. This phenomenon may result in a decline in employee morale due to the absence of customary social

and professional contacts often encountered in a conventional office environment. It is imperative to apply strategies to uphold elevated morale levels among remote and hybrid workers. These strategies encompass the implementation of virtual team-building activities and the cultivation of a robust sense of connection among employees.

The emergence of self-doubt poses a barrier since certain workers may need more confidence to execute tasks autonomously. In a hybrid work setting, promptly obtaining confirmation from supervisors or co-workers may need help due to their potential absence in the actual workspace. Resolving self-doubt necessitates a delicate equilibrium between cultivating self-sufficiency and establishing supportive structures for individuals, including effective lines of communication and easily accessible information.

The secondary aim of the study was to ascertain the techniques and practices businesses utilise to successfully acculturate and integrate new employees within a hybrid work setting. Multiple solutions were discovered, encompassing personnel Onboarding, Onboarding systems, internet Onboarding, and Africa-wide Onboarding. The process of employee Onboarding is of great significance in facilitating the integration of newly hired individuals into an organisation, equipping them with the necessary information and abilities to effectively adjust to their respective positions and the overall functioning of the firm. The comprehensive approach may encompass orientation workshops, training courses, mentorship programs, and job shadowing opportunities.

An efficacious strategy for facilitating the acculturation and integration of newly hired personnel within a hybrid work setting involves implementing comprehensive training and Onboarding programs. Virtual orientation programs, encompassing online Onboarding platforms, remote training sessions, and virtual office tours, have proven to be efficacious approaches in providing new employees with the necessary knowledge and resources to thrive in their respective positions. These methodologies can be modified to suit hybrid work environments, acknowledging the necessity for training approaches conducive to remote work.

The ultimate research aim was to assess the efficacy of these tactics and practices in assimilating and integrating newly hired individuals into a work environment that combines both remote and in-person elements. In conclusion, it is imperative to evaluate the efficacy of staff onboarding techniques and tactics thoroughly. Ensuring the comprehensiveness of onboarding programs is of utmost importance, as they play a vital role in educating newly hired individuals with the requisite skills and knowledge essential for their success in a hybrid work setting. Successful integration is achieved through in-person and remote tactics, encompassing mentorship, training courses, orientation workshops, and job shadowing.

In summary, enterprises must tackle the obstacles and utilise efficient approaches and methodologies in a hybrid work setting to facilitate the smooth integration and assimilation of new employees. The aforementioned complex issues necessitate inventive resolutions that cater to the distinct requirements of individuals working remotely or in hybrid work arrangements, all the while cultivating a feeling of inclusion, confidence, and high morale within the organisational context. The ongoing assessment and adjustment of these tactics are crucial in guaranteeing the sustained achievement of newly recruited employees in a hybrid work environment following the COVID-19 pandemic.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Introduction

The changing working landscape from a traditional in-office work setting into a hybrid work environment motivated the study. That, coupled with progress in technological and digital advances, means that in future, the work environment will evolve to a point where organisations will be challenged to employ new strategies to instil organisational culture in their employees. These challenges on how organisations acculturate and embed their new hires were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

From the results of this study, we noted that the managers and new hires still need to thoroughly consider the challenges presented by the transition to HWE in onboarding employees. We noted from the results that strategies for onboarding in an HWE. These challenges were also compounded from the researcher's perspective because of the lack of empirical literature on the topic of this research – or that literature is in its infancy and is yet to be tested empirically over a reasonable period.

This chapter presents hybrid frameworks and models in development or implementation by organisations such as PWC, EY, and Google. Furthermore, we present a generic hybrid model (HM) that organisations can follow in the development and implementation of their company-specific HM.

7.2. Insight from PWC during the MBA Global Module for Practical Recommendations

The visit to PWC offices in New York was particularly insightful to the research because of the strategies they have developed to deal with the challenges of hybrid working. As a leading consultant, PWC has had to be at the forefront of the hybrid working revolutions to assist their clients with sound advice on the subject matter.

We engage with the PWC Purpose and Inclusion team at their New York office. They have committed to recruiting over 25,000 employees from the black and Latino communities for internal demands and on behalf of their clients in the next decade. Currently, the New York office has about 10,000 employees, but not all of them work there. The office is not capacitated to sit all 10,000 at once, meaning most of them are consulting clients working

at the client location, which lends itself to a perfect example of hybrid working by a highly high-cultured organisation with a large workforce that is globally orientated. For the study, the PWC engagement during the global immersion tour was very insightful from a process perspective that deals with hybrid working.

PWC has used artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatPWC to gamify the learning experience for their new hires. Over time, PWC plans to expand AI learning to the rest of its global workforce 65 000. PWC has embraced AI rapidly following the COVID-19 pandemic, severely impacting its operations. ChatPWC is an internal platform that enhanced the Chat-GPT platform into a more secure, internally focused technology. Currently, 5,000 PWC employees are actively using the ChatPWC platform. According to the PWC, AI is the future of business for them and their clients in enabling clients to be more competitive and adapt to changing work environments, such as the shift to hybrid working.

7.2.1. PWC Strategies for HWE

7.2.1.1. Employee Wellness and Engagement

At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, PWC initially focused on people's safety, which gave them the insight to develop further strategies for employee engagement and wellness, such as regular virtual check-ins like employees sending an emoji that indicates the state of their emotional condition. The emoji is sent live during meetings directly to the employee engagement team, and it is confidential from the rest of the staff, which ensures that the employee can feel that they are in a secure space in the organisation yet working from home.

7.2.1.2. Traditional Methods – Internal Surveys

Internally, PWC conducts regular surveys to do inclusion networks to address the diversity challenges within the organisation. PWC believes that by focusing on employee engagement and being proactive about it, they have a competitive advantage when compared to their peers because only a few of their peers are doing that. In the survey, employees are asked questions like:

        a. *Are you happy at work?*
        b. *Do you need to be at the office?*

c. Are you talking to somebody at work about the challenges you encounter?

7.2.1.3. Digitisation

PWC used AI to gamify learning and training. For example, they initiated the following processes:

i. Videos

How to guide that is available to all employees. These videos assist employees and new hires in navigating the information gap challenges. With a simple search using keywords, employees are exposed to various videos about the information they seek. PWC gamified their HW by hosting events like happy hour on Zoom cooking competitions that were live-streamed. Much creativity outside of the typical work environment came through as employees showed their personality, and this was critical in breaking barriers and building friendships remotely. There were online fitness challenges like push-up competitions to keep staff fit and agile while building camaraderie.

ii. Role's information

Information on individual roles with detailed data, contacts, KPIs and metrics specific to each employee is aggregated and stored in a database that can accessed by the employee on demand.

iii. Technology

At headquarters, PWC has 100 data scientists working on continuously sharpening the AI tools and processes.

The key takeaway from PWC was that HW is a learning curve. It is vital to have an HM that is more dynamic than static. For example, when their metrics indicated low employee engagement, they encouraged employees to do more in-office work, or they did *Video Fridays* that required all employees to turn off their videos at home. However, Video Friday's idea was cancelled after realising that a 10-hour video exposure started creating mental challenges and anxiety for some employees. Although these strategies may appear too broad for a severe organisation, they are deliberately designed to improve

organisational performance and to smooth the onboarding of new hires in the organisation.

7.3. Proposed Hybrid Model Framework

Figure 12. A Proposed Framework for a Hybrid Model

Synthesising the findings of the study with anecdotal input from the interaction with PWC and Google in New York, we came up with a hybrid working framework that we proposed. As the HWE is an evolving phenomenon, the proposed framework is not static but dynamic, nor is it following a linear form but is dependent on what the organisation seeks to achieve, meaning some organisations will be interested in some of the factors of the proposed model not all, and other will consider implementing all of them. In contrast, others will have needs outside of what is proposed in the framework.

7.4. Limitations

With hindsight from the data collected and the output which we analysed and discussed in the preceding chapters, it is evident that the topic of the research required an approach that is different from the one followed from a research design perspective. Ideally, the research design required that we focus on experts in the field of hybrid working, such as

consultants like McKinsey, PWC, and EY. These companies are at the forefront of thinking regarding HWE and have better insights from their interactions with a wide range of clients. The research would have benefitted from extracting information from these institutions (i.e., PWC, EY) instead of talking directly to managers and new hires whose commitment to the research topic may be lacking.

Although the results from this study have enabled the researcher to identify gaps that need to be followed for future research, such as the import of technology and digitisations, the timeframe of this study and deliverables commitment were constrained in pursuing an approach that would have addressed the identified gaps.

7.5.   Conclusion

HWE still needs to be understood based on what the informant shared. While many of the informants may understand its meaning, there needs to be more in understanding its implication and ascertaining its impact on the organisations from the challenges and strategies perspective. Organisations may have been shocked into action by the COVID-19 pandemic; they seemingly have resorted to the old ways of doing business, and those that embrace HWE are generally the big, well-resourced companies such as banks.

The researcher is cognisant that not all organisations can work hybrid; all organisations must try to develop a hybrid working model for those *black-swan* events such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

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9. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Semi-structured Interview Questions – Executives/HR
Managers/Supervisors

Estimated time (25 – 30 minutes)

Interview type: recorded and transcribed

Venue: virtual

Interview questions

1. In your role, how do you perceive the differences between onboarding new hires in a hybrid work setting and using traditional methods?

2. How have you adapted your onboarding strategies to accommodate the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the hybrid work environment?

3. From your perspective, what are the key factors that contribute to successful acculturation and embedding of new hires in the organisation under the hybrid work model?

4. In what ways do you believe remote work impacts the sense of camaraderie and team dynamics for new hires during their onboarding process?

5. How do you assess the effectiveness of onboarding efforts in the hybrid work setting, and what metrics or indicators do you use to gauge their success?

6. Have you noticed any differences in the rate of integration or engagement between new hires who underwent traditional onboarding and those who experienced onboarding in a hybrid work environment?

7. From your observations, how do new hires perceive the company culture and their fit within the organisation under the hybrid work model?

8. What strategies or practices have you found most effective in promoting a sense of belonging and connection for new hires working in a hybrid setting?

9. Have there been any challenges in providing support and mentorship to new hires in a hybrid work environment, and if so, how have you addressed them?

10. How do you envision the future of onboarding and acculturation in a hybrid work environment, and what improvements or changes would you recommend optimizing the process?

Estimated time (25 – 30 minutes)

Interview type: recorded and transcribed

Venue: virtual

Interview questions

1. How would you describe your experience with the onboarding process in the hybrid work environment compared to traditional methods?

2. In what ways do you feel the hybrid work environment has impacted your acculturation into the company culture?

3. Can you identify any specific challenges or benefits you encountered while adapting to the new work arrangements during your onboarding?

4. How has the availability of remote work affected your integration into teams and interactions with colleagues?

5. Have you noticed any differences in the level of support and guidance you received during your onboarding in the hybrid work environment compared to the traditional approach?

6. How do you perceive the importance of face-to-face interactions with colleagues and supervisors in developing a sense of belonging and understanding the company culture?

7. How has the use of technology and virtual tools during onboarding influenced your assimilation into the organisation?

8. Have you encountered any barriers or facilitators that have impacted your ability to feel integrated into the company culture while working in a hybrid environment?

9. Can you share any experiences or examples of how the organisation's efforts to acculturate new hires in the hybrid work setting have been effective or ineffective?

10. In your opinion, what could the company do differently to enhance the onboarding experience and improve the acculturation process for new hires in a hybrid work environment?

APPENDIX 3: Ethical Clearance

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

Ethical Clearance
Approved

Dear Sizolwethu Richard Sindane,

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

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

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

Ethical Clearance Form

Kind Regards

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

APPENDIX 4: Informed Consent Form

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

*I am researching **how organisations assimilate new hires into their culture in a hybrid work environment that emerged post-Covid**.*

*I would like to set up a face-to-face interview with a new hire(s) in your organisation and HR practitioners or manager/supervisor working with new hires. Our interview is expected to last about between 30-min to a 1 hour and will help us **understand how new hires are acculturated and embedded into the organisation**.*

*Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be reported without identifiers., and the **interview is confidential**. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.*

The outcomes of this study will be shared with you to guide your policies and procedures.

*Researcher: **Richy Sindane***   *Research Supervisor: **Prof. Albert Wocke***

*Email: **22962192@mygibs.co.za***   *Email: **wockea@gibs.co.za***

*Phone: **064 750 4306***   *Phone: **082 411 6526***

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: 8 - 8 - 2023

APPENDIX 5: Supervisor-Researcher Agreement

THE STUDENT AND THE SUPERVISOR:

Confirm that we have read and understood this Memorandum of Agreement and agree to accept its content for the duration of the period of study in respect of the degree as specified below.

Name of student:

SIZOLWETHU RICHARD SINDANE

Student number:

22962192

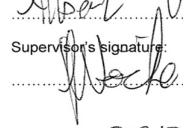Signed at GIBS CAMPUS - ILLOVO on

27 MAY 2023 (date)

Student's signature

....

Name of supervisor: Albert Wocke

....

Supervisor's signature:

....

Signed at GIBS (ILLOVO) on

27 MAY 2023 (date)

The full memorandum of Agreement is available on request from the author of this report.