

The impact of mandatory work from home on employee engagement

20803002

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.

02 November 2021

Abstract

Employee engagement was shown to have positive effects on organisational performance and business sustainability. Engaged employees function as organisational human capital resources which benefits organisations through increased productivity, quality of services and products produced, while saving them expenses through decreased absenteeism. Flexible work arrangements, which supports working from home, has also been found by scholars to positively influence employee engagement. This study sought to understand how a mandatory work from home context that was influenced by the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic impacted employee engagement.

A qualitative research approach was adopted to explore the common drivers of engagement during the lockdown period. The exploratory nature of the study allowed the researcher to gain new and deeper insights into the research problem. Respondents were selected from four different industries in which relevant parts of their organisations were mandated to work from home for the duration of all lockdown levels. All 16 interviews, four managers and 12 employees, were conducted online. Microsoft Teams with enabled video and transcription was utilised to best represent a face-to-face interactive interview. Thematic analysis was thereafter employed to analyse the interviews.

The research study largely found that mandatory work from home provided a conducive environment for employee engagement during unconventional circumstances which revealed positive employee engagement outcomes. Mandatory work from home had a positive impact on employee engagement by supporting the perceived flexible work arrangements that were afforded to employees. This supported positive work-life balance of employees which was noted as an enabler of employee engagement. The study also proposed practical recommendations for organisations to improve employee engagement during mandatory work from home. As the longevity of this situation and the uncertainty around Covid-19 remain elusive, this can be utilised as suggestions on improving employee engagement while organisations continue to mandate their staff to work from home.

The research study was limited to industries within South Africa during lockdown levels one to five of the Covid-19 period.

Key Words

Employee engagement, Mandatory work from home, Flexible work arrangements,
Work-life balance

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.

Shanelle Melissa Padayachee

02 November 2021

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Key Words	ii
Declaration	iii
List of Abbreviations	ix
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research Problem	1
1.1 Background to the Research Problem	1
1.2 Research Problem and Rationale	2
1.3 Research Scope	3
1.4 Research Purpose	4
1.5 Brief Outline of the Research.....	5
1.6 Conclusion.....	5
Chapter 2: Literature Review	6
2.1 Introduction.....	6
2.2 Employee Engagement	6
2.2.1 Employee Engagement Performance and Productivity Factors	8
2.2.2 Employee Engagement and Company Practices viewed through Social Exchange Theory.....	9
2.2.3 Employee Engagement and Employee Well-being	10
2.2.4 Employee Engagement and Organisational Commitment.....	10
2.2.5 Employee Engagement and Organisational Culture	11
2.3 Knowledge Workers.....	12
2.4 The Traditional Office Workplace.....	13
2.5 Voluntary Work from Home	13
2.5.1 Voluntary Work from Home and Work-life Balance	14

2.6	Mandatory Work from Home and the Covid-19 Pandemic.....	16
2.6.1	Employee Well-being, Lifestyle and Mandatory Work from Home.....	17
2.6.2	Productivity and Mandatory Work from Home.....	19
2.7	Conclusion.....	20
Chapter 3: Research Questions		21
3.1	Introduction.....	21
3.2	Research Question 1	21
3.3	Research Question 2	21
3.4	Research Question 3.....	22
3.5	Research Question 4.....	22
3.6	Conclusion.....	22
Chapter 4: Research Methodology		23
4.1	Introduction.....	23
4.2	Research Methodology and Design.....	23
4.3	Population.....	24
4.4	Unit of Analysis.....	25
4.5	Sampling Method and Size.....	26
4.6	Data Collection Instrument	28
4.7	Data Gathering Process	29
4.7.1	Pilot Interview	29
4.7.2	Main Interviews.....	29
4.8	Analysis Approach.....	30
4.9	Quality Controls.....	31
4.10	Ethics.....	32
4.11	Limitations	32
4.12	Conclusion.....	33
Chapter 5: Results.....		34

5.1	Introduction.....	34
5.2	Results for Research Question 1	34
5.2.1	The state of organisational practices during mandatory work from home	34
5.3	Results for Research Question 2	40
5.3.1	Business Continuity	40
5.4	Results for Research Question 3	44
5.4.1	Negative impact on communication during mandatory work from home	44
5.5	Results for Research Question 4	50
5.5.1	Impact of work-life balance on employee engagement	50
5.6	Overview of Results.....	59
5.7	Conclusion.....	60
Chapter 6: Discussion of Results		61
6.1	Introduction.....	61
6.2	Research Question 1 - The state of organisational practices during mandatory work from home	62
6.2.1	Positive Organisational Support.....	62
6.2.2	Positive Organisational Culture	63
6.2.3	Absence of Organisational Policies.....	63
6.3	Research Question 2 - Business Continuity.....	64
6.3.1	Prioritisation of Employee Safety	64
6.3.2	Increased Productivity.....	65
6.3.3	Firm Organisational Commitment	66
6.4	Research Question 3 - The negative impact on communication during mandatory work from home	66
6.4.1	More Rigid Workday Structure	66
6.4.2	Enhanced Collaborative Relations	67

6.4.3	Importance of Physical Exchange of Information	67
6.5	Research Question 4 - Impact of work-life balance on employee engagement	68
6.5.1	Benefits and Drawbacks of Remote Work.....	68
6.5.2	Adjustment to Employee Lifestyle	69
6.5.3	Perceived Flexible Work Arrangements	70
6.6	Improvement of Employee Engagement during Mandatory Work from Home	72
6.6.1	Fair Practice through Policy Creation.....	73
6.6.2	Providing Self-management Tools	74
6.6.3	Facilitating Responsible Interaction	74
6.6.4	Improving Online Etiquette.....	75
6.7	Conclusion.....	75
Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations.....		76
7.1	Introduction.....	76
7.2	Principal Conclusions	77
7.2.1	Understanding how Organisations Engaged Employees and the Perceived Benefits they encountered	77
7.2.2	The Optimal Work from Home Conditions and Determination of Mandatory Work from Home Drawbacks	78
7.3	Practical Contribution.....	79
7.3.1	Improving Employee Engagement.....	79
7.4	Contribution to Literature	80
7.5	Implications for Management and other relevant Stakeholders	80
7.6	Limitations of the Research	81
7.7	Suggestions for Future Research	82
7.8	Conclusion.....	83
References.....		84

Appendix 1: Consistency Matrix.....	91
Appendix 2: Respondent Consent Form.....	92
Appendix 3: Interview Guide for Managers that were involved in implementing mandatory Work from Home	93
Appendix 4: Interview Guide for Employees that were that were mandated to Work from Home	94
Appendix 5: Ethical Clearance Approval.....	95
Appendix 6: Codebook - ATLAS.ti	96

List of Abbreviations

CMC Computer-mediated communication
FWA Flexible work arrangement
ICT Information and communications technology

List of Tables

Table 1: Respondent Breakdown

List of Figures

Figure 1: Data Saturation Evaluation of New Codes Generated per Respondent
Figure 2: Consolidated Results for Research Question 1
Figure 3: Consolidated Results for Research Question 2
Figure 4: Consolidated Results for Research Question 3
Figure 5: Consolidated Results for Research Question 4
Figure 6: Summary of Influences and Associations of Results
Figure 7: Framework: Situation Analysis and Improving Employee Engagement during Mandatory Work from Home

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research Problem

The aim of this research was to explore the influence of mandatory work from home, instigated by the Covid-19 pandemic, on employee engagement. The research was conducted through a qualitative study with a focus on the human resource management field. The justification for the business and academic need for the research was highlighted which was then focused into the research problem and purpose.

1.1 Background to the Research Problem

The Covid-19 pandemic initiated mandatory work from home during the year 2020. Organisations were instructed to heed the government directive of social distancing to mitigate against the spread of the virus (Dingel & Nieman, 2020). As such, employees that previously worked from a traditional workplace, namely, an office setting, were mandated to work from home as a response to facilitate productivity and business continuity. Face-to-face interactions were replaced with the use of technology as a resource to communicate with colleagues, undertake meetings and execute decision-making during this fragile time (Purushotham, 2020).

Sustaining superior organisational performance during uncertain economic conditions is paramount to the success of a business. Organisations have identified the value of actively engaged human capital resources in addition to the tangible assets that they possess (Shuck, Adelson, & Reio, 2017). According to Mehrzi and Singh (2016), employee engagement has been positively linked to the productivity of an employee as well as the performance of the organisation thereby providing a competitive advantage. The benefit of having engaged employees and improving engagement factors has therefore been a topical subject within the human resource management field (Saks, 2021; Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

Engaged employees benefitted business through driving the organisational strategy and willingly living out the values of the organisation while remaining loyal. The emotional attachment formed by employees with their organisations culminated in organisational commitment which enhanced their passion toward their work roles, enabling them to surpass their expected outcomes (Sun, 2019).

The balance of work priorities with family requirements that was encouraged through work flexibility was cited as a contributing factor of positive employee engagement (Wiedeman & Hofmeyr, 2020). Work from home, a category of flexible work arrangement (FWA), was introduced by organisations to promote work-life balance, reduce employee absenteeism, and decrease building lease costs. This construct gained importance during the global Covid-19 pandemic as the context shifted to include protection of employees and a deliberate effort by businesses to continue economic activity and thus remain sustainable during the lockdown period of the pandemic through mandating large proportions of the workforce to work from home (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garces, 2020).

Research has confirmed that traditional work from home flexibility, which was mainly a voluntary notion, was supported by caring organisational human resource practices (Saks, 2021). This provided employees with choices that influenced when, where and for how long they performed their work-related duties. It has proven beneficial to a happy workforce and improved employee engagement (Bal & De Lange, 2015; Cohen & Gosai, 2016; Saks, 2021; Wiedeman & Hofmeyr, 2020). During the pandemic, under mandatory work from home conditions, employees had to contend with isolation, multi-tasking of domestic and work-related duties, exhaustion, and home-schooling their children, for those who were parents. Work from home under mandatory conditions was a consequence of the change in the organisational internal environment due to the pandemic and, as a driver of employee engagement, remained uncertain (Purushotham, 2020).

1.2 Research Problem and Rationale

In the business context, organisational longevity is positively affiliated with engaged employees. This, in turn, provided stakeholder value in the form of return on equity (ROE) for the organisation which manifested through the efforts and productivity of their employees (Osbourne & Hammoud, 2017; Mehrzi & Singh, 2016).

According to Sun (2019), social exchange theory indicated that employees that were well treated and felt valued by their employers reciprocated by enhancing their productivity. This contributed to organisational competitive advantage which was an important factor of business sustainability (Sun, 2019). The Gallup (2021) meta-

analysis results relating to the relationship between workforce engagement and organisational outcomes concluded that organisations more than doubled their odds of success when they scored in the top half on employee engagement as compared to those who scored in the bottom half.

While the benefits of engaged employees have been realised, disengagement remains prevalent with only 22% of the global workforce and 9% of the South African workforce found to be actively engaged at work (Gallup, 2021). As individual and business performance has been shown to improve with more engaged employees, the results pose a threat to business sustainability as disengaged employees are more prone to absenteeism, working unsafely, contribute to low quality standards and tend to be more unproductive. As there is such a high level of disengagement amongst South Africans under conventional circumstances which already poses a risk to business performance, evaluation of employee engagement under unconventional circumstances is warranted.

This research will aim to supplement the growing body of academic literature on the influences of employee engagement, establish whether mandatory work from home is an enabler or limiting factor of employee engagement, and understand how mandatory work from home impacted workforce structures and jobs within various industries.

1.3 Research Scope

Organisational practices were found to be contributing factors toward the degree of engagement of the workforce (Warrick, 2017; Gupta & Sharma 2016). Dingel and Nieman (2020) explained that organisations across various industries were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and large proportions of the organisational workforce was mandated to work from home. The study will address the degree to which the conventional drivers of employee engagement, namely, company practices, quality of life and work role attributes affected mandatory work from home conditions (Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

The research was conducted on the selected parts of four different industries which did not allow its employees back to the traditional office space, namely, the financial

services, supply chain, education, and entertainment sectors. The research was centered around the experiences of South African employees and managers from the stipulated industries who have had to work from home post the level five lockdown.

1.4 Research Purpose

This research study aimed to explore whether employee engagement had deteriorated or improved in light of the Covid-19 pandemic when mandatory work from home gained prominence and became a reality for many employees. The findings will benefit organisations as they will be in a better position to entrench employee engagement practices during large-scale disruptive events. The study will enable organisations to leverage the findings toward the improvement of operational effectiveness, organisational efficiency and provide insights into what meaning this has on future opportunities to work from home post Covid-19.

Given that voluntary work from home was positively correlated to FWAs and work-life balance, favouring employee engagement, the researcher aims to further investigate the impact that a mandatory work from home situation has on employee engagement, and to identify any potential factors that could improve employee engagement under this construct.

Research Objectives:

- To understand how organisations efficiently engaged employees to facilitate strong business performance under unprecedented work conditions and the employee engagement benefits they acknowledged through implementing mandatory work from home.
- To explore the optimal work from home conditions that facilitate engaged employees.
- To determine the drawbacks of mandatory work from home conditions and understand the approach that organisations can take to optimise employee engagement under different work environments.

1.5 Brief Outline of the Research

Section one provided an introduction to the research study which emphasised the background of the research problem and the significance of the study. Section two will contain a literature review in which the constructs of employee engagement and mandatory work from home are critically evaluated from current literature to gain more understanding of the research problem. The insights gained from the literature review will be used as a guide to formulate the research questions which will be consolidated in section three. The research questions will then be used as a guide to create the proposed methodology in section four. The appendices will contain the consistency matrix, respondent consent form, interview guides, ethical clearance approval letter, and the ATLAS.ti codebook.

1.6 Conclusion

This research study will aim to explore whether mandatory work from home impacted employee engagement for employees that were mandated to work from home during the global Covid-19 pandemic. The rationale of business performance and sustainability will be at the core of understanding if a change in the traditional organisational internal environment, to working from home, hindered or heightened engagement amongst its employees.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Employee engagement, as a driver of business sustainability and stakeholder value proved valuable from a business and academic point of view. Engaged employees were viewed as a human capital resource to achieve business performance. The antecedents of this construct have been widely researched yet motivational factors are constantly unearthed (Lemon, 2019).

The succeeding literature review delved into the conflict and congruence within the constructs of employee engagement and mandatory work from home to facilitate better understanding of the research problem. The suitability of employees and jobs that could be done from home, home-schooling, work-family conflict, and support posed a challenging environment for both employees and employers (Dingel & Nieman, 2020; Wiederman & Hofmeyr, 2020; Kramer & Kramer, 2020). Employee engagement is driven by various factors, but this study will focus on company practices, quality of life and work role attributes. Social exchange theory will be used as a lens to investigate company practices that were carried out or created to enhance the mandatory work from home directive in return for better engaged employees. The basis for this study in assessing the impact of mandatory work from home on employee engagement will be assessed from FWAs and work-life balance which supported positive effects on employee engagement through voluntary work from home. This study focused on workers that were office-based before the Covid-19 lockdown period, who had to work from home post the level five lockdown, to determine if the conventional drivers of employee engagement were still relevant after alterations to the place of work of the employee was made (Purushotham, 2020). This section will aid in the formulation of the research questions.

2.2 Employee Engagement

The term employee engagement has had varying and often conflicting definitions over the years (Shen & Jiang, 2019). It been conceptualised from the perspectives of organisational versus individual engagement, hard versus soft factors, enduring versus fluctuating factors and well-being versus engagement aspects (Lemon, 2019). Initially it was coined by Khan (1990) as the emotional, physical and cognitive

state that organisational members display toward their work-related duties (Lemon, 2019). Subsequent definitions have tried to restrict the scope of the definition. Shuck et al. (2017) focused more on the cerebral aspects of employee engagement and defined it as a positive psychological state where employees were actively present around their vocational responsibilities. Further studies, however, have not continued along this vein of thought, but have moved back to more holistic definitions. Shen and Jiang (2019), for example, define employee engagement as the enactment of an employee's self at work, often citing Khan (1990), in their paper.

According to Lemon (2019), the various conceptualisations and definitions of employee engagement lent to the incongruity within it during operationalisation. Anthony-McMann, Ellinger, Astakhova, and Halbesleben (2017), mentioned that employee engagement remained an elusive construct and that there was a risk of it being too generalised because of the lack of consistent understanding of the topic. This was in agreement with Gupta and Sharma (2016) who stated that employee engagement should be evaluated more deeply to justify its importance in the corporate sphere. They argued that employee engagement was an integration of various behavioural constituents such as commitment, psychological presence, positive attitude and discretionary effort. Saks (2021) summed up the various definitions as a multidimensional motivational state in which the full self of the employee was invested in a work role or task. This is the same definition for employee engagement that will be used in this research paper.

In addition to the variations in the definition of employee engagement, many factors have been identified and studied to understand the degree to which they affect employee engagement. Gupta and Sharma (2016) as well as Saks (2021) argued that non-financial motivators of employee engagement were better drivers of the construct than financial motivators and that differences in work culture lent to the degree of importance of specific engagement drivers which were endemic to an organisation. Additionally, Sun (2019) added that an employee's individual performance, factored through organisational commitment, as well as the performance of an organisation, was positively correlated to employee engagement.

The influencing factors of employee engagement, namely, company practices viewed through social exchange theory, organisational commitment, organisational culture and work-life balance, which are supported in the literature are summarised to facilitate the comprehension of mandatory work from home on employee engagement (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Sun, 2019; Saks (2021).

2.2.1 Employee Engagement Performance and Productivity Factors

The trend of rapid innovation and constant change to remain competitive within business has oriented the traditional proficiency of employees toward their capability of adapting to novel organisational challenges. Engaged employees were found to benefit organisations during those times because of their dedication and heightened energy as compared to employees that were not engaged (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). This was supported by Palvalin, van der Voort, and Jylhä (2017) who further noted that employee self-management abilities were pivotal in individual and team productivity outputs. Consequently, the quality of work produced at both levels had also shown signs of improvement through this practice. As more engaged employees contributed more toward individual and organisational performance, it was observed that a healthier workforce was required to effectively maintain and grow performance levels. The productivity outputs of employees were argued to improve when issues of seasonal allergies, stress, and depression were properly treated. Caring for children or other adults were also related to fluctuations in an employee's productivity (Burton, Chen, Xingquan, & Schultz, 2017).

Organisational climates that presented the employee with purpose, a sense of challenge and relevance encouraged them to fully invest themselves in extra-role performance behaviours (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). Reijseger, Peeters, Taris, and Schaufeli (2017) were in agreement with this and added that more engaged employees demonstrated both in-role and extra-role performance outcomes. They emphasised that there was a positive relationship between employees that were engaged and organisational performance benefits which was mediated by open-mindedness from both the employee and employer perspective.

2.2.2 Employee Engagement and Company Practices viewed through Social Exchange Theory

Engaged employees benefited organisations through positive effects such as working harder and smarter to attain performance excellence and the overall organisational mission of business excellence (Channa & Sangeeta, 2020). The study by Shuck et al. (2017) supported the notion that nuances within employee engagement was explored through social exchange theory.

According to Sun (2019), social exchange theory highlighted that the relationship between employers and employees was centred on reciprocity. It was underpinned on the relationships formed between organisations, groups and individuals therefore the degree of engagement differed amongst the variables. Employees with raised levels of engagement and organisational commitment were those that were well treated and felt valued by their employers through fair practice and procedures (Sun, 2019). The outcomes from the paper by Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu (2018) further highlighted that there was a need to review traditional social exchange theory application in relation to modern exchange relationships in the workplace that addressed work-family conflict.

Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart and Adis (2017) found that employees went over and above their normal duties thereby enhancing their job-related efforts when their perception of organisational support was heightened. Reader, Mearns, Lopes and Kuha (2017) concurred with this and found a positive relationship around the activities that organisations utilised to support employees' well-being regarding organisational citizen behaviour, which was related to duties outside of their contractual agreement.

The work from home set-up related to the modern workplace set-up, encompassed digitisation, in which leadership support was paramount due to the absence of face-to-face communication. Organisational exchange in the form of employee support, through a focus on employee well-being, fair practice, policies, structures, and work-family conflict will be examined in this study to facilitate the understanding of the degree of engagement of employees that were mandated to work from home, as well

as the perceived employee engagement benefits that were acknowledged by implementing mandatory work from home.

2.2.3 Employee Engagement and Employee Well-being

Employee well-being was defined as a holistic view on the mental and physical health of the employee due to the characteristics of working life. It included the employee's sense of feeling safe during their employment, the type of environment in which they operated and their outlook on their work roles (Packirisamy, Meenakshy, & Jagannathan, 2017).

Sivapragasam and Raya (2017) noted that organisations recognised the well-being of their employees as a key factor in the long-term success of the company. This was elaborated on by Guidetti, Conservo, Loera, and Viotti (2018) who reasoned that the early onset of organisational change processes resulted in less engaged employees and an increase in the burnout levels of employees. Burnout levels affected younger employees more, as they had the need to work harder and longer hours due to fear of their job security as a result of downsizing, were more likely to feel less integrated within the organisation, and were more prone to feeling more stressed because of insecurities around their ability to manage their job roles (Packirisamy et al., 2017). It was concluded that organisational support mitigated workplace stress which favoured employee engagement and organisational performance (Sivapragasam & Raya, 2017; Packirisamy et al., 2017; Guidetti et al., 2018).

2.2.4 Employee Engagement and Organisational Commitment

The study by Nazir and UI Islam (2017) defined organisational commitment as the extent to which employees felt proud to be part of an organisation thereby doing their best to input their energy into the success of the business. McCormick and Donohue (2019) broadened this definition and differentiated between two forms of organisational commitment, normative and affective, related to the embeddedness of an employee to their organisation. Normative commitment was the obligatory need to stay within an organisation while affective commitment was the emotional attachment of an employee to their organisation, corresponding to the view of Nazir and UI Islam (2017). Eisenberger, Rockstuhl, Shoss, Wen, and Dulebohn (2019)

went further and created an ordinal relationship between normative and affective commitment. They posited that the exchange of organisational rewards and materialistic gains for an employee's time, loyalty and effort was secondary to the employees perception of favourable treatment by their organisations and the emotional connetations related with affective organisational commitment.

For the purpose of this paper, the researcher will not make the ordinal assumption between normative and affective organisational commitment. The relative importance of these factors will be determined by the outcome of the study later in the paper. The relevance of organisational commitment in relation to employee engagement will attempt to understand the extent to which employees felt proud to be part of their organisation during the lockdown periods when they worked from home and which factors contributed to the gratitude that they felt.

2.2.5 Employee Engagement and Organisational Culture

An important factor to consider in this study is the strength of an organisations culture and its impact on employee engagement. Organisational culture was defined as the observations made by employees which generated the skeletal framework of opinions, anticipations and values formed (Mehrzi & Singh, 2016).

According to Warrick (2017), organisational culture influenced the productivity of the workforce and the performance of the company and differed between and within organisations. While Chatman and O'Reilly (2016) agreed that cultural ideals that were aligned with decision making and organisational strategy fostered good business results, they identified that coordinating the tasks of employees required a certain degree of control through the assessment of goals and feedback mechanisms. Formal control systems such as performance management, financial controls, and product planning, while effective for employee incentives and compliance, had the effect of organisational rigidity when extensively used. Reis, Trullen and Story (2016) agreed that organisational cultures that fostered too much of control over their employees created a lack of trust, thereby negatively affecting authentic employees and employee engagement.

Effective implementation of organisational change was reliant on the sincerity of the commitment by management and the general workforce. Unaccommodating organisational culture to change posed a threat to employee motivation and hence negatively affected employee engagement (Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). This section will aim to unearth the systems, processes and routines that were either maintained or created to foster positive organisational culture.

2.3 Knowledge Workers

Knowledge workers are seen to be vital to an organisation as they contributed to a material impact on the performance of the organisation. Their value add to the organisation was through their knowledge and intellect instead of through physical labour contributions. The job titles of such employees are related to that of office workers. These include, but are not limited to, accountants, administrators, consultants, and lawyers (Moussa, Bright, & Varua, 2017).

van Laar, van Deursen, van Dijk, and de Haan (2017) argued that the knowledge worker base that formed the knowledge society should possess the discrete skill of digital competence whereby technology had the ability to mobilise traditional skills toward that of the developing digital environment. Moussa et al. (2017) were critical that the work design of knowledge workers was well structured and suited their job title to promote employee productivity. Elements of organisational context related to the employee work characteristics should also be included. In addition to this, Tate, Lartey, and Randall (2019) contributed that traditional face-to-face communication efforts have been re-directed toward that of computer-mediated communication (CMC). This nature of communication facilitated real-time and immediate contact with colleagues, vendors, customers and business allies, globally. CMC was found to provide an engaging focus through organised patterns and random developments which encompassed elements of unpredictability, and creativity. It was concluded that the evolving way in which work can be facilitated through information and communications technology (ICT) favoured remote work of employees and the decentralisation of decision making while altering the manner in which knowledge workers socially interacted (van Laar et al., 2017). The support of knowledge workers during remote work through communication and interaction with management and

colleagues also positively supported employee engagement efforts (Tate et al., 2019).

2.4 The Traditional Office Workplace

Office workplaces prior to Covid-19 represented a formal way of working that encompassed disciplined work times, punctuality, rigidity, and competitiveness between colleagues and departments. An advantage of this type of set-up was that it was conducive to employees thinking in line with conducting work alone from a physical office to aid productivity (Kumar & Aithal, 2016; Kang & Sang, 2017).

The transformation of physical work to automation in various industries had heightened the need for soft skills, such as social interactions and communication of employees, to be developed to ensure that job security was maintained as automation could not easily duplicate this skill. It allowed employees to remain relevant in an ever-changing work environment (Steele, 2016). Communication in the form of non-verbal gestures helped to convey the real meaning behind an individual's words while active listening facilitated providing appropriate responses and engagement between employees in a conversation. The physical face time between individuals in the office mitigated feelings of loneliness and isolation (Purushotham, 2020). Bonaccio, O'Reilly, O'Sullivan, and Chiochio (2016) determined that non-verbal interactions aided a more holistic understanding of life within an organisation. This was not limited to camaraderie which evoked workplace efficiency, collaboration, and genuine enjoyment as a result of the bonds and trust that employees developed through their time spent together. Additionally, Kang and Sung (2017) concluded that good internal organisational communication at the workplace fostered relationship building that led to more engaged employees and positive organisational performance.

2.5 Voluntary Work from Home

According to Kubicek and Tement (2016), historical organisations considered an ideal employee to be one that was highly responsive, dedicated and always willing to work. The expectancy from employees was that their work life was prioritised over their private life for organisations to possess a competitive advantage. Delanoije, Verbruggen, and Germeys (2019) argued that employees that favoured their home

based activities, described as heightened home protection preference, experienced more conflict from the home environment which encroached on their work time while Dingel and Nieman (2020) suggested that work from home blurred the lines of the work-home boundaries which resulted in employees that worked longer hours and posed the threat of being over-worked. Under these circumstances, Kubicek and Tement (2016) noted that strict boundaries relating to work and home constructs was beneficial in times of heightened work intensification.

In support of the idea that improved employee engagement can be achieved while working from home, Beckmann, Cornelissen, and Kräkel (2017) postulated that employees who were intrinsically motivated were able to show more autonomy over managing their working hours which resulted in a sense of control for the employee. The benefit of self-managed working hours was viewed in a positive light and contributed to improved employee engagement (Beckmann et. al., 2017). In addition, global workforce trends and characteristics have altered due to organisational innovation practices, employee friendly policies and technological advancements (Lakshmi, Nigam, & Mishra, 2017). The benefit of work from home allowed employees to perform their work-related tasks while fulfilling their home duties thus positively affecting employee engagement from a caring human resource practice perspective (Delanoetje et al., 2019; Saks 2021).

Voluntary work from home was therefore viewed as an enabling factor of employee engagement under conventional circumstances. The voluntary nature and the choice that employees had to select their place of work through FWAs was therefore significantly different to the compelling nature of work from home that was brought about by the pandemic. The impact of mandatory work from home on employee engagement is therefore not clearly understood for previous full-time office workers (Purushotham, 2020). In the study, a variety of industries and perspectives will be examined to help shed light on this relationship.

2.5.1 Voluntary Work from Home and Work-life Balance

Work-life balance was an initial response by organisations to facilitate female employee well-being but later expanded to include all employees to foster employee engagement (Cohen & Gosai, 2016). A component of work-life balance was FWAs

which comprised of flexitime and flexplace, such as work from home (Wiedeman & Hofmeyr, 2020). These constructs provided employees with greater control regarding suitable arrangements toward performing their work duties and yielded a positive relationship with employee engagement (Wiedeman & Hofmeyr, 2020). Bal and De Lange (2015) defined flexible arrangements in the workplace as an opportunity that employees have to influence their choice in where, when and the duration that they engage in work-related duties. Saks (2021) concurred that work-life balance and FWAs heightened employee engagement. The study added that organisations that created a sense of caring for their employees through human resource practices, created an environment in which employees reciprocated by displaying their concern for the organisation through being more engaged in their functions. According to Bal and De Lange (2015), FWAs positively influenced employee engagement for younger employees while it enhanced the performance of aged employees.

According to Cohen and Gosai (2016), the management of job stress was attributed to work-life balance for better work engagement. Although work from home was valued from an employee perspective, Mas and Pallais (2017) postulated that it was not always worker friendly. Cohen and Gosai (2016) suggested that organisational support mitigated against negative associations related to flexible work scheduling.

FWAs were categorised into individual constructs or grouped together to form bundles (Avgoustaki & Bessa, 2019). The study concluded that when FWA bundles favoured either the employee or employer, productivity was negatively affected. This was also in agreement with Sun (2019), and, Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu (2018), in which they argue that social exchanges that were based on reciprocity favoured productivity and engagement. To further add to the complexity, findings from Dingel and Nieman (2020) suggested that the productivity of employees varied based on their place of work.

As productivity was found to be a measure of employee engagement and FWAs was found to positively enhanced employee engagement through its motivational factors, further investigation around the individual construct of work from home in a mandatory setting could add to the depth of research in the debate between productive and visibly present employees (Dingel & Nieman, 2020; Gallup, 2021).

2.6 Mandatory Work from Home and the Covid-19 Pandemic

Given the global COVID-19 pandemic, many companies compelled employees to work from home due to regulatory travel restrictions and protocol around social distancing to facilitate the safety of employees and to limit the spread of the virus (Dingel & Nieman, 2020). Work from home therefore took on a mandatory role which was considerably different to the choice that employees previously had during selecting when, where and for how long they worked through FWAs. Organisations had to alter their internal environment to suit the change in the variation of work. Unconventional conditions such as work from home during the pandemic had the ability to affect the productivity of employees through fatigue, communication gaps, network failures and isolation (Purushotham, 2020).

Various constructs facilitated or constrained the ability to work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. Practically suitable occupations linked to work from home were limited by the lack of employees to proper internet access (Sanchez, Parra, Ozden, Rijkers, Viollaz and Winkler, 2021). Channa and Sangeeta (2020) concurred with that finding. They proposed that organisational commitment was heightened for employees that worked from home when organisational support was provided for in the form of video conference team building sessions, online counselling, timeous online work alignment sessions, online training and webinars, as well as competitions and appreciation sessions (Channa & Sangeeta, 2020).

Dingel and Nieman (2020) concluded that lower income economies had a fewer number of jobs that employees were eligible to carry out from their homes, hence the range of jobs that could be undertaken from home across different occupations should be evaluated for economic viability. Further to this, Kramer and Kramer (2020) claimed that employees with varied levels of work from home experience had to adapt to the new normal and work under those conditions. They suggested that certain jobs were better suited than others to work from home. According to Purushotham (2020), the place of work of an employee was a motivational factor to remain interested in their roles. Their study proposed that employee engagement and employee well-being levels should be evaluated after alteration of the organisational environment. This was supported by Yuan, Ye, and Zhong (2021) who

pointed out that further investigation into large scale events that brought about disruption should be studied to add to the literature.

2.6.1 Employee Well-being, Lifestyle and Mandatory Work from Home

The onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic propelled organisations to mandate their employees to work from home on a full time basis to encourage safety and reduce the concentration risk amongst employees (Xiao, Becerik-Gerber, Lucas, & Roll, 2021). Waizenegger, McKenna, Cai, and Bendz (2020) further added that power distances disappeared between knowledge workers and their colleagues during enforced work from home that was facilitated through technological affordances. Similarly to technological affordances, which can be considered as a resource to conduct work duties remotely, organisational policies that supported FWAs during mandatory work from home were seen to benefit employees with regard to creating and enforcing strict boundaries with employers and family. This was seen to have improved employee well-being through availing more time and energy for employees to manage their demands across many spheres (Shifrin & Michel, 2021).

Organisational policies related to work-life balance of employees that worked remotely have been found to narrowly define the lifestyle component. While these policies marginally favoured employees with children and family responsibilities, it was found to negatively affect the well-being of single employees or employees without children. The perception of the fairness of these policies was deemed to be skewed and not comprehensive enough (Wilkinson, Tomlinson, & Gardiner, 2018). In addition to this, Ganster, Rosen, and Fisher (2018) concluded that nuances such as age, gender, and working conditions of employees affected the outcome of working longer hours on employee well-being. This was disputed by Xiao et al. (2021) who highlighted that while employees' health against the novel Coronavirus was prioritised during mandatory work from home, it was apparent that employees struggled with maintaining complete mental and physical well-being. Organisational policies that supported FWAs were also used as a tool to promote overall employee well-being and have become more prevalent during the onset of Covid-19 (Shifrin & Michel, 2021). Mandatory work from home presented well-being challenges to the employee in the form of improper diet, missed interaction with colleagues, shifts in working hours, and distractions from the home environment. Wilkinson et al. (2018)

further highlighted that the functioning of an organisation could be compromised when policy design to support work-life balance was created with a narrow outlook.

The onset of Covid-19 altered the social structures and lifestyle of knowledge workers that instantly became remote workers. Matli (2020) noted that the inequality in South Africa provided further divide regarding access to resources and poor infrastructure in certain areas. Additionally, employees took on the added stress of working at odd hours to remain productive during power cuts which affected South Africa through lockdown. It rendered remote work unsuccessful for long periods of time. Clark et al. (2021) was in agreement with this. They reflected that family structures and the management thereof were deemed pivotal in the ability to manage work deliverables as the home structure sometimes comprised of extended family members that resided with together. Having multiple working family members within the same residence meant that certain resources had to be shared and that household duties, including child-minding, had to be prioritised. The build-up of work as a consequence of poorly managed social and family structures resulted in more overworked employees that did not manage their lifestyles well (Matli, 2020). Further to this, working mothers encountered more of this burden as compared to working fathers. Gender disparities with disproportionate work-life duties posed more of an effect on the way in which women scheduled their time during mandatory work from home which led to them experiencing psychological distress (Clark, et al., 2021).

Higher stress levels were also noticed when digital platforms were overused by employees which bordered on a life-to-work benefit due to the blurring of boundaries concerning private lifestyles with that of work life. The dire need for employees to remain relevant and visible impacted the way in which online tools were utilised, sometimes giving the false pretence that it replaced physical interactions (Schwartz, Scherrer, Hohmann, Brugger, & Nunez-Jimenez, 2020). This impediment on employees' lifestyles was exacerbated because of unclear guidelines from organisations on how digital platforms should be used appropriately. Self-control depletion through constant use of online tools was found to be problematic when employees needed to unwind and focus on family aspects. The resulting consequence was that employees used connectivity counterintuitively. Employees were found to withdraw and remain elusive instead of effectively staying connected

with other individuals which led to disengaged employees. (Chadee, Ren, & Tang, 2020). Xiao et al. (2021) concluded that mandatory work from home resulted in disruptions of individual lifestyle routines. As such, employees lacked the discipline to follow exercise routines and proper diets and the overall well-being of employees was found to decline. They argued that countering psychological and fitness related issues while remote working took place through regular breaks that included playing with children and regular physical activity. This assisted the human body with producing endorphins that supported overall well-being.

2.6.2 Productivity and Mandatory Work from Home

Although FWAs were a growing trend for knowledge workers in recent years, the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic had left many organisations unprepared when they had to mandate their employees to work from home and support business continuity. Many organisations that were able to hit the ground running had experimented with FWAs and were aware of the factors that constituted productive employees when they operated remotely. The freedom for an employee to plan their time was viewed as an advantage for employees that worked from home. Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė, and Goštautaitė (2019) emphasised that employee productivity was a contentious topic for employees that worked remotely. They argued that employee productivity was improved as a result of them functioning during the hours they deemed most productive. This had the possibility of fluctuating due to poor social interaction, distractions, and lower perceived support from management. Huls, Sajjad, Kanters, Hakkart-van Roijen, and Brouwer (2021) agreed with this outcome as they found that work from home distractions decreased productivity levels, especially for working parents that had small children.

According to Seva, Tejero, and Fadrihan-Camacho (2021) employees that lived in small homes displayed decreased productivity levels due to the inefficiency of the available space to integrate work and personal aspects. This was supported by Huls et al. (2021) who resolved that employees who could cater for a separate working area within their homes had a less problematic time with being productive. It was suggested that employers take a more proactive stance on aiding better working conditions during mandatory work from home to facilitate productivity.

2.7 Conclusion

Literature has shown that voluntary work from home, a component of FWAs, positively influenced employee engagement as it supported work-life balance. This study sought to understand how a mandatory work from home context that was influenced by the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic impacted employee engagement as there was a change in the internal organisational environment (Purushotham, 2020). The research questions are consolidated in the next section which will follow into the research methodology.

Chapter 3: Research Questions

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is a consolidation of the key research questions that informed the research study. These questions directed the explorative nature of the study in gaining deeper insights on the factors of mandatory work from home that impacted employee engagement. A consistency matrix (Appendix 1) was created to facilitate composing the research questions in alignment with the literature review in chapter two. Based on the literature review carried out, the following questions were assessed.

The overarching research question was:

What impact did mandatory work from home have on employee engagement?

3.2 Research Question 1

What were the actions taken by organisations to promote employee engagement during working from home through the pandemic?

3.3 Research Question 2

What were the employee engagement benefits that organisations believed they achieved by implementing mandatory work from home?

Social exchange theory highlighted that employee engagement was achieved when employees felt valued and well treated (Sun, 2019; Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu, 2018; Xiao et al., 2021). Employees were seen to return this gratitude by going over and above their contractual duties to support their organisations (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Reader et al., 2017; Nazir and UI Islam, 2017; Huls et al., 2021).

Research question one therefore aimed to understand the reciprocal nature of the organisation in the form of the culture that was portrayed to the employees and the support it provided to its employees to better engage them while they were tasked with working from home. Research question two aimed to understand the benefits

that managers of organisations perceived to be linked with employee engagement through mandating employees to work from home.

3.4 Research Question 3

What were the lived experiences of employees prior to mandatory work from home?

The traditional work environment enabled employee engagement through providing employees with appropriate resources and interactions (Bonaccio et al., 2016). It was viewed to give structure and efficiency to the workday (Kumar & Aithal, 2016; Steele, 2016; Kang & Sang, 2017).

This question aimed to provide contextual insight from the respondents around the baseline employee engagement motivational factors that they experienced prior to mandatory work from home.

3.5 Research Question 4

What were the factors of work from home, either positive or negative, that affected employee engagement during the pandemic?

This question aimed to understand the factors that affected work-life balance during mandatory work from home as traditional or voluntary work from home, as a component of FWAs, was found to be a driver of employee engagement during conventional times (Purushotham, 2020; Sanchez et al., 2021; Channa & Sangeeta, 2020; Kramer & Kramer, 2020) .

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the research questions and its rationale that directed this exploratory study. The answers to these questions are described in chapter five and analysed in chapter six. The following chapter refers to the step-wise methodology that was carried out in this study.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This section provides an outline of the research methods that were utilised in the study. The selection and reasoning of the research design are described, after which information about the respondents and the selection criteria for their inclusion in the research are provided. The process of data collection and analysis are then discussed.

4.2 Research Methodology and Design

A qualitative-exploratory research design was chosen for this study in order to explore the impact of mandatory work from home on employee engagement. This enabled the researcher to gain deeper insights from the selected respondents on their experiences of involuntary working from home (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). As presented in the literature review, this way of working could shape working conditions and drivers for the foreseeable future therefore a deeper understanding through research was seen to be advantageous (Dingel & Nieman, 2020).

The focus of the research was underpinned by interpretivism as it promoted understanding insights from the experience of the participants of the study (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013). This research approach was most suited to understand the phenomena of mandatory work from home on employee engagement that was heightened during Covid-19. A qualitative study aimed to delve into the thoughts of employees as social actors within the workplace provided insight into the switch from office-based work to mandatory work from home (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

An inductive research approach was undertaken. The research was directed at building upon work from home as a construct of bundled FWAs by investigating the construct in its individual form in a mandatory setting. It is a “bottom-up” approach intended to build upon theoretical evidence (Saunders & Lewis, 2018) about the relationship and factors around work from home with regard to employee engagement. This approach allowed for broad generalisations to be made from specific observations that were drawn from the insights and ideas obtained from the exploratory research design (Maxwell, 2008).

A mono method qualitative research design, in the form of semi-structured interviews was chosen. Due to the qualitative nature of the study and time constraints associated with data collection, the researcher opted to proceed with a mono method approach. Semi-structured interviews allowed for probing questions to be asked to gain deep insight into the relationship between the research constructs. The investigative nature of this research warranted a method that delved deeper into the answers of the participants, hence semi-structured interviews were an appropriate choice (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

As described by Moran (2002) the qualitative strategy of phenomenology was utilised to gain depth and understanding of a phenomenon through the lived experiences by individuals. This research pursued a phenomenological strategy to understand the lived experiences of employees and the perspective of the organisation through the experience of management professionals. The premise was to facilitate a holistic understanding of how work from home impacted employee engagement during the unprecedented lockdown period of Covid-19. Data triangulation was facilitated through a multi-faceted lens by investigating the views of the employees and managers (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Jonsen, 2009).

The research design followed the process of collecting data from participants over one period therefore a cross-sectional study was appropriate (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.3 Population

A population is described as a complete set or collection of group members that would be available to impart insight to the researcher (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). They encompassed the universe from which the sample was drawn and defined the subjects of the study who should have characteristics that are similar (Maxwell, 2008). As the global pandemic affected organisations and employees across South Africa, the overarching population for this study included the workforce of a selected variety of local industries that were mandated with working from home after level five of the lockdown period of Covid-19 had passed.

Multiple industries were used for selection of the population to limit industry bias. The industries selected, namely financial services, supply chain, education, and entertainment were chosen as selected parts of these industries have not allowed its employees to go back to the traditional office setting after the lockdown restrictions were lifted. This part of the workforce was interviewed to gain deeper insights from as they have the most experience with mandated working from home and was best suited to gauge whether the traditional employee engagement drivers were still relevant.

The criteria set out for this research purpose based on the unit of analysis in (4.4) was:

4.3.1 Employees that were mandated to work from home after level five of the lockdown was lifted, of both genders, who have a minimum of two years full time work experience within their organisation from the financial services, supply chain, education, and entertainment industries.

4.3.2 Managers of both genders, who were involved in mandating work from home, who have a minimum of two years full time work experience within their organisation, from the financial services, supply chain, education, and entertainment industries.

4.4 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in qualitative research refers to the measurement source from whom the data will be collected (Zikmund et al., 2013). Two measurement sources were identified for this research to gain greater richness from the obtainable data and to enhance the validity of the research through respondent triangulation (Jonsen, 2009). The organisational workforce comprised of employees and management staff that facilitated congruency of the work processes to achieve stakeholder value. The multi-faceted approach relied on social exchange theory to examine the give and take effects of working from non-traditional work settings on employee engagement. The unit of analysis was therefore the lived experiences of individuals that were categorised as employees and managers.

The unit of analysis for this study referred to:

4.4.1 The lived experiences of employees that were mandated with working from home after level five of the lockdown was lifted.

4.4.2 The view and perceptions of managers within organisations that were involved in mandating work from home, after level five of the lockdown was lifted, to provide contextual insight.

4.5 Sampling Method and Size

Maximum variation, purposive sampling was employed with a sample size of 16 participants. Creswell and Poth (2016) suggested that a sample size of 5 to 25 participants should be considered as the initial target but that data saturation should dictate the termination of sampling. A sample is a sub-set of the population from which data is gathered and analysed to draw conclusions and make inferences about the research topic (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). According to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), maximum variation or heterogeneous sampling allowed for data to be collected from candidates over a broad spectrum to investigate different views and angles related to the research topic. According to literature, work from home during the pandemic affected employees and organisations from multiple industries therefore the candidates were chosen over various industries for critical evaluation (Dingel & Nieman, 2020).

Purposive sampling is defined as an intentional sampling method to best inform the researcher about the constructs under enquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This sampling method was employed based on the researcher's judgement to best answer the research questions (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Participants were selected based on sampling criteria prior to data collection to eliminate bias from the researcher. A sample size of 16 participants was the initial selection. The participants comprised of 12 employees and four managers.

Table 1 below provides a summary of the respondent information and breakdown. The majority of employees and managers were selected through the researcher's personal network based on the criteria specified in (4.3). Where the researcher struggled to obtain respondents, the managers then assisted with providing the additional employee respondents from their organisations. All managers held either senior or director level positions within their organisations. The employees were selected with different hierarchical positions to facilitate a wider range of views that could assist with adding depth to the qualitative study.

Whereas the study was open to all provinces within South Africa, the respondents that participated in the study were eventually obtained from two provinces, Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Table 1: Respondent Breakdown

Industry	Gender	Job Title	Designation	Respondent
Financial Services	Male	Market Risk Manager	Manager	M_RP
	Female	IT Support	Employee	E_ND
	Male	Market Risk Analyst	Employee	E_JD
	Male	Market Risk Analyst	Employee	E_ML
Supply Chain	Female	Group Transport Excellence Manager	Manager	M_MN
	Male	Group Exports Logistics Manager	Employee	E_MK
	Male	Group Earehouse Excellence Manager	Employee	E_TM
	Male	Supply Chain Optimisation	Employee	E_NB
Education	Female	HR Manager	Manager	M_PG
	Male	Talent Specialist	Employee	E_RR
	Female	HR Administrator	Employee	E_LM
	Female	Executive Assistant	Employee	E_ZZ
Entertainment	Male	Digital Director	Manager	M_NB
	Male	Digital Marketing Strategy Manager	Employee	E_LR
	Male	Partner Growth Manager	Employee	E_JF
	Male	Account Manager	Employee	E_MA

The sample size in each category had the ability to either increase or decrease based on the amount of new information obtained and whether data saturation was achieved. This ensured that new information was not omitted from the research which could hamper the validity of the research. Overall data saturation was noticed by the researcher after the thirteenth respondent's interview was coded, after which the remaining interviews were completed to ensure that no insights were lost (Fusch

& Ness, 2015). The data saturation graph was compiled by the researcher through manually noting down new codes that were created in ATLAS.ti. This was then plotted in an Excel graph to visually demonstrate data saturation.

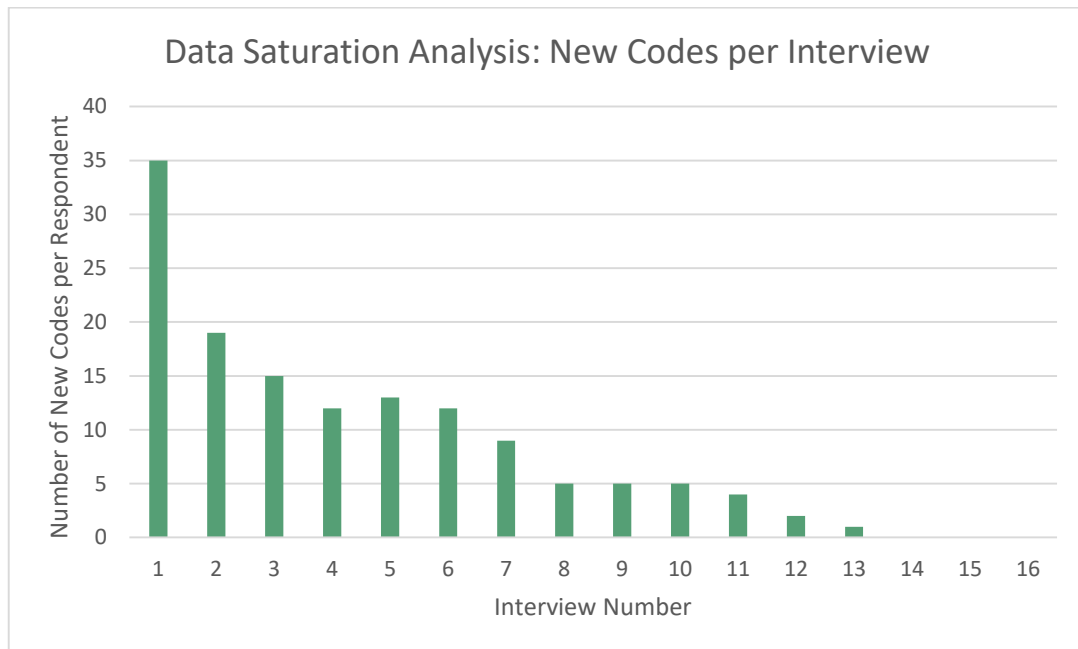


Figure 1: Data Saturation Evaluation of New Codes Generated per Respondent

4.6 Data Collection Instrument

The way in which data was collected was a contributing factor that influenced the quality of the research. Interviews were the most common form of the data gathering process. Semi-structured interviews supported the qualitative research process as it facilitated theory building (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Whereas the construct of employee engagement had been well defined in literature, mandatory work from home has become topical due to the unprecedented nature of the Covid-19 pandemic and its influence on the continuation of economic activity (Dingel & Nieman, 2020). The use of a semi-structured interview assisted in further exploring and building upon past research. The interview guides (Appendix 3 and Appendix 4) formed the main structure of the discussion but allowed for similar information and further insights around factors associated with mandatory work from home to be collected from the participants through exploratory questioning (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). This structure with central themes also

mitigated against the collection of data that was irrelevant to the study due to the probing nature of the data collection. As the research was exploratory in nature, a semi-structured interview allowed for the flexibility to ask candidates follow-up questions based on the responses of their answers.

The interview guide for employees posed different questions to that which was posed to managers as the aim of the data collection method was to obtain various perspectives to analyse toward a more meaningful research outcome.

4.7 Data Gathering Process

4.7.1 Pilot Interview

A trial run of the interview process in the form of a pilot interview phase was found to be beneficial in evaluating the aptness of the research questions, the flow of the process, and assessing issues related to recording of the data (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A pilot interview phase was conducted prior to the main interviews with colleagues that matched the respondent criteria set out in (4.3). After concluding the pilot phase, the researcher started the main interview process by interviewing the managers first, thereafter the employees. This was due to the availability of the respondents. A refinement of the interview process, including asking probing questions was noticed as more respondents were interviewed, which facilitated richer information being obtained.

4.7.2 Main Interviews

Primary data through semi-structured interviews was collected for this research purpose as mandatory work from home became a trend within organisations that was propelled by the global phenomenon of the Covid-19 pandemic (Dingel & Nieman, 2020).

Based on the criteria set out in section (4.3), potential candidates were contacted via the online platform, Microsoft Teams, or via a telephone call to provide context around the research topic, gain information about the candidate and set the tone for the semi-structured interviews (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Calendar invites were sent out to the respondents to confirm and secure the interview details. Consent forms (Appendix 2) were drafted and sent to the participants before the interview for ease of mind around confidentiality and to enable understanding of how the data was used (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The interview proceeded if a signed consent form was received from the candidate or if the candidate acknowledged on record that they understood the confidentiality clause and use of the information that they presented before the interview took place. They were allowed to present the signed consent form after the interview was conducted.

Saunders & Lewis (2018), suggested that the interview venue be convenient, without distraction and comfortable for the participant. Due to government regulation around social distancing due to Covid-19, participants were interviewed over online platforms with enabled video and transcription to best represent a face-to-face interactive interview. Notes were taken in addition to the transcription facility that was utilised during the online interviews. The online platform also allowed for the interviews to be recorded for preservation and future analysis. As mentioned in section (4.5), participants were interviewed until data saturation was achieved. Data related to the research in all formats was stored in duplicate. A hard drive and cloud storage was utilised for secure storage.

The interview guide comprised of overarching questions with probing sub-questions to facilitate the conversation between the researcher and the respondents. It was noted that although the interview guides were structured in the order of the questions to be asked, certain respondents led the conversation in a manner in which the research questions were answered non-sequentially. The coding process was carried out as per the order in which the respondents answered the research questions. These codes (Appendix 6) were then categorised into code groups from which themes were generated that aligned with answering the research questions.

4.8 Analysis Approach

Maxwell (2008), stated that the the analysis approach be regarded together with, and be influenced by the design stage of the research. Data collection and analysis was therefore be done in tandem to streamline the interviews and observations, and decide how best to assess the conclusions (Maxwell, 2008).

A categorising strategy was employed for this research. This included the use of qualitative analysis software, ATLAS.ti to which the interview transcripts were uploaded (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Following the premise of the qualitative analysis process, the collected data was coded using the software. The individual codes were be grouped into categories from which themes were generated and analysed (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

According to Braun and Clark (2006), there are six steps in thematic analysis. Step one required the researcher to get familiar with the data through repeated reading of the data and transcribing it. Step two included systematically generating codes. In step three, the codes were grouped into categories then the categories were grouped into themes. Step four was the review of the categorised themes to ensure they were appropriate, which continued until the themes made logical sense. Themes were defined in step five and were interpreted for the final reporting in step six (Braun & Clark, 2006).

4.9 Quality Controls

The characteristics that constituted a trustworthy research study were credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and one that had an audit trail (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Mitigating measures were considered throughout the methodology processes to ensure the validity of the research. Creation of a sample selection criteria prior to contacting possible participants was one method to overcome researcher bias (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Respondent triangulation added to the quality and validity of the outcomes from the generated themes as a fuller, more informative view was established (Jonsen, 2009). Thematic analysis was beneficial as it analysed the views of participants to gain insight into the research problem. The flexible nature of this method may lead to inconsistency during theme development. Audit trials allowed for the researcher to trace back the decision-making process and the raw data to validate thematic outcomes. This allowed for other researchers to cross-reference the data (Nowell et al., 2017).

4.10 Ethics

Ethical clearance was obtained by the researcher prior to collecting data (Appendix 5). Respondents were made aware of the research topic and the aim of the research study upon signing the confidentiality document. The researcher upheld this responsibility by anonymising respondent names and broadly categorising organisational information. Respondents were also advised that they could terminate their interview at any point during the process if they were uncomfortable.

4.11 Limitations

A cross-sectional research study may not provide the depth that a longitudinal study may allow for (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Maximum variation sampling is a non-random sampling method (Etikan et al., 2016). Bias in candidate selection could be present which can impact inferences drawn from the research. Researcher bias may impart limitations on the validity of the results due to the exploratory nature of the study. Probing questions during the semi-structured interviews may lead to collection of information that was irrelevant to the study (Kallio et al., 2016).

Further limitations identified by the study were:

- The small sample size did not allow for generalisability of the study. Although the interviews comprised of respondents and managers from four different industries, the study may not be a full representation of the various other industries that were also subject to mandatory work from home within South Africa.
- Although participants were selected based on sampling criteria prior to data collection to eliminate bias from the researcher, respondents were also selected on their ease of access to the researcher.
- A mono method approach was made use of which may have resulted in a less comprehensive result than a mixed method approach

4.12 Conclusion

A qualitative research approach was employed in this study. The rationale and criteria for how the research was conducted was provided in this section. A total of 16 online semi-structured interviews were carried out which was evaluated through thematic analysis, facilitated through ATLAS.ti. The subsequent chapter will provide the results of the research study.

Chapter 5: Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the findings from the 16 semi-structured interviews that were conducted. The research findings have been organised based on the research questions generated in chapter three. Four prevalent themes emerged from the study which supported the four research questions respectively. These included the state of organisational practices during mandatory work from home, business continuity, negative impact on communication during mandatory work from home, and impact of work-life balance on employee engagement.

Each of the four overarching themes contained three sub-themes. The researcher's analysis was supported by direct quotations from the respondents' viewpoint.

A diagrammatic representation of the overview of each research question precedes the findings for that section. These representations included influences and associations between the sub-themes which was then consolidated in an overall summary of the research findings in Figure 6 which was evaluated in the conclusion.

5.2 Results for Research Question 1

What were the actions taken by organisations to promote employee engagement during working from home through the pandemic?

This research question was posed to managers and employees to understand the reciprocity involved in facilitating employee engagement while employees were mandated to work from home.

The emergent theme related to this question was:

5.2.1 The state of organisational practices during mandatory work from home

The haste in which organisations implemented mandatory work from home had the potential to overlook important practices in support of social exchange theory where employees reciprocated through better engagement. Information from the respondents during the interview process indicated that the three sub-themes,

positive organisational support, positive organisational culture and the absence of organisational policies provided information on the state of organisational practices in a mandatory work from home context.

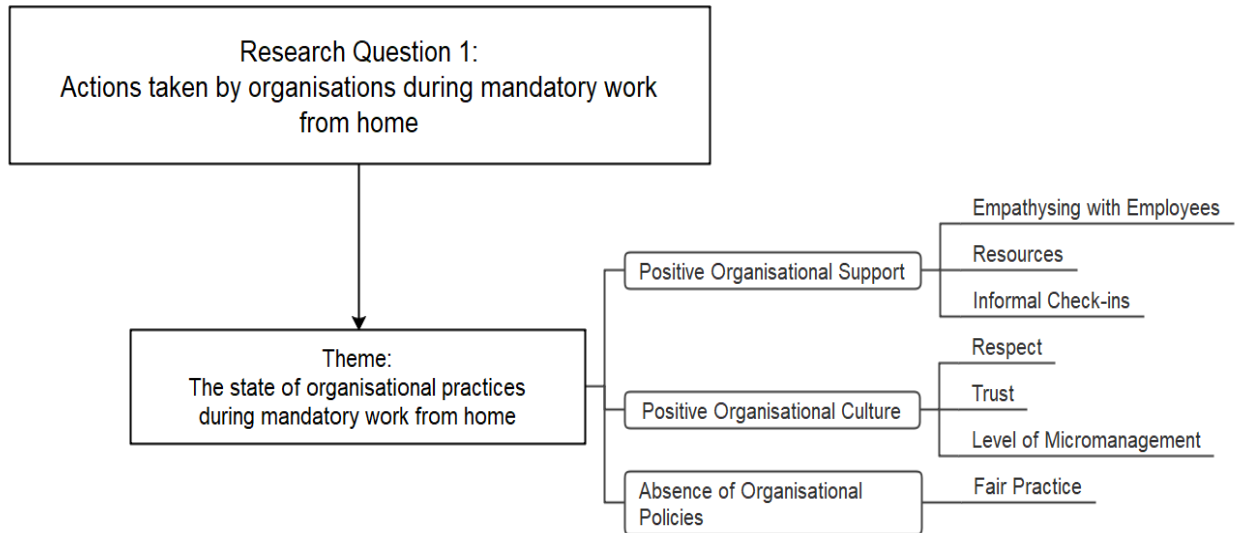


Figure 2: Consolidated Results for Research Question 1

5.2.1.1 Positive Organisational Support

Managers highlighted that organisations emphasised that their employees were an important asset by including informal check-ins to better understand how employees were coping and provide the human element of caring and sincerity.

“Or a coffee check, check how they're doing, see how they doing. Just engage with them. I think there's more time for engagement which I actually found contradictory because I always thought HR needs to be physically in front of you but that's not necessarily the case.” (M_PG)

“So every single day we had a 30 minute call with our teams. Yeah checking with people from a mental health point of view, checking with the team what works for them, which is a bit different because we're in constant communication the entire day through WhatsApp groups.” (M_NB)

An important element of mandatory work from home was setting up workstations from home and having the necessary tools to be able to conduct work functions

effortlessly. It was noted from many employees that support in the form of physical resources and online resources were attended to by organisations. This aspect positively motivated the employer-employee relationship.

“I think that's one of the things that they did very well. Prior to them asking people to work from home they made sure that all the employees had the tools that they need to be able to work from home. Ensured that you know if there was stuff like IT or Wi-Fi issues, they provided 3G cards. If there's certain employees that required printers, for example, or a printing machine, that was provided.” (E_TM)

Organisational support was further provided for in the form of reassurance of job security which managers felt could provide ease of mind to employees during the economic uncertainty.

“We know that many other sectors in the economy were impacted quite adversely during this time. And you know, definitely like the feeling amongst people was that you know if you have a job. So in terms of job security. We ensured that our team was aware that their jobs were safe.” (M_RP)

During the uncertainty surrounding what Covid-19 meant for business continuity and employee health, it was the view of the majority of employees that the organisations visibility and stance on promoting and supporting well-being initiatives boded well for them. Employees that felt they were well informed and were updated timeously on developments in the country surrounding the pandemic. Employees felt they would give back more wholly to the organisation.

“I do think I would go over and above because of the way that the company looks out for staff.” (E_JF)

“You know, besides just material things, sometimes you just need moral support. They created a hotline. If I remember very well, if you're struggling with coping from working from home, you could find that line and you know someone would pick up the line and try and help you. Or if you needed to talk

to someone, even our own bosses said if anyone is struggling to adjust please my door is open you know. Set up a session.” (E_TM)

“I think I'm one of the fortunate ones that it's so easy to talk with leadership, and so I've been able to communicate to say, you know what? This is how I feel. This is where I am. So I'm going to say from that perspective. I haven't failed to stress that I'm feeling hopeless.” (E_ND)

A minority of employees felt that they were left to fend for themselves as they did not have long tenures with their organisations. They felt disconnected from their teams and unsure of their daily deliverables due to not meeting with their team members or management prior to their employment.

“It's a bit difficult because I don't have anyone physical showing me how to do things and we just connect over the meetings online visually and then we do everything on our own. So there's little training, I feel like I'm still a bit lost.” (E_LM)

5.2.1.2 Positive Organisational Culture

Mandatory work from home catapulted the majority of knowledge workers into a new normal. Team work was carried out during structured online interaction but individual participation was then carried forward during the bulk of the work day. Employees were left to manage their output and work-times. They felt that there was less micromanaging and more autonomy. Employees felt heightened trust from their organisations which they respected.

“Employees are more engaged. They want to be part of the organisation. For them, trust is a big thing.” (M_PG)

“It gives me a higher sense of control or autonomy, so I feel like I'm trusted more. It's not like someone always watching over me where you know, I'm at work, I'm behind my desk so I'm judged on outputs now and not really on time spent behind the desk.” (E_NB)

It was evident that employees felt a sense of pride towards their organisations when they felt cared for. Lots of employees felt motivated to be proactive around their work deliverables.

“I think it really shows that it's not just a policy that they're trying to implement. It's rather embedded in the culture, so I really look at them very favourably. I think it has a big impact on the perception of a company and the way I conduct my work.” (E_NB)

E_ND mentioned that strong relationships and mutual respect within the culture of an organisation facilitated open discussions and assisted in getting the job done efficiently. It cultivated a good work environment for collaboration on a professional and personal level. This outlook was a common occurrence from the respondents.

“The culture is almost like a family-oriented culture. It's been really encouraged that as leaders you are as close to the people that reports into you as possible, forming these intentional relationships with people. We are always trying to find best ways of making the experience at work as effective as possible, but also as enjoyable as possible for people and for teams.” (E_MK)

“There's respect amongst colleagues and there's just a certain way that we get things done without stepping on each other. You know, there's this unity of purpose within the team. So with that, that gives me a sense of pride being part of the local company.” (E_TM)

It was evident that managers understood the need to relinquish over managing their teams while they worked from home. Employees felt comfortable and confident to perform to the best of their ability as a result of inclusive organisational cultures.

5.2.1.3 Absence of Organisational Policies

The general feeling amongst employees was that mandatory work from home policies were not created. Organisational policies were geared toward the traditional office workplace and informal agreements were made between management and their teams regarding working from home. As this was a relatively new concept, the view was that it was still too early to fully embrace policy updates as there wasn't clarity on the longevity of the situation.

"I don't think they've actually formalised anything from a policy perspective. You know, to make this more long term. I think we we've done studies to understand how people feel about working from home and the new environments, and I'm assuming that something long term would be developed from that in time." (E_MK)

"It would be difficult to do that because I don't necessarily know how they would be able to necessarily police that in any way." (E_JF)

Employees felt that mandatory work from home did not give organisations enough visibility around monitoring whether strict work times were adhered to apart from performance. There was a notion that an update to the current work policies to include mandatory work from home would not have much meaning as it would be a difficult task to police what employees were doing.

Managers felt that organisations would need to encompass elements of family structure and distractions such as child-minding during work hours for parents that could not send their kids to school. These nuances needed to be accounted for during policy creation.

"And then we are obviously intruding in that space because they're working from home, so sometimes there are kids that are crying in the background that don't understand what's going on. You have to facilitate and manage the external factors like the kids or somebody coming to your door to drop off something. But definitely policies around there." (M_PG)

In reviewing the qualitative data received from the respondents, an analysis of the findings related to research question one is as follows. Corporates that were proactive in terms of organisational support and who displayed positive culture that embodied people-centricity during the mandatory work from home period made their employees feel valued. This in turn, was an encouraging motivational factor of employee engagement which also resulted in employees that worked harder. Given the uncertainty around the duration of mandatory work from home, most corporates did not have specific policies in place. Creating such policies would need to take into account employees' specific working conditions at home, making this a non-trivial task. However, if created and implemented correctly, having such policies would further entrench employee engagement through supporting fair practice, thereby holistically providing employees with supportive organisational practices.

5.3 Results for Research Question 2

What were the employee engagement benefits that organisations believed they achieved by implementing mandatory work from home?

This research question was posed to managers to understand the benefits that managers perceived to be linked with employee engagement through mandating employees to work from home.

The emergent theme related to this question was:

5.3.1 Business Continuity

During the onset of Covid-19, business continuity remained uncertain for many organisations due to the restricted movement of people and the slowdown of economic activity. The three sub-themes, prioritisation of employee safety, increased productivity and firm organisational support emerged as anecdotes that explained how business was able to remain resilient during this period.

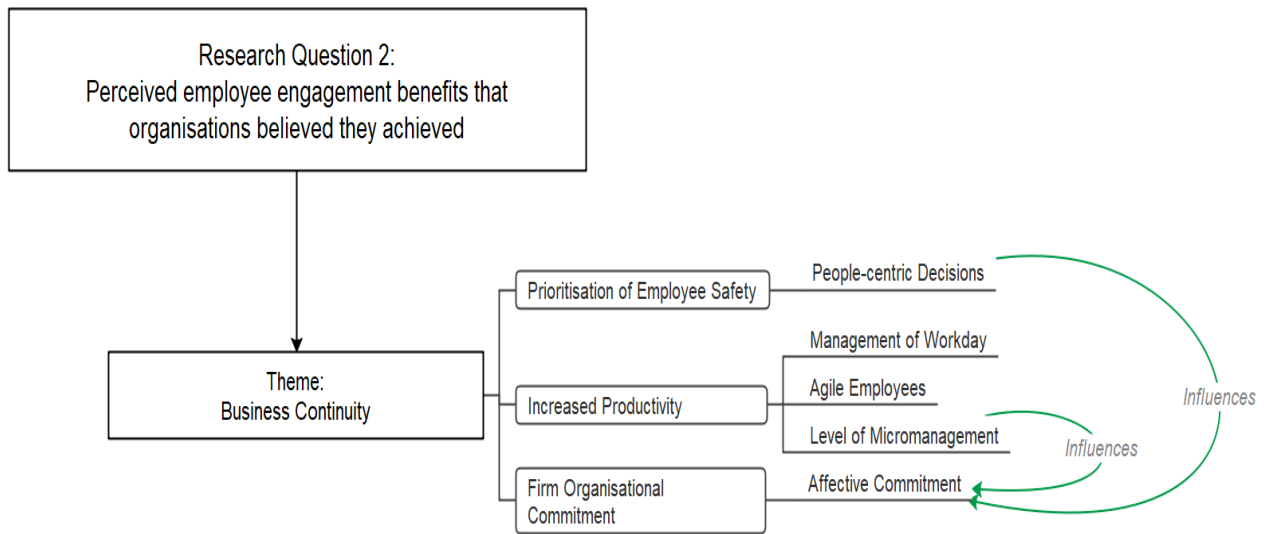


Figure 3: Consolidated Results for Research Question 2

5.3.1.1 Prioritisation of Employee Safety

The most prominent category that emerged from managers was that organisations valued their human capital assets and tried to protect them through the lockdown period, thereby ensuring business continuity.

“Uh, what we found though, was that as the lockdown became more kind of prolonged, we had to adjust our strategy so the top priority was to ensure that the health and safety of our employees was catered for. This was from day one.” (M_RP)

Managers understood that their employees were vulnerable and scared. They recognised that there was a sense of uneasiness for employees that had to rely on commuting via public transport. They felt that mandatory work from home was a welcomed risk mitigating tool that did not compromise the workforce, especially those with comorbidities.

“In all they wanted was just to be protected and work from home. They were scared to go into the centre of town and go to an office block.” (M_PG)

It was highlighted that small office spaces did not allow for proper social distancing which meant that the spread of the Covid-19 infection would be more prominent.

“I mean our kind of plan for this COVID pandemic, initially, was such that we would ensure that our team was split and that there wasn't a concentration kind of build-up of people from our team.” (M_RP)

5.3.1.2 Increased Productivity

Managers spoke about both employee productivity and organisational performance during mandatory work from home. The consensus from managers was that employees were happier knowing that they were valued. The autonomy that was provided to employees made them want to prove themselves to their organisations by delivering on their outputs.

“We've done a temperature survey and a lot of people were much happier knowing that there was a trust factor that came from the organisation to allow them to work from home. It gave them peace of mind, knowing that we knew that they were getting the work done. I mean if we look at our numbers, if we look at our stats compared to two years ago or three years ago, things have just drastically increased.” (M_PG)

“They seemed happier and more impactful. They had more work-life balance, most of them.” (M_MN)

Managers were also cognisant that being able to have some flexibility by working from home allowed employees to structure their work times according to their circumstances at home. It was found through management interaction with their employees that home-related tasks were managed in accordance with work deliverables and that the output was more meaningful.

The flexibility and trust that was given to employees was viewed to improve employee engagement which resulted in better employee contribution toward the overall business performance.

“The heightened engagement that we’ve seen enabled us to increase our performance as a business.” (M_MN)

Mandatory work from home propelled knowledge workers to become comfortable with communicating through online platforms to collaborate with their team members. These meetings were very structured and had a definite end time. As such, there was little time to digress from the meeting agenda. This was found to streamline discussions and improve either finalising deliverables or redirecting them to be completed by the correct department.

“I found that we achieved far more because we were challenged by connecting online. I think it compelled us to get the work done quicker and more efficiently and ask more meaningful questions to curtail or to direct.” (M_RP)

5.3.1.3 Firm Organisational Commitment

Whereas the bulk of employees felt a sense of pride and belonging with their organisations due to the support that they received throughout mandatory work from home (5.3.1.1), managers were unanimous in their feedback that employees would remain with their current organisations as a result of the improved work-life balance they experienced. They felt that employees were more committed because organisations were people-centric during this dire time and were confident that it was an enabler of employee skills retention.

“Very engaged, they won't jump ship. They have more work-life balance.” (M_MN)

“You can see the retention has definitely not dropped. I mean, that attention is definitely increased. There's no feelings of insecurity. We also did a temperature survey with ICAS to help us through with this project.” (M_PG)

Three sub-themes related to business continuity was unearthed by the researcher. Prioritisation of employee safety and increased productivity were sub-themes that

showcased a positive trend toward more engaged employees. This resonated well with employees which made them more affectively committed to their organisations.

In reviewing the qualitative data received from the respondents, an analysis of the findings related to research question two is as follows. By prioritising employee safety and enabling employees to choose how best to complete their deliverables, thereby increasing productivity, employees developed a sense of loyalty to their organisations. This organisational commitment ensured that key human resources were retained during the mandatory work from home period, thereby promoting business continuity.

5.4 Results for Research Question 3

What were the lived experiences of employees prior to mandatory work from home?

This research question was posed to respondents to gain contextual insight from them on their experiences prior to being mandated to work from home.

The emergent theme related to this question was:

5.4.1 Negative impact on communication during mandatory work from home

The main theme above was found to be a common topic during the exploratory interviews. Respondents viewed communication to be an imperative aspect of employee engagement. This theme was supported by three sub-themes, more rigid workday structure, enhanced collaborative relations, and importance of physical exchange of information.

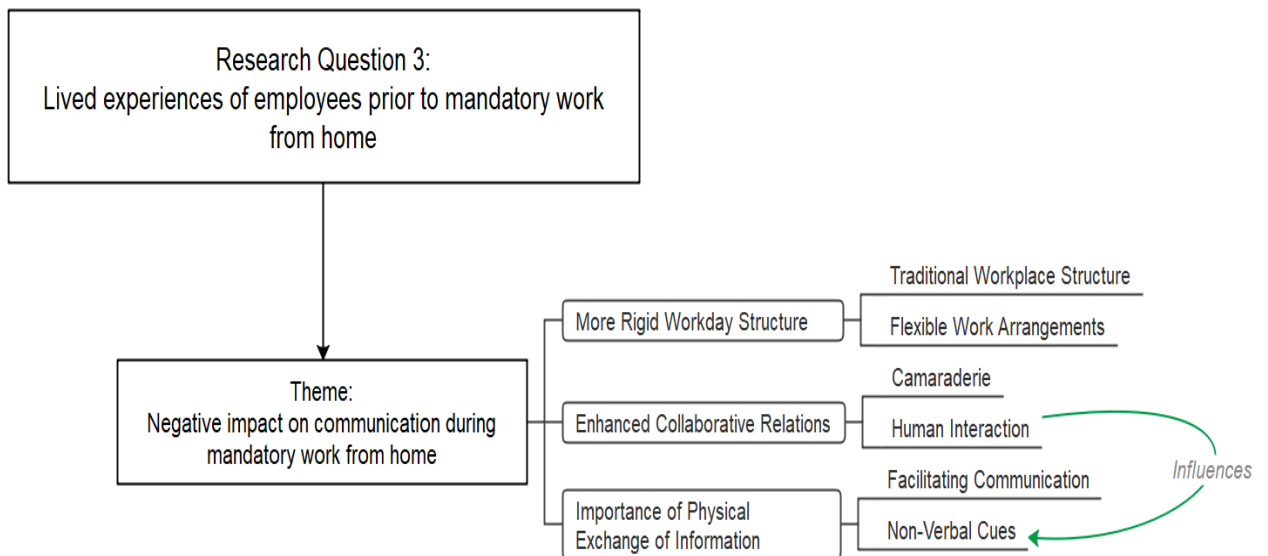


Figure 4: Consolidated Results for Research Question 3

5.4.1.1 More Rigid Workday Structure

The typical office workday had structured work times, systems and procedures. The expectation from employers was that employees abided to those workplace guidelines. The structure provided ease of working conditions to employees.

“I knew that I had to get to work at 9:00 o'clock and I could leave at 5:00 o'clock and then I could do like whatever I wanted to do kind of thing.” (E_JF)

“It was like the thing to do at that time, like the norm or working in a traditional office space. But I guess that it also makes working a lot easier, you come. You're able to communicate with your colleagues a lot quicker instead of like I'm going through emails and phone calls which sometimes do take a better time to get hold of someone.” (E_MA)

Many organisations had been aware of the benefits of flexible work arrangements prior to mandatory work from home. Numerous employees had experienced a blended work environment, therefore, when mandatory work from home was implemented, they felt that it was the next logical progression of the way that work would be conducted. Flexibility was granted to an employee based on verbal agreements between managers and employees.

“Yes, so before we actually started working at home full time, we had like a period, basically where we work one day at the office for a few hours and then the next day at home. We worked a few hours working from home and it's just a lot of back and forth making sure that we have everything we need.” (E_MA)

“Luckily from my previous company, it was one of the environments where we really understood that work can continue without employees being in the office every day. Uh, we already had the flexibility of having your odd days at home probably once a week or once every two weeks. Dependent on your personal requirements, and then with the alignment of your frontline manager.” (E_MK)

Employees were also mindful of the benefits of flexible work arrangements from their peers in organisations that provided this offering to their employees prior to mandatory work from home. They were able to see the benefits from the change that their peers experienced on their lifestyles. In certain instances, employees suggested this amendment of the workplace to their own companies.

“So even before COVID-19 I already tried to sort of feed in the seeds for working from home to my company and I actually started working from home, I think it was a day or two per week maximum, so maybe like a day per week in general.” (E_NB)

A minority of employees felt that they were more productive from the traditional workplace as there were less distractions. The office set-up was found to be more comfortable and conducive to finalising deliverables as the necessary resources were readily available and workstations were properly arranged.

“I think before lockdown, you will be more productive because, like you know that you need to focus on certain things that you need to do before you can leave. In the office you sit comfortably on your chair. Like now, sometimes I have to do meetings and trainings on my bed because you find that my child didn't go to school so he will distract me every now and then” (E_LM)

5.4.1.2 Enhanced Collaborative Relations

There was a unanimous agreement from employees that the traditional workplace fostered positive relationships between colleagues and enhanced collaborative efforts. The setting allowed for internal communication to be streamlined and allowed for managers and employees to be on the same page regarding work-related tasks.

“I think the glaring one for me is a lack of face-to-face engagement, particularly the type of work you do and how it relates to team efficiency.”
(E_NB)

“There was a huge difference in terms of my ability to stay engaged and stay in touch with the team during working hours. Yes, we had obviously the various platforms that you have in terms of technology, but the face-to-face contacts, conversations, the walking up to people, and having conversations on the spot. That, to me was very much important as well.” (E_MK)

Employees felt that the lack of social interaction during mandatory work from home served as an impediment to the personal touch that would have otherwise been incorporated into an office workday.

“One of the things that we’ve really managed to do in the office is to build relationships and friendships. You realize that you actually miss people, you miss conversations that you would have with people. So all of that kind of now just fell off, you talk to people, it’s just about work, work, work. There isn’t really that social aspect of things which you know. I think it’s also very important for us.” (E_ND)

Employees from specific industries felt that the traditional workplace enhanced their sense of enthusiasm toward their work and added an element of excitement which gave rise to a feeling of wanting to be at work. It was considered to be the normal way of working for employees. They felt that the richness of information that was received from personal interactions was more valuable than the online option.

“I mean, that's what we've been doing generally, you know, so it's kind of like this is a system that I was used to already but working from the office specifically in the industry we are working for was a nice place to be and I enjoyed being there. So the atmosphere is quite engaging.” (E_LR)

“I quite enjoyed working from an office, UM, especially with the industry that we're in. And it's and it's an industry where a lot of things happen based on relationships throughout with people. Uh, and I feel that those relationships solidified data in person, than like over a computer screen.” (E_JF)

5.4.1.3 Importance of Physical Exchange of Information

An important aspect of information sharing during collaborative team sessions was the use of body language to converse with peers. While non-verbal cues were often taken for granted in the office setting, it was missed during online meetings where individuals often abused the option to keep their cameras off. Employees felt that it was imperative during customer liaisons to be able to gauge the meaning behind the spoken words.

“I can say if you sit in a meeting room and there are 12 people in that meeting room, you can immediately see whether you have the attention of the people you're speaking to. If you're the one presenting, you can immediately see if someone you know has a question boiling up and they want to raise their hand and ask something.” (E_JD)

“So if you're doing a lot of like current state mapping and design or for customer's future state and implementation, you know you lack that that face to face engagement where you can draw out sentiment from a person's behaviour.” (E_NB)

It was observed from the interviews with employees that face-to-face communication provided better engagement. They stressed that the elasticity around spontaneous interactions helped to speed up the completion of their work instead of wasting time setting up formal meetings.

“Working from home versus being in the office, there was a huge difference in terms of my ability to stay engaged and stay in touch with the team during working hours. Yes, we had obviously the various platforms that you have in terms of technology et cetera, but the face-to-face contacts, conversations, the walking up to people, and having conversations on the spot. That, to me was very much important as well.” (E_MK)

Employees felt that the traditional office space allowed them to address meeting requests more efficiently and communicate quicker. They spoke about the quality of their interactions with their colleagues as being superior to that of a text message or online chat. They felt that face-to-face conversations was a simpler way of transferring information.

“When you're in the office, it was easy to coordinate, uh, between teams, in terms of, you know, this is what we're doing, but now that we are at home, you would just be getting requests from all angles.” (E_ND)

“I would argue that the quality and the level of that collaboration isn't nearly as good as well as it would have been in a traditional office space sense.” (E_JD)

In reviewing the qualitative data received from the respondents, an analysis of the findings related to research question three is as follows. A formal workspace with an established workday structure was found to make the completion of employee deliverables easier. In addition, working and collaborating with each other physically was noticed as being superior to using online collaboration tools as it countered the missed human interaction that was felt during mandatory work from home. As such, it was established that physical interaction was more meaningful as employees could communicate on many different topics, not necessarily pertaining to work. In contrast, working using online tools thus had a negative impact on internal communication for employees.

5.5 Results for Research Question 4

What were the factors of mandatory work from home, either positive or negative, that affected employee engagement during the pandemic?

This research question was posed to respondents to gain insights into factors that affected their work-life balance as work-life balance was found to have a positive effect on employee engagement during voluntary work from home as mentioned in (2.3.1).

The emergent theme related to this question was:

5.5.1 Impact of work-life balance on employee engagement

During mandatory work from home, employees created workspaces through utilising parts of their living spaces. As the majority of their activities were carried out from the same location, it was important to understand how they distributed their time between personal and work obligations and which factors impacted this. Three sub-themes, benefits and drawbacks of remote work, adjustment to employee lifestyle, and perceived flexible work arrangements provided insight into the impact of work-life balance on employee engagement.

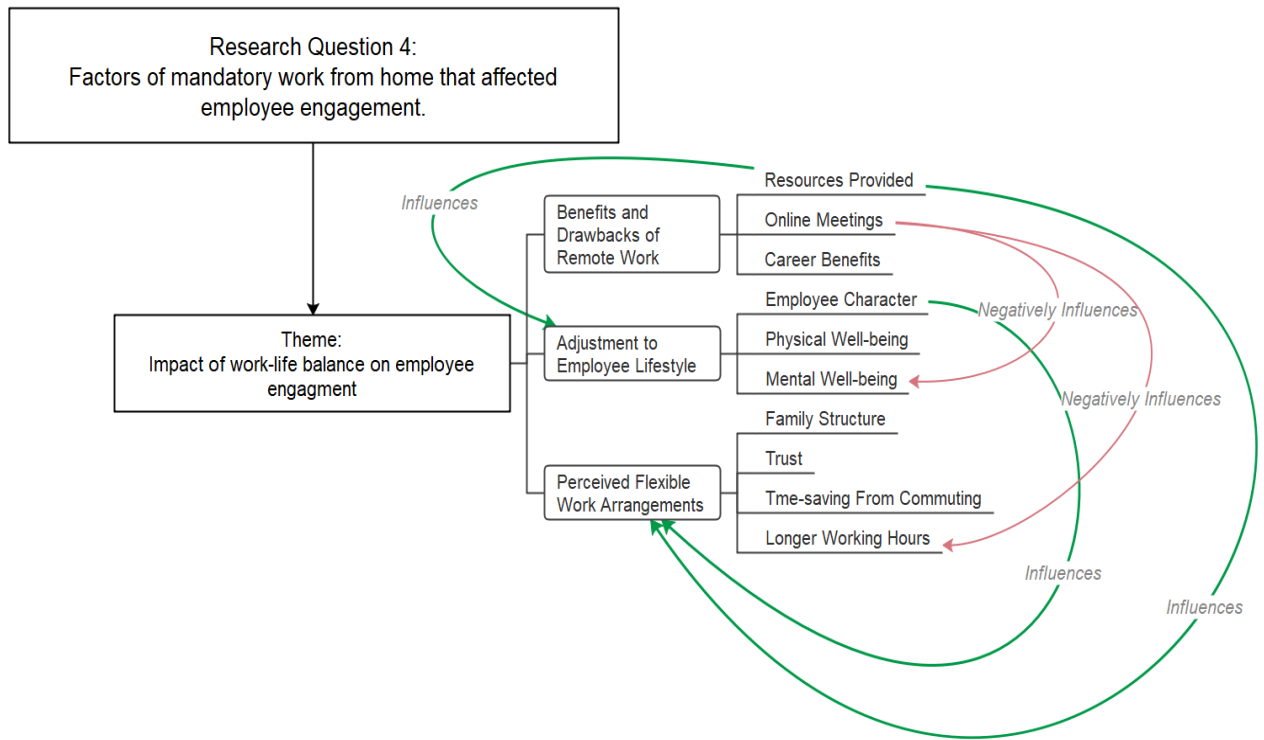


Figure 5: Consolidated Results for Research Question 4

5.5.1.1 Benefits and Drawbacks of Remote Work

E_ML was of the view that mandatory work from home favoured employees that required limited interaction with people and that did not require a lot of specialised equipment to conduct their work duties. Resources that complimented the remote workplace created more efficiency for employees. This was also supported by other respondents.

“So purely because we live in an online world and everything we do in online means that working from home has been relatively easy for us.” (E_JF)

Many employees were of the opinion that a drawback of online meetings was that they lasted longer than necessary to account for the human interaction that employees craved. These meetings eroded the employee standard work times which often left employees with little time to complete their deadlines. Numerous employees noted that they spent more of their personal time to catch up on their deliverables.

“There was an extreme of having people just setting up meetings, and I think it was all because they wanted to just talk to people or see people so you would find yourself in a string of meetings for 6 out of the 8 hours that you have to be working.” (E_ND)

“It just like hampers your day because it's an interruption. And then you're like okay, now I have to get going on what I was doing originally.” (E_JF)

E_MK elaborated that there were situations in which there was no need for his participation in specific meetings which contributed to a waste of his work time. He added that the lack of clarity due to ineffective communication led to an abundance of formal meetings in which a blanket cover of employees were invited to, irrespective of their contribution. This view was reinforced by other employees.

“In some instances you are like, why do I have to be on this call? I haven't even had to speak. Why am I here kind of thing.” (E_JF)

“So socialisation and communication has changed dramatically. Uh, you end up being in zoom meetings longer than you would have in a meeting that you were in the physical office because you need to do daily catch ups, daily feedback daily reports. So you stuck on calls continuously.” (E_LR)

Employees often had to waste time trying to sync the calendars of their colleagues with theirs in order to accommodate meetings that facilitated decision making.

“It's often quite a difficult task to get them all on the same forum to make one decision, whereas in traditional workspace you know we used to have this nice to work with current offices which was easy.” (E_RR)

A prominent category that employees felt did not contribute to work-life balance was the ease in which employees could hide behind the online platform and not be fully present during meetings. Employees often found themselves trying to catch up after the meeting which ate into their work or personal time. Employees noted that the

ability to turn off their cameras during meetings allowed them to continue with distractions in which they were not fully immersed in the meetings.

“If I’m honest, sometimes I hide behind my computer screen. It makes it easier to hide.” (E_JD)

“I can be in my pjs and just switch off my camera and be in the meeting and eat the whole day. Tomorrow is the same routine whenever I need a break from my laptop. It’s either I sit and watch TV or I can have a snack but then I need to finish my work later.” (E_LM)

A minority insight from E_JF was that mandatory work from home facilitated global interactions and expanded work networks and relationships. As a result, he felt that he had a more holistic view of the business which allowed him to learn more in his sphere of work.

5.5.1.2 Adjustment to Employee Lifestyle

During the coding process, the researcher grouped various individual codes, namely, employee character, physical well-being, and mental well-being into the category of employee lifestyle.

E_ML highlighted that the initial stages of mandatory work from home was a big adjustment but employees were able to find a routine that incorporated different aspects of their lifestyles. The perceived flexibility improved the way in which employees structured their day.

Other employees have found ways to live a healthier lifestyle by including exercise into their daily routine. The unavailability of canteen snacks and large meals forced employees to manage their diets in a more wholesome way which positively impacted their body mass index.

“I’ve increased going to the gym when I can. Sometimes I have to squeeze it in within my lunch hour. Sometimes I just go for a jog.” (E_LR)

“I've lost a bit of weight and I eat more healthy stuff and I don't feel the need to constantly eat, you know, and I know you know, if I have to come to the kitchen, I have to make something for myself. And like in the office you can just go and all that stuff you know, wait for it and eat.” (E_TM)

Living and working in the same space day in and day out proved to be difficult for employees as many of them found it difficult to separate domestic duties from work time. There were instances in which colleagues and management did not respect personal time boundaries. The expectation was that employees would be able to work continuously as they were set up to conduct work from home which resulted in increased employee stress levels.

“I find for me personally I struggled to switch off. Even like after working hours you still thinking about things that you need to do from work and stuff. So I find it very difficult to cope compartmentalise, and therefore even when you doing other things, you still thinking about work.” (E_ML)

“Added stress, definitely. And I, I guess it is probably related to digital fatigue. It is related to, you know, people not respecting office hours anymore, not respecting those boundaries, those unspoken or unmentioned boundaries that used to exist.” (E_JD)

Contradictory to the majority of views from employees, E_TM experienced reduced stress levels as a result of being able to pause and reflect after stressful meetings. The ability to turn off the camera after an online meeting and spend time with his children assisted him to calm down and dissipate his stress levels. This was a tool that allowed the flow of productivity to continue.

Employees shared the view that online meetings led to them feel tired. This resulted in them withdrawing from further interaction with their extended families through online platforms as a means to detach from using online tools.

“Because I feel like after I spend the flipside of 8 hours on my phone, I’m not in the mood to have it. Informal conversations with you know with friends or family.” (E_JD)

5.5.1.3 Perceived Flexible Work Arrangements

Mandatory work from home was found to be a promoter of flexible work arrangements for employees that did not have this benefit previously. Employees stressed that the ability to obtain good work-life balance rested with the character of the employee to be able to segregate and manage their deliverables and time well.

“Time to unwind and to just be a human being outside of your job title and outside of your job environment, that becomes a bit tricky, so you have to be very clear and intentional about that more than before.” (E_LR)

“So definitely a balance between personality and I think also the outputs of your job. Because I think they’re also drivers.” (E_NB)

The majority of employees elaborated that more family time was a positive result of being trusted to structure their work times. Employees noted that this aspect was lacking during work from the office.

“Even though I mean they, they still wake up and go to school. The fact that you get to see them when they come back from school. You are here and for me it’s one of the positives of being at home, and while working, they can come ask you for things. You responding to continue with work. So I think on the work-life balance. It just kind of had some very good positives in that in that sense.” (E_ND)

“It was my first time starting to work from home, I’ve been always in the office, so for me, it was exciting because I had to spend time with my family.” (E_ZZ)

An advantage of being mandated to work from home was the time that employees saved during their commute to and from the office. Foregoing the need to awake early and get ready before rush-hour traffic was welcomed. Employees utilised this time to catch up on work or to reflect and enjoy some personal time.

“So you're saving the time that you can maybe use to be more productive at work or to kind of relax a bit.” (E_MA)

“Probably one of the driving reasons for that is there's obviously less of a requirement to get ready in the morning and the time that you're getting back. The time that you're spending traveling to the office and back. So from an efficiency perspective, I feel that has somewhat increased just based on the time that I now have back to me.” (E_MK)

A select few employees indicated that the perceived flexibility of their time resulted in the benefit of their organisations instead of their families. Their family time was negatively impacted. These employees noted that genuine family time was lost and that employees were found to co-exist with their families rather than spend quality time with them.

“The workload increased so much more that you're not actually spending more time with the person, your family, you're just in the same environment in the same room as them.” (E_NB)

Appreciation was observed by employees, who were also parents, toward their organisations. The ability to home-school children and run errands in between the work day created employees that willingly wanted to give off more of themselves to their employers. This sometimes resulted in a double-edged sword as the time that employees gave back to their organisations was far more than the time they utilised during the day for personal errands. This often led to employees that worked longer hours and felt tired but who also saw a benefit in their family time.

“I would have to focus on work with certain time and then also give attention to school. So that just meant long days in general which I didn’t mind, but that could have been also the result of me feeling overwhelmed.” (E_ND)

Many employees mentioned that because they worked longer hours, their productivity improved and also benefitted their organisations.

“Essentially what’s happening is you work longer hours and the outcomes or outputs are probably better.” (E_JD)

“So working from home has created a space where people start earlier than they would when they would be at the office and finish much later than they will at the office, so working times are much longer and a person like me with no children. running around, my concentration is heightened.” (E_LR)

Various employees were aware of the challenges that the continual work from home set-up had on their work-life balance. Unanimously, the employees felt that a feeling of work from home monotony would be avoided and that they would be happier, more engaged and less burnt-out if organisations adopted a hybrid work model going forward. The mandatory work from home experience proved that business continuity was possible. This experimental phase allowed employees to see that they did not necessarily have to be in the office every day and that they could still benefit from the flexibility of a hybrid system.

“Time off is still in the same house with the same workspace, so your house no longer feels like your own space. You know, working from home, living at home, weekends at home, being stuck in one consistent space.” (E_LR)

“Ah, we’ve seen that there’s a model where we can get the same outputs and have people be a lot happier. I am pro a balance of the two. I think it is needed but a full time without the option, I think that’s a recipe for failure to engage and to retain your talent.” (E_NB)

“So I think in that perspective it got to a point where I must say I felt burnt-out there I was like, if we could go back to the office, at least a few days, I would be able to separate work from home life.” (E_ND)

“Hoping for my employer to implement the hybrid strategy that allows you to have the best of both.” (E_JD)

In reviewing the qualitative data received from the respondents, an analysis of the findings related to research question four is as follows. A drawback of remote work highlighted that blurring of lines between work and family time was evident. Additionally, sub-theme two underlined that longer working hours impeded the mental health of employees as they adjusted their lifestyles to the online way of working. These factors were determined to be negligible in comparison to the increase in family time and the ability of employees to structure their workdays according to their vastly different lifestyles. This was found to be provided to employees through perceived FWAs. Career progression, correct resources that facilitated online work, physical well-being, trust and time-saving from commuting also supported better work-life balance which in turn supported better engagement within the workforce during mandatory work from home. Family time and flexibility were found to be more valuable than the nuances within the elements that led to work-life conflict. These could be mitigated through better self-management practices and online protocols. In addition, a hybrid work model post Covid-19 could aid in lessening some of the drawbacks in the promotion of work-life balance.

5.6 Overview of Results

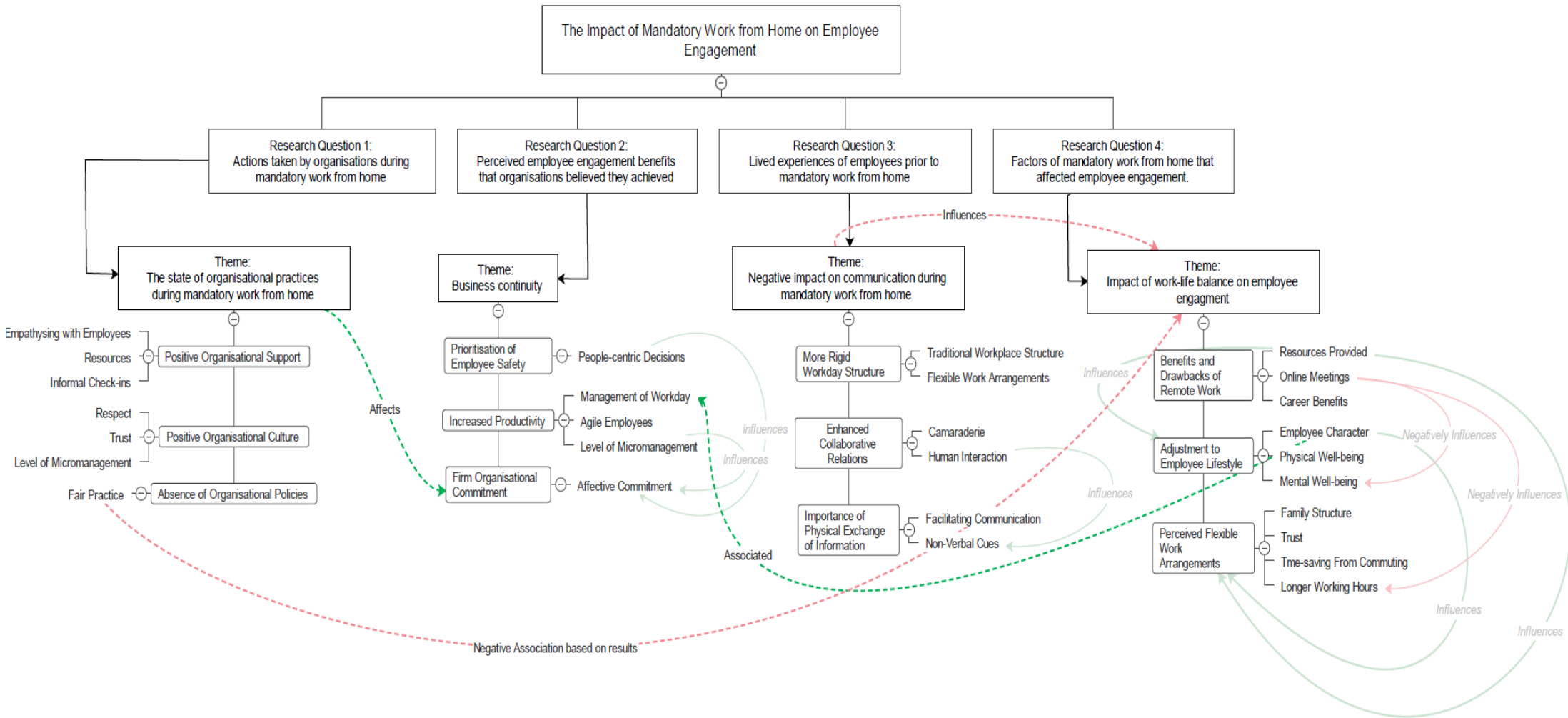


Figure 6: Summary of Influences and Associations of Results

5.7 Conclusion

Four research questions were asked to the respondents from which four main themes were presented in this chapter. Interpretation and evaluation per research question respectively highlighted the following. Although the current practices by organisations supported employee engagement during mandatory work from home, a more holistic provision could be made to employees through policy creation. Affective organisational commitment was a result of engaged employees which resulted in business continuity. The research findings also determined that physical interaction supported internal communication more, and that an overall trend in better work-life balance resulted in more engaged employees through perceived FWAs.

Aside from evaluating the results from the individual research questions, influences and associations were derived between the themes and sub-themes that emerged which was depicted in Figure 6. It was determined that although organisational commitment resulted in business continuity, the driver behind this affective commitment was the organisational practices that were carried out. The supporting policies of mandatory work from home that were not yet created was found to have a negative association with work-life balance as fair practice was compromised. Additionally, the negative impact on communication during mandatory work from home had a negative influence on work-life balance through an increase of online meetings to counter the missed human interaction that employees felt. The character of the employee was an integral aspect that was associated with employees' ability to manage their workday efficiently to support work-life balance. Better self-management of employees have the potential to result in employees that work toward their strengths during their deemed productive hours.

The next chapter will present the discussion of the results from this chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Results

6.1 Introduction

A detailed discussion of the results from chapter five will be presented in this chapter. This chapter aims to find congruence or divergence from literature surrounding the results that were interpreted from the 16 respondents. The discussion will be focused on the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the research questions posed in chapter three through evaluation of the theory presented in chapter two.

Research question one aimed to understand the reciprocal nature of the organisation in the form of the support it provided to its employees, the culture that was portrayed and the absence of policy creation during mandatory work from home. These three sub-themes supported the discussion of the emergent theme, the state of organisational practices during mandatory work from home.

Research question two was posed to managers to understand the benefits that managers perceived to be linked with employee engagement through mandating employees to work from home. Prioritisation of employee safety, increased productivity and firm organisational commitment were the three sub-themes that supported the emergent theme, business continuity.

Research question three was posed to employees to contextualise their work related experiences prior to mandatory work from home. More rigid workday structures, enhanced collaborative relations, and the importance of physical exchange of information were the three sub-themes that supported the emergent theme, the negative impact on communication during mandatory work from home.

It was found that voluntary work from home promoted work-life balance through FWAs, which supported employee engagement. Research question four was posed to employees to gain insights from them on whether mandatory work from home affected their work-life balance, through the benefits and drawbacks of remote work, adjustment to employee lifestyle and perceived flexible work arrangements. These three sub-themes supported the emergent theme, impact of work-life balance on employee engagement.

6.2 Research Question 1 - The state of organisational practices during mandatory work from home

6.2.1 Positive Organisational Support

The study found that organisational support received by employees during mandatory work from home supported social exchange theory. Mandatory work from home left a feeling of anxiousness within employees due to the novelty of the experience. Organisations that implemented mandatory work from home for the duration of the lockdown period addressed these fears and instead promoted a motivational narrative, ensuring that sincerity, caring and understanding was conveyed to their employees.

These findings are in line with literature. Kurtessis et al. (2017) found that employees went over and above their normal duties when they felt supported by their organisations. The extra effort that they put into their daily duties was performed willingly and thoroughly. This view concurred with that of employees who were asked about their view of organisational support regarding their work input. They confirmed that they looked favourably upon their organisations when they felt valued, and went the extra mile as an unspoken token of gratitude to their organisations.

An insight from employers was that they focused on the non-transactional aspects as well as the transactional aspects during their interactions with their employees. The simplistic check-ins around their employees well-being and the personal touch that they conveyed to their staff was supported by Reader et al. (2017) who argued that positive engagement was obtained when organisations supported employees from duties outside of their contractual agreement.

Fair practice was found to be an enabler of employee engagement (Sun, 2019). The information received from employees that were relatively new to their organisations was a disconnect with their teams and unclear work deliverables. In an organisational context, proper training and job descriptions for all employees could be considered as fair practice to enable them to conduct their work duties seamlessly. The mandatory work from home setting did not entirely promote this for newer employees due to the absence of face-to-face communication and rigid interaction with

management. Established employees did not consider the same issues when discussing their views on organisational support. This could be due to those employees already having the basic grounding and relationships with their managers, and the longevity within their organisations to have entrenched routines regarding conducting their work effectively.

6.2.2 Positive Organisational Culture

The outcome from employees regarding the culture within their organisations was that it encompassed accommodating elements through inclusivity and people-centricity. Organisations, through the view of management, have been aware of the need for employees to feel included to enhance engagement levels therefore they have supported mutual respect. The impact of treating employees from a less transactional point of view resonated favourably with employees and is supported by the literature. Literature has highlighted that unaccommodating and insincere organisations negatively affected employee engagement (Merzhi & Singh, 2016).

Reis et al. (2016) posited that organisations risked negatively affecting the employee engagement levels of authentic employees through a lack of trust. The study found that organisations fostered heightened trust amongst their employees. Employees looked favourably toward their organisations as they were allowed to practice autonomy. The feeling of being micro-managed through mandatory work from home was negligible which had positive implications toward employee engagement. Both, employees and management, identified improved employee productivity and organisational performance due to the right blend of organisational cultural aspects. This notion was further supported by Warrick (2017) in the literature.

6.2.3 Absence of Organisational Policies

Contrary to what literature has emphasised regarding a growth trend of policy creation or modification to support Covid-19 and remote work, employees from the study have stressed that organisational policies that supported FWAs or work-life balance were not drawn up due to the uncertainty of the situation (Shifrin & Michel, 2021).

Literature has also argued that policies that were created in support of FWAs, had a positive outlook on employee well-being. It maintained that support provided to employees in the form of fair practice via appropriate work place policies resulted in organisations that retained engaged employees (Sivapragasam & Raya, 2017). Managers agreed with employees on the lack of remote work policies and emphasised that family-centric nuances would need to be incorporated into these policies. This is in agreement with theory that mentioned that employees who had families were somewhat prioritised during policy amendments over employees that were single (Wilkinson et al., 2018). For better employee engagement to be developed during mandatory work from home, organisations should look into policy creation that is more comprehensive and inclusive of the diversity of employees within the organisation.

In conclusion, positive organisational support and positive organisational culture were found to be aligned with literature toward promoting employee engagement. The absence of policy creation was determined to be a drawback of employee engagement and a contradiction to literature as it was emphasised that this was a growing trend. This aspect can therefore be highlighted as a possible improvement of mandatory work from home to further support employee engagement.

6.3 Research Question 2 - Business Continuity

6.3.1 Prioritisation of Employee Safety

According to theory, organisations were required to mandate knowledge workers, where possible, to work from home under level five of the lockdown period to assist with curbing the spread of the Covid-19 virus. This included employees that were not categorised as front-line workers or were not part of essential services. As the lockdown levels varied during the course of the year, organisations had the discretion to allow their employees back into the office space accordingly (Dingel & Nieman, 2020). All respondents that were interviewed substantiated that their organisations opted to continue with the mandatory work from home directive throughout all lockdown levels.

A positive aspect noticed from the study was that organisations understood that dealing with people required them to incorporate a human element into their

decisions around whether employees would return to the office during varied lockdown levels or whether they would remain working from home. It was found that business strategies were evaluated and aligned with keeping the safety of employees as a priority and to engage employees throughout the pandemic (Xiao et al., 2021).

Managers realised that safety nuances such as cramped office areas hindered the ability to properly social distance employees. This was supported by Xiao et al. (2021) who mentioned that mandatory work from home enabled employee safety and a reduction in the concentration of employees in smaller areas.

6.3.2 Increased Productivity

The view of managers was that mandatory work from home positively affected business performance and employee engagement. A proportion of this performance was attributed to the heightened productivity of knowledge workers. Not all employees were similar in the way in which they worked, resulting in some employees that were more productive during the day while others were more productive at night (Huls et al., 2021). Managers realised that mandatory work from home facilitated FWAs to a certain degree which positively impacted employee work-life balance. Literature supported the notion that enhanced productivity through FWAs was a result of more engaged employees (Dingel & Nieman, 2020).

The study found that communicating through technology provided the benefit of streamlined discussions when self-management practices were executed. Theory supported this by noting that knowledge workers that easily adapted to this form of working were deemed to provide organisational competitiveness through being agile in addition to the talent that they provided to their companies (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016).

Employees were allowed to structure their day where possible and micromanaging employee whereabouts or work times were kept to a minimum. This facilitated the trust component between employees and their managers. Pavalin et al. (2017) was in agreement with this as they postulated that productivity levels of both employees and teams were heightened when self-management practices were conducted appropriately.

6.3.3 Firm Organisational Commitment

Feedback from organisational representatives in the form of the managers was that employees had an emotional connection with their organisations because they felt well treated, respected and trusted. According to theory, affective commitment was related to the emotional experiences of employees which was deemed to be seen in a more positive light than the transactional alternative of normative commitment (Nazir & Ul Islam, 2017). It can be inferred from the study that employees related to their organisations through affective commitment during mandatory work from home which led to employee retention, and can be viewed as an outcome of organisational commitment.

In conclusion, the prioritisation of employee safety and the autonomy afforded to employees through trust was supported by theory as promoters of employee engagement. The resultant outcomes were employee productivity when self-management practices were conducted efficiently, organisational performance, and affective organisational commitment which led to employee and skills retention. Literature further supported that a more engaged workforce was evident given these outcomes. Tools to promote self-management practices in support of employee productivity can therefore be highlighted as a possible improvement of mandatory work from home to further support employee engagement and mitigate burnout through increased employee stress levels.

6.4 Research Question 3 - The negative impact on communication during mandatory work from home

6.4.1 More Rigid Workday Structure

Employees were aware that the structure presented from the traditional workplace was conducive to carrying out work deliverables efficiently. Many employees stated that they did not consider an alternative work arrangement before Covid-19 as they considered that way of working to be the norm. The study emphasised that the traditional workplace facilitated ease of conducting work as people and resources were within the same environment.

A small number of employees preferred working from the traditional workplace over being mandated to work from home. These employees reasoned that they did not receive adequate support and did not have readily available resources at their disposal. This is in agreement with literature, as Kumar and Aithal (2016) concluded that the traditional workplace was advantageous to employees as it better aligned employee thinking with work deliverables through providing the supporting resources.

The study highlighted that employees were acutely aware of the changes in the way work was being conducted. The majority of employees viewed organisations that provided FWAs to their employees as a benefit and many of them instigated this trend within their organisations. They felt that FWAs gave them the best of both worlds and looked more positively upon organisations that supported FWAs prior to Covid-19.

6.4.2 Enhanced Collaborative Relations

Theory supported the idea that camaraderie in the traditional workplace was an integral component of workplace productivity. Individuals in an office setting formed strong relationships and some treated their colleagues as family rather than acquaintances (Bonaccio et al., 2016). This was evident from the study in which employees felt disconnected from their peers once mandatory work from home was implemented.

The missing element of human interaction was found to be a large drawback of being mandated to work from home as opposed to managing those interactions from a voluntary work from home setting. The feeling from employees was that this interaction amongst colleagues and management not only stifled collaborative efforts but that it left employees craving for this primal form of communication.

6.4.3 Importance of Physical Exchange of Information

The ability to communicate through non-verbal cues severely declined once online meetings became prevalent. The bulk of the employees that were interviewed maintained that drawing sentiment from customers or individuals in a meeting became difficult and that having the knack of saying just enough in a conversation

became tricky due to missed emotional connotations. These employees provided further insight that individuals overused the option to keep their cameras off which further perpetuated the lack of non-verbal interaction. Theory has supported that exchanging of information through soft skills was important for employees to better understand each other, remaining relevant, and allowed for personalisation of exchanging information to take place (Steele, 2016).

Employees found that there was less courtesy during sending out online meeting requests which resulted in everyone wanting to cram their agenda in. The formality around online meetings and the haste in which meetings were carried out resulted in poorer inter-team collaboration. Kang and Sung (2017) concurred that good internal organisational communication led to positively engaged employees as it promoted the development of relationships. The study has highlighted that internal communication was hampered by mandatory work from home.

In conclusion, more rigid workday structures were seen to provide a constructive way of working and aligning employee thinking toward their deliverables which was supported by literature. Sincere relationship building and friendships were disadvantaged due to the lack of human interaction that supported collaboration. Additionally, internal communication was negatively affected as soft skills such as non-verbal cues that aided better understanding and personalisation through physical interaction was hampered. Theory supported the importance of communication as a promoter of employee engagement. Therefore, cultivating communication through facilitating responsible interaction of employees has the potential to improve engagement levels in a mandatory work from home context.

6.5 Research Question 4 - Impact of work-life balance on employee engagement

6.5.1 Benefits and Drawbacks of Remote Work

Employees noted that mandatory work from home increased the need for digitisation and required knowledge workers to function and rely more on web-based tools across different online platforms to enable them to collaborate with their teams efficiently. Channa and Sangeeta (2020) mentioned that employees were more committed which led to better engagement when they felt supported from an

organisational perspective in terms of having the correct resources and visibility of management available to them. The ease of conducting work remotely was viewed positively by employees. The inference can be made that it is a facilitator of work-life balance.

The study highlighted that although online platforms facilitated ease of conducting work, there was an element of overuse, which impeded work-life boundaries. The results found that online meetings that were not applicable to all the invitees became part of the daily distractions for these employees. It not only hampered their ability to complete their deliverables timeously but it also affected their state of mind, often leaving them feeling more mentally tired than if they attended the appropriate face-to-face meetings. Schwartz et al. (2020) argued that online communication was used as a smokescreen to mask the deeper need for human interaction without realising the adverse effects that it contributed to once the meetings had ended.

A benefit of remote work that was brought to light by the study was the ability of employees to gain a thorough view of the organisation in which they worked, through meeting virtually with the global players that contributed to the success of the business. This aspect would not have been as simplistic to coordinate during working from the traditional workspace as organisations would be burdened with the added expense of travel, accommodation, and time away from work for employees to interact with their global counterparts. The inference can be made that employees who encountered this benefit may be earmarked for growth and development which would positively benefit their careers.

6.5.2 Adjustment to Employee Lifestyle

The outcome from the study revealed mixed views from respondents regarding the impact that mandatory work from home had on their lifestyle. It was evident that lifestyle benefits or disadvantages largely resided with the character of the employee.

Employees that included stress relievers such as self-soothing techniques or distancing themselves from the point of stress through conducive distractions during their workday found it easier to manage their well-being. The study revealed that this

was imperative to counter monotonous situations in which work and private characteristics bled together.

Some employees were able to make life-changing decisions that supported their overall health and well-being. A reduction in junk food consumption and increased physical activity were noted once employees were able to manoeuvre around the adjustment of working from home. Xiao et al. (2021) emphasised that positive hormones known as endorphins were released in the human body when exercise was conducted or when positive emotional experiences were created. This had the ability to negate stress inducing psychological disorders.

Other employees were presented with different challenges that added to increased stress levels. These were found to be as a result of self-management practices that were poorly applied. Employees were found to be slaves to their organisations in certain instances as they were not able to effectively communicate with their managers around cut-off times. These employees found it difficult to say no to infringements on their personal time. As a result, digital fatigue added to the already stressed and tired workers. Chadee et al. (2020) supported that digital fatigue and the improper structuring of the workday led to a workforce that is more withdrawn and disengaged from their organisations.

6.5.3 Perceived Flexible Work Arrangements

Knowledge workers that were thrust into mandatory work from home displayed enthusiasm toward the newfound way of working. A combination of personality traits and family structure of these employees determined their ability to utilise the flexible work component to enhance their personal relationships and their careers equally.

The onset of Covid-19 resulted in periods of hard lockdown in which government dictated the closure of schools and childcare facilities. Employees with children faced the brunt of coping with home-schooling and entertaining their children during their workday which rendered some of them inaccessible to their employers during this time. The flexibility that remote work provided to them enabled them to shuffle their work around and create schedules that suited their lifestyle. Theory found that this often resulted in longer, more unpredictable work hours for employees Huls et al.

(2021). The study indicated that although employees felt more tired with this way of working, it supported their personal lifestyles. They found this flexibility to be a promoter of their work-life balance.

The results have shown that organisations created employee morale and positive engagement through fostering a culture of trust which led to better quality of work being produced. The support of organisations gave employees the feeling that the place in which they worked did not matter but that how they worked was important. The stance from the sample that were interviewed was that they were not heavily monitored. There was no indication of unethical practices from organisations that hindered the employee-employer relationship.

As supported by social exchange theory from the literature, employees delivered more valuable output, were noble in their attempt to be fair to their organisations when structuring their workday, and were found to be more engaged through the heightened trust which they noted was not always present when they worked from the office (Shuck et al., 2017).

The results highlighted that time saving on commuting to and from the traditional workplace was viewed positively by the respondents. This was utilised to enhance employee well-being through relaxation and rejuvenation while also benefitting organisations as employees gave back some of this time toward adding to their productive hours.

Self-management practices were found to be imperative to balance work-life aspects and mitigate work-life conflict. A minority view from the study was that changes in the work routine of employees blurred work-life boundaries which hampered time spent with family. Productivity was then found to be as a result of working longer hours as more work was accomplished. Employees' willingness to work longer hours is evidence that they perceived value in being mandated to work from home despite the difficulties described.

The perceived flexibility that employees were presented with enhanced their view of their organisation. Many employees favoured a hybrid work model post Covid-19 and

opted to work for employers that provided this benefit to them. The majority view of employees was that the perceived FWAs that were afforded to them through mandatory work from home was found to positively support their work-life balance.

In conclusion, cumbersome online meetings was noted as a drawback of remote work. Theory supported that this was due to the primal need for human interaction. Self-management practices were additionally supported in literature to mitigate longer working hours that led to poor mental well-being while employees adjusted their lifestyles to working from home. A notable outcome from the discussion of this theme was that as voluntary work from home promoted work-life balance of employees that resulted in positive employee engagement, so too did mandatory work from home through perceived FWAs. Improving online etiquette can therefore be highlighted as a possible improvement of mandatory work from home to further support work-life balance and employee engagement.

6.6 Improvement of Employee Engagement during Mandatory Work from Home

A review of the results has highlighted areas which have found to be lacking in a mandatory work from home context. As the longevity of this situation and the uncertainty around Covid-19 remain elusive, this can be utilised as suggestions on improving employee engagement while organisations continue to mandate their staff to work from home. Fair practice through policy creation, providing self-management tools, facilitating responsible interaction, and improving online etiquette were identified as opportunistic avenues to enable a greater number of engaged employees in the workforce.

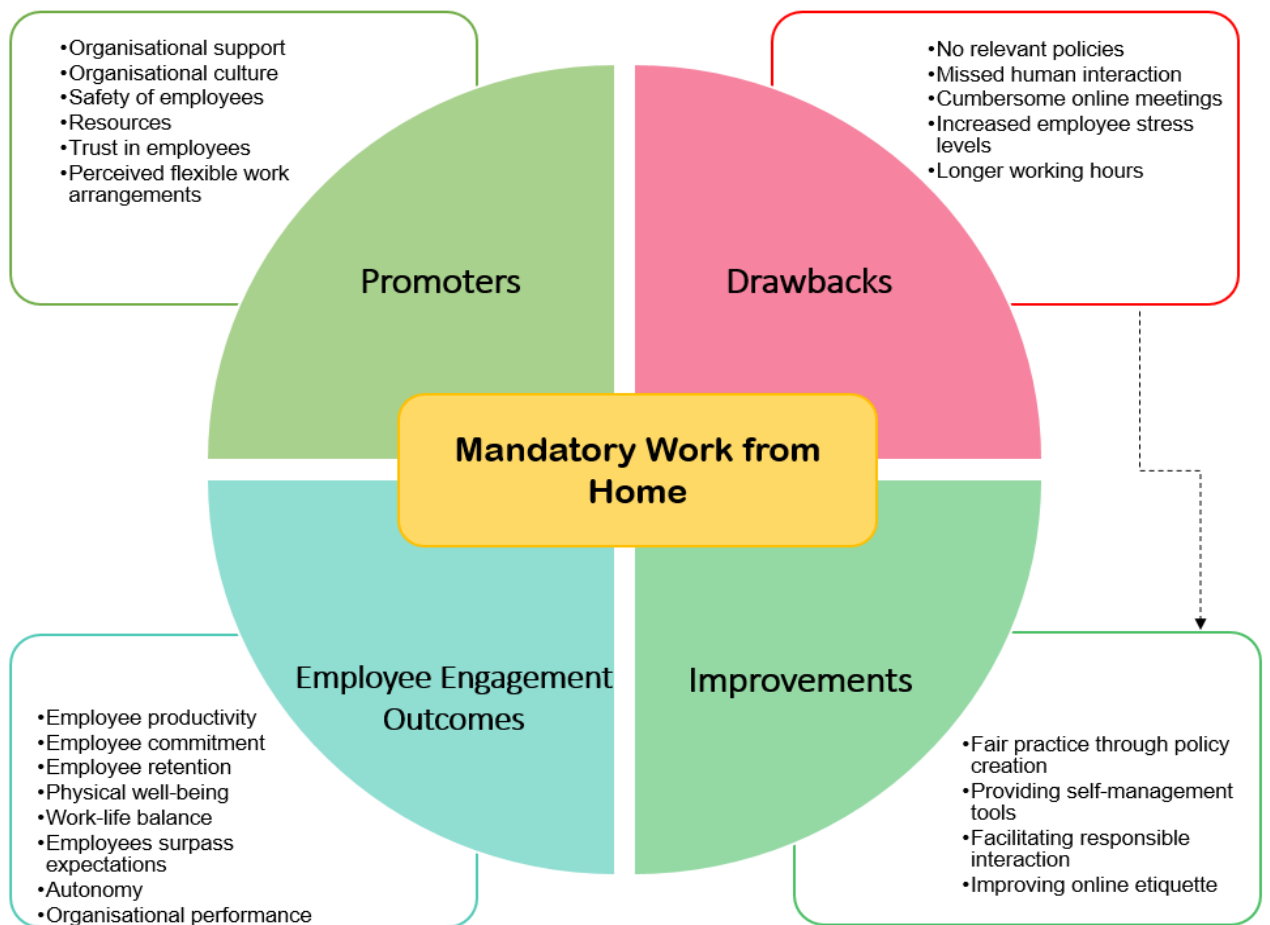


Figure 7: Framework: Situation Analysis and Improving Employee Engagement during Mandatory Work from Home

6.6.1 Fair Practice through Policy Creation

The results have displayed that organisations did not have functioning work from home policies to support fair practices. Work roles, deliverables and the functioning of teams during mandatory work from home was left to discretionary conversations between employees and management. Both managers and employees saw this as a drawback to building an enabling working environment during mandatory work from home. Employees were found to have a rich diversity which did not allow for them to be catered for under a single umbrella in terms of the organisational practices that were carried out. Inclusivity of all employees through comprehensive mandatory work from home policy creation has the potential to heighten employee engagement levels within organisations. The literature reviewed was from international studies. This supported better employee engagement through establishing expectations, providing guidance, and ensuring consistent, fair practices that were communicated to

employees (Shifrin & Michel, 2021). There was little insight on this aspect from a South African perspective.

6.6.2 Providing Self-management Tools

The study has suggested that while mandatory work from home positively influenced the work-life balance of employees, there were a few employees that struggled with the management of their workdays. As work-life balance was found to be a promoter of employee engagement, ensuring that every employee had the opportunity to develop this construct would bode well for organisations and business continuity (Cohen & Gosai, 2016).

Organisations have the opportunity to enhance support initiatives for their employees through providing tools that are essential for cultivating constructive self-management during mandatory work from home.

6.6.3 Facilitating Responsible Interaction

The absence of interacting with colleagues or friendly corridor banter was found to be a major drawback of mandatory work from home. It was a key indicator in relationship building and negating uncertainty which could adversely affect productivity (Kang & Sang, 2017). As organisational commitment was found to be a predictor of employee engagement, Channa and Sangeeta (2020) emphasised that support from organisations that facilitated online interaction resulted in more committed, and hence, more engaged employees. As such, responsible workplace interactions in light of the Covid-19 restrictions should be facilitated by organisations. These interactions could support informal interactions, such as online quiz games between departments or intimate gatherings between team members within the bounds of social distancing.

The study found a disconnect between newer employees and their teams due to them being unfamiliar with each other. Literature also confirmed that organisational change processes, such as mandatory work from home, had the ability to create disengaged employees through higher stress levels and poorer integration of employees, thereby leading to a decline in employee well-being levels. Promotion of responsible interaction could foster cross-pollination of ideas and provide

opportunities for senior and junior employees to connect, thereby bringing together more cohesive teams. Theory supported that the longing for human interaction was a challenge that resulted in poor well-being (Shifrin & Michel, 2021).

6.6.4 Improving Online Etiquette

Online etiquette was found to be a common thread between the themes in the study which hampered effective internal communication efforts and proper planning of the employee workday, was found to prompt exhaustion, and facilitated poor employee well-being while heightening work-conflict conditions. These components were found to be detrimental to employee engagement according to Tate et al. (2019); Packirisamy et al. (2017); Saks (2021) and Cohen and Gosai (2016).

The results showed that good online etiquette such as proper planning of meetings with specific agendas and courteously supporting colleagues with prompts about deliverables can create clarity for employees that had trouble with defining clear work-life boundaries. Constructive work without delayed responses was found to be hindered through attendees that kept their cameras off. As a result, attendees did not give off their full attention to the meeting and were found to be more distracted. Mitigating longer working hours because of catching up on missed information could then be achieved to enhance work-life balance for all employees.

6.7 Conclusion

Chapter six provided the discussion of the results that were presented in chapter five. Evaluation of the in-depth insights from the qualitative research provided evidence that mandatory work from home delivered employee engagement benefits to organisations through facilitating work-life balance for the majority of the respondents in the study. The study further identified improvement avenues through analysing the minority and contradicting views from the respondents to enable holistic engagement within organisations. The improvement areas were found to be “fair practice through policy creation, providing self-management tools, facilitating responsible interaction, and improving online etiquette.” The next chapter will provide the conclusion to the research study.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This study set out to explore the impact of mandatory work from home on employee engagement. Engaged employees were found to provide a competitive advantage to their employers by living out the values of the organisation, driving organisational strategy, remaining loyal, and contributing positively to the performance of the organisation (Mehrzi & Singh, 2016). The global Covid-19 pandemic created uncertainty around sustaining business productivity and continuity through economic activity and the safety of employees, therefore large proportions of the workforce were mandated to work from home (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garces, 2020). There have been several contributors to literature on the impact of voluntary work from home, through FWAs, on employee engagement, however, limited research was conducted from a mandatory work from home perspective.

The pertinence of investigating whether mandatory work from home impacted employee engagement resided with the knowledge that disengagement under conventional circumstances was high. Actively engaged employees accounted for 22% globally and 9% within South Africa (Gallup, 2021). The benefits of having a highly engaged workforce have been constantly emphasised in literature therefore investigation under unconventional circumstances was warranted (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Lemon, 2019; Purushotham, 2020; Saks, 2021; Shuck et al., 2017; Sun, 2019).

This study considered the role of the organisation in its supporting practices to employees that were mandated to work from home, it investigated the benefits of mandating employees to work from home, it viewed the context of the traditional workplace, and it delved into the factors that affected employees while they were mandated to work from home.

This closing chapter will present the conclusion to the research study by firstly providing the principal conclusions to the research questions, thereafter, state the practical contribution, the contribution to literature, and implications for management. The implications for business will be concluded through a brief explanation of the framework for improving mandatory work from home to support a greater proportion

of engaged employees. The research limitations and suggestions for future research will also be presented in this chapter.

7.2 Principal Conclusions

The research study has provided a clear response to the research problem in chapter one which aimed to comprehend whether mandatory work from home impacted employee engagement through understanding if it served as an enabler or limitation of the construct. Four main research questions facilitated achieving the consolidated research objectives to answer the overarching research question.

The overarching research question that drove this study was:

What impact did mandatory work from home have on employee engagement?

The four main research questions were:

- What were the actions taken by organisations to promote employee engagement during working from home through the pandemic?
- What were the employee engagement benefits that organisations believed they achieved by implementing mandatory work from home?
- What were the lived experiences of employees prior to mandatory work from home?
- What were the factors of work from home, either positive or negative, that affected employee engagement during the pandemic?

7.2.1 Understanding how Organisations Engaged Employees and the Perceived Benefits they encountered

The first emergent theme, the state of organisational practices during mandatory work from home, was found to encourage employee engagement through the organisational support and culture that was presented to employees (Reader et al., 2017). Although policy creation was lacking, employees felt that their organisations empathised with them by going above supportive initiatives stipulated by their contractual agreements, and provided support from a genuine caring perspective.

The second emergent theme, business continuity, the benefit that organisations noticed, was found to enable employee engagement as organisations made people-centric decisions regarding the safety of employees. It was found to have led to affective employee commitment and employee productivity which are indicators of engaged employees (Nazir & Ul Islam, 2017).

7.2.2 The Optimal Work from Home Conditions and Determination of Mandatory Work from Home Drawbacks

The third emergent theme, negative impact of communication during mandatory work from home, was found to be a drawback and can be insightful to organisations during improving the conditions of mandatory work from home. Employees recognised more holistic and effective communication from the traditional workplace. Communication was found to resonate on a deeper level of missed human interaction with the respondents. The lack of personalisation during the exchange of information and the absence of non-verbal cues was seen to hamper internal communication efforts during online interaction (Steele, 2016).

The fourth emergent theme, impact of work-life balance on employee engagement was found to be as a result of the perceived flexible work arrangements that employees encountered. The study found that it supported work-life balance which was recognised as a facilitator of employee engagement. It emerged that during the unprecedented pandemic conditions, the importance of family and well-being conditions were elevated. The perceived FWAs promoted improved family time and physical health conditions of employees. Supporting engaged employees through autonomous workdays due to the trust that employees experienced from their managers assisted in mitigating work-conflict areas (Shuck et al., 2017). Longer working hours due to online and workday distractions were found to be negligible for the respondents as the ability to structure their day according to their needs was found to be more valuable (Nakrosiene et al., 2019). The reciprocity noticed in return for the actions and support that organisations provided was a willingness to surpass management expectations and deliver on productivity (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

7.3 Practical Contribution

The principal findings of the research study are presented in the framework depicted by Figure 7. The framework describes the optimal conditions to support employee engagement during mandatory work from home by providing insight into the employee engagement promoters, drawbacks, and outcomes during a mandatory work from home directive. The framework further provides practical suggestions in the form of improvements for management of organisations to implement. The study has found that this could facilitate the engagement of a larger proportion of the workforce by being cognisant of the diversity within organisations.

7.3.1 Improving Employee Engagement

The improvement avenues were created through analysing the minority and contradicting views from the respondents to enable holistic engagement within organisations. The improvement areas were found to be “fair practice through policy creation, providing self-management tools, facilitating responsible interaction, and improving online etiquette.”

International studies have indicated that mandatory work from home policies that encouraged fair practice have had a positive growth trajectory which supported engaged employees (Shifrin & Michel, 2021). This was not evident from the respondents in a South African context. The diversity within South Africa, and hence, organisations, is rife. Accommodating this diversity in the workforce through the creation of clear guidelines to promote fair practice can promote further engagement within organisations.

An addition to the support provided by organisations is self-management tools. This could assist more of the workforce to better manage their days to encourage work-life balance for a greater number of employees, thus creating a more engaged workforce (Cohen & Gosai, 2016).

Newer employees within organisations were found to be at a disadvantage due to the unfamiliarity of their teams. The resultant increase in stress levels for these employees and the longing for human interaction resulted in poor mental well-being levels. The traditional workplace was seen to mitigate this due to the face-to-face

interaction that employees were accustomed to. The facilitation of online interaction that stimulated camaraderie or the inclusion of responsible face-to-face interaction within the bounds of the lockdown regulations could support higher engagement and productivity levels (Kang & Sang, 2017; Channa & Sangeeta, 2020; Shifrin & Michel, 2021).

Disengagement due to work-conflict situations, poor internal communication, and poor mental well-being levels as a result of poor online etiquette can be mitigated through proper workday planning with specific agendas for online meetings. This has the ability to promote work-life balance for employees that struggled with working longer hours due to cumbersome online meetings that blurred work-life boundaries. In conclusion, improving online etiquette can support employee engagement (Tate et al., 2019; Packirisamy et al., 2017; Saks, 2021; Cohen and Gosai, 2016).

7.4 Contribution to Literature

This study contributes to literature by adding to the growing body of knowledge on employee engagement. Purushotham (2020) posited that work from home under mandatory conditions was a consequence of the change in the organisational internal environment due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, and as a driver of employee engagement remained uncertain. This research study largely found that mandatory work from home provided a conducive environment for employee engagement during unconventional circumstances which revealed positive employee engagement outcomes.

7.5 Implications for Management and other relevant Stakeholders

The research study, through the discussion of results and the framework presented in Figure 7, has identified practical suggestions in the form of improvements for management of organisations to implement. The study has found that mandatory work from home does have an impact on employee engagement through evaluation of the common drivers of employee engagement. It was noted that this unconventional way of working supported business performance and sustainability, therefore, improving on the drawbacks of mandatory work from home could support organisations in attaining a larger workforce of engaged employees.

Management should be cognisant of the following when promoting employee engagement in a mandatory work from home context:

- Heightened views of the organisational image were evident by employees through the support that was provided to them. This typically resulted in more committed employees, and organisations were more likely to retain skilled employees.
- Employees viewed the trust that they received as a facilitator of employee engagement as it endorsed an autonomous working environment for them. They were more likely to surpass their employer expectations in their work roles in this regard.
- The lack of job descriptions and basic training were viewed to support disengagement of employees. Management should be more aware of focusing on growing and supporting newer employees during unconventional circumstances to foster engagement with them.
- The perceived FWAs presented by mandatory work from home were successful in promoting work-life balance which is a driver of employee engagement. Based on this study, organisations should investigate a hybrid work model which includes the positive aspects of mandatory work from home in conjunction with the benefits of the traditional workplace to further promote employee engagement post Covid-19.

7.6 Limitations of the Research

The limitations that emerged during the research study are as follows:

- The small sample size did not allow for generalisability of the study. Although the interviews comprised of respondents and managers from four different industries, the study may not be a full representation of the various other industries that were also subject to mandatory work from home within South Africa.

- Although participants were selected based on sampling criteria prior to data collection to eliminate bias from the researcher, respondents were also selected on their ease of access to the researcher.
- The study utilised a cross-sectional study which may not provide the depth that a longitudinal study may allow for.
- A mono method approach was made use of which may have resulted in a less comprehensive result than a mixed method approach

7.7 Suggestions for Future Research

Potential areas of future research were noted throughout the study which are highlighted below.

- The study revealed that the management style within the organisations that were explored was forward thinking with minimal micromanaging. This supported trust and autonomy for employees. A future area of research could investigate the influence of different leadership styles as a mediator of employee engagement during mandatory work from home.
- The study highlighted that women, as primary caregivers, may be disproportionately affected by mandatory work from home. A potential area of study is to better understand gender disparities during mandatory work from home and its effect on employee engagement.
- The findings of the study showed that self-control depletion due to the counterintuitive use of online tools had disengagement tendencies. Further investigation of employee personality during mandatory work from home could aid in the understanding of employee engagement consequences.
- The study highlighted that social divides within South Africa had the potential to affect employees' access to proper infrastructure. Research into the role of social divides during mandatory work from home could shed more light on the engagement experiences of employees.

7.8 Conclusion

Theoretical evaluation through the literature review has found many nuances that had the ability to impact employee engagement during mandatory work from home. This research study was successful in answering the main research question, “*what impact did mandatory work from home have on employee engagement?*” It can be concluded that mandatory work from home largely had a positive impact on employee engagement by supporting the work-life balance of employees which was an enabler of employee engagement.

Suggested improvements through the evaluation of the contradictory and minority views from employees were represented in the framework in Figure 7 to engage a larger proportion of the workforce. This study has contributed to literature by noting the impact that mandatory work from home had on employee engagement and has also made practical recommendations to organisations to improve employee engagement.

References

- Anthony-McMann, P. E., Ellinger, A. D., Astakhova, M., & Halbesleben, J. R. (2017). Exploring different operationalisations of employee engagement and their relationship with workplace stress and burnout. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 28(2), 162-195. doi:10.1002/hrdq.21276
- Avgoustaki, A., & Bessa, L. (2019). Examining the link between flexible working arrangement bundles and employee work effort. *Human Resource Management*, 431-449. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21969>
- Bal, P. M., & De Lange, A. H. (2015). From flexibility human resource management to employee engagement and perceived job performance across the lifespan: A multisample study. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 88, 126-154. doi:10.1111/joop.12082
- Beckmann, M., Cornelissen, T., & Kräkel, M. (2017). Self-managed working time and employee effort: Theory and evidence. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 285–302. doi:10.1016/j.jebo.2016.11.013
- Belzunegui-Eraso, A., & Erro-Garces, A. (2020). Teleworking in the context of the Covid-19 crisis. *Sustainability*. doi:10.3390/su12093662
- Bonaccio, S., O'Reilly, J., O'Sullivan, S. L., & Chiochio, F. (2016). Nonverbal behavior and communication in the workplace: A review and an agenda for research. *Journal of Management*, 42(5), 1044–1074. doi:10.1177/0149206315621146
- Braun, V., & Clark, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Burton, W. N., Chen, C.-Y., Xingquan, L., & Schultz, A. B. (2017). The association of employee engagement at work with health risks and presenteeism. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 59(10), 988-992. doi: 10.1097/JOM.0000000000001108
- Chadee, D., Ren, S., & Tang, G. (2020). Is digital technology the magic bullet for performing work at home? Lessons learned for post COVID-19 recovery in hospitality management. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 92, 1-8. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102718>
- Channa, N., & Sangeeta. (2020). Employee engagement practices during COVID-19 lockdown. *Journal of Public Affairs*. doi:10.1002/pa.2508

- Chatman, J. A., & O'Reilly, C. A. (2016). Paradigm lost: Reinvigorating the study of organizational culture. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 36, 199-224. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2016.11.004>
- Cheryak-Hai, L., & Rabenu, E. (2018). The new era workplace relationships: Is social exchange theory still relevant? *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 11(3), 456-481. doi:10.1017/iop.2018.5
- Clark, S., McGrane, A., Boyle, N., Joksimovic, N., Burke, L., Rock, N., & O' Sullivan, K. (2021). You're a teacher you're a mother, you're a worker: Gender inequality during COVID-19 in Ireland. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 28, 1352–1362. doi:10.1111/gwao.12611
- Cohen, T., & Gosai, N. (2016). Making a case for work-life balance for the South African employee. *Industrial Law Journal* (3, A), 37, 22237-22250.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (4th ed.). Sage publications.
- Delanoëije, J., Verbruggen, M., & Germeys, L. (2019). Boundary role transitions: A day-to-day approach to explain the effects of home-based telework on work-to-home conflict and home-to-work conflict. *Human Relations*, 72(12), 1843–1868. doi:10.1177/0018726718823071
- Dingel, J. I., & Nieman, B. (2020). How many jobs can be done at home? *Journal of Public Economics*, 1-8. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2020.104235>
- Eisenberger, R., Rockstuhl, T., Shoss, M. K., Wen, X., & Dulebohn, J. (2019). Is the employee–organization relationship dying or thriving? A temporal meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 104(8), 1306-1057. doi:10.1037/apl0000390
- Eldor, L., & Harpaz, I. (2016). A process model of employee engagement: The learning climate and its relationship with extra-role performance behaviors. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 37, 213-235. doi:10.1002/job.2037
- Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(9), 1408-1416. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss9/3>
- Gallup. (2021). *Gallup Q12® Meta-Analysis*. Retrieved from www.gallup.com: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/321725/gallup-q12-meta-analysis-report.aspx>

- Ganster, D. C., Rosen, C. C., & Fisher, G. G. (2018). Long working hours and well-being: What we know, what we do not know, and what we need to know. *Journal of Business Psychology*, 33, 25-39. doi:10.1007/s10869-016-9478-1
- Guidetti, G., Conservo, D., Loera, B., & Viotti, S. (2018). Concerns about change and employee wellbeing: The moderating role of social support. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 30(3), 216-228. doi:10.1108/JWL-09-2017-0083
- Gupta, N., & Sharma, V. (2016). Exploring employee engagement - A way to better business performance. *Global Business Review*, 45-63. doi:10.1177/0972150916631082
- Huls, S. P., Sajjad, A., Kanters, T. A., Hakkart-van Roijen, L., & Brouwer, W. B. (2021). Productivity of working at home and time allocation between paid work, unpaid work and leisure activities during a pandemic. *Pharmaco Economics*, 1-25. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40273-021-01078-7>
- Jonsen, K. (2009). Using triangulation to validate themes in qualitative studies. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 4(2), 123-150. doi:10.1108/17465640910978391
- Kahn, W. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4), 692-724. doi:10.5465/256287
- Kallio, H., Pietila, A.-M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(12), 2954-2965. doi:10.1111/jan.13031
- Kang, M., & Sung, M. (2017). How symmetrical employee communication leads to employee engagement and positive employee communication behaviors. *Journal of Communication Management*, 21(1), 82-102. doi:10.1108/JCOM-04-2016-0026
- Kramer, A., & Kramer, K. Z. (2020). The potential impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on occupational status, work from home, and occupational mobility. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103442>
- Kubicek, B., & Tement, S. (2016). Work intensification and the work-home interface. *Journal of Personnel Psychology*, 76–89. doi: 10.1027/1866-5888/a000158

- Kumar, S. P., & Aithal, P. (2016). Working from home - A transition in the concept of workplace. *International Journal of Current Research and Modern Education*, 1(1), 2455-5428.
- Kurtessis, J., Eisenberger, R., Ford, M., Buffardi, L., Stewart, K., & Adis, C. (2017). Perceived organisational support: A meta-analytic evaluation of organisational support theory. *Journal of Management*, 43(6), 1854-1884. doi:10.1177/0149206315575554
- Lakshmi, V., Nigam, R., & Mishra, S. (2017). Telecommuting – A key driver to work-life balance and productivity. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*. doi:10.9790/487X-1901032023
- Lemon, L. L. (2019). The employee experience: how employees make meaning of employee engagement. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 31(5-6), 176-199. doi:10.1080/1062726X.2019.1704288
- Mas, A., & Pallais, A. (2017). Valuing alternative work arrangements. *American Economic Review*, 3722–3759. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20161500>
- Matli, W. (2020). The changing work landscape as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic: Insights from remote workers life situations in South Africa. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 40(9), 1237-1256. doi:10.1108/IJSSP-08-2020-0386
- Maxwell, J. A. (2008). *Designing a qualitative study* (Vol. 2). The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods.
- McCormick, L., & Donohue, R. (2019). Antecedents of affective and normative commitment of organisational volunteers. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 30(18), 2581-2604. doi:10.1080/09585192.2016.1166388
- Mehrzi, N. A., & Singh, S. K. (2016). Competing through employee engagement: A proposed framework. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 66(6). doi:10.1108/IJPPM-02-2016-0037
- Moran, D. (2002). *Introduction to phenomenology*. New York: Routledge.
- Moussa, M., Bright, M., & Varua, M. E. (2017). Investigating knowledge workers' productivity using work design theory. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance*, 66(6), 822-834. doi:10.1108/IJPPM-08-2016-0161

- Nakrošienė, A., Bučiūnienė, I., & Goštautaitė, B. (2019). Working from home: Characteristics and outcomes of telework. *International Journal of Manpower*, 40(1), 87-101. doi:10.1108/IJM-07-2017-0172
- Nazir, O., & Ul Islam, J. (2017). Enhancing organizational commitment and employee performance through employee engagement. *South Asian Journal of Business Studies*, 6(1), 98-114. doi:10.1108/SAJBS-04-2016-0036
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16, 1-13. doi:10.1177/1609406917733847
- Osbourne, S., & Hammoud, M. S. (2017). Effective employee engagement in the workplace. *International Journal of Applied Management and Technology*, 16(1), 50-67. doi:10.5590/IJAMT.2017.16.1.04
- Packirisamy, P., Meenakshy, M., & Jagannathan, S. (2017). Burnout during early career: Lived experiences of the knowledge workers in India. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, 30(1), 96-121. doi:10.1108/JEIM-01-2016-0041
- Palvalin, M., van der Voort, T., & Jylhä, T. (2017). The impact of workplaces and self-management practices on the productivity of knowledge workers. *Journal of Facilities Management*, 15(4), 423-438. doi:10.1108/JFM-03-2017-0010
- Purushotham, A. (2020). A literature review analysis - Employee engagement interventions. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, 7(9), 454-460.
- Reader, T. W., Mearns, K., Lopes, C., & Kuha, J. (2017). Organizational support for the workforce and employee safety citizenship behaviors: A social exchange relationship. *Human Relations*, 70(3), 362-385. doi:10.1177/0018726716655863
- Reijseger, G., Peeters, M. C., Taris, T. W., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2017). From motivation to activation: Why engaged workers are better. *Journal of Business Psychology*, 32, 117-130. doi:10.1007/s10869-016-9435-z
- Reis, G., Trullen, J., & Story, J. (2016). Perceived organizational culture and engagement: The mediating role of authenticity. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 31(6), 1091-1105. doi:10.1108/JMP-05-2015-0178

- Sanchez, D. G., Parra, N. G., Ozden, C., Rijkers, B., Viollaz, M., & Winkler, H. (2021). Who on earth can work from home? *World Bank Research Observer*, 36(1), 67-100. doi:10.1093/wbro/lkab002
- Saks, A. M. (2021). Caring human resources management and employee engagement. *Human Resource Management Review*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmmr.2021.100835>
- Saunders, M., & Lewis, P. (2018). *Doing research in business management* (2nd ed.). Harlow, England: Pearson.
- Schwartz, M., Scherrer, A., Hohmann, C., Brugger, A., & Nunez-Jimenez, A. (2020). COVID-19 and the academy: It is time for going digital. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 68, 1-3. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101684>
- Seva, R. R., Tejero, L. M., & Fadrilan-Camacho, V. (2021). Barriers and facilitators of productivity while working from home during pandemic. *Journal of Occupational Health*, 63, 1-10. doi:10.1002/1348-9585.12242
- Shen, H., & Jiang, H. (2019). Engaged at work? An employee engagement model in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 31(1-2), 32-49. doi:10.1080/1062726X.2019.1585855
- Shifrin, N. V., & Michel, J. S. (2021). Flexible work arrangements and employee health: A meta-analytic review. *Work & Stress*, 1-26. doi:10.1080/02678373.2021.1936287
- Shuck, B., Adelson, J. L., & Reio, T. G. (2017). The employee engagement scale: Initial evidence for construct validity and implications for theory and practice. *Human Resource Management*, 56(6), 953-977. doi:10.1002/hrm.21811
- Sivapragasam, S., & Raya, R. P. (2017). HRM and employee engagement link: Mediating role of employee well-being. *Global Business Review*, 19(1), 147-161. doi:10.1177/0972150917713369
- Steele, Z. (2016). The importance of social skills for the future of work. *New Zealand Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(1), 32-42.
- Sun, L. (2019). Employee engagement: A literature review. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, 63-80. doi:10.5296/ijhrs.ijhrs.v9i1.14167.14167
- Tate, T. D., Lartey, F. M., & Randall, P. M. (2019). Relationship between computer-mediated communication and employee engagement among telecommuting

- knowledge workers. *Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies*, 7, 328-347. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4236/jhrss.2019.72021>
- van Laar, E., van Deursen, A. J., van Dijk, J. A., & de Haan, J. (2017). The relation between 21st-century skills and digital skills: A systematic literature review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 72, 577-588. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.03.010>
- Waizenegger, L., McKenna, B., Cai, W., & Bendz, T. (2020). An affordance perspective of team collaboration and enforced working from home during COVID-19. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 29(4), 429-442. doi:10.1080/0960085X.2020.1800417
- Warrick, D. D. (2017). What leaders need to know about organizational culture. *Business Horizons*, 60, 395-404. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2017.01.011>
- Wiedeman, M., & Hofmeyr, K. B. (2020). The influence of flexible work arrangements on employee engagement: An exploratory study. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(0), 1-18. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v18i0.1209>
- Wilkinson, K., Tomlinson, J., & Gardiner, J. (2018). The perceived fairness of work–life balance policies: A UK case study of solo-living managers and professionals without children. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 28, 325-339. doi:10.1111/1748-8583.12181
- Xiao, Y., Becerik-Gerber, B., Lucas, G., & Roll, S. C. (2021). Impacts of working from home during COVID-19 pandemic on physical and mental well-being of office workstation users. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 63(3), 181-190. doi:10.1097/JOM.0000000000002097
- Yuan, Z., Ye, Z., & Zhong, M. (2021). Plug back into work, safely: Job reattachment, leader safety commitment, and job engagement in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 106(1), 62-70. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000860>
- Zikmund, W. G., Babin, B. J., Carr, J. C., & Griffin, M. (2013). *Business research methods* (9th ed.). Mason: South-Western.

Appendix 1: Consistency Matrix

Title: The impact of mandatory work from home on employee engagement

Number	Questions	Literature Review	Data Collection Tool	Analysis
1.	What were the actions taken by organisations to promote employee engagement during working from home through the pandemic?	Sun, 2019 Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018 Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart & Adis, 2017 Reader, Mearns, Lopes & Kuha, 2017	Question 1.1 and 1.2 in interview guide for managers	Content analysis as an open-ended question to understand the reciprocal nature of the organisation in the form of the culture that was portrayed to the employees and the support it provided to its employees to better engage them while they were tasked with working from home.
2.	What were the employee engagement benefits that organisations believed they achieved by implementing mandatory work from home?	Sun, 2019 Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018 Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart & Adis, 2017 Reader, Mearns, Lopes & Kuha, 2017	Question 2.1 and 2.2 in interview guide for managers	Content analysis as an open-ended question to understand the benefits that managers of organisations perceived to be linked with employee engagement through mandating employees to work from home.
3.	What were the lived experiences of employees prior to mandatory work from home?	Bonaccio et al., 2016 Kumar & Aithal, 2016 Steele, 2016 Kang & Sang, 2017	Question 1.1 in interview guide for employees	Content analysis as an open-ended question to provide contextual insight from employees around the baseline employee engagement motivational factors that they experienced prior to mandatory work from home.
4.	What were the factors of work from home, either positive or negative, that affected employee engagement during the pandemic?	Purushotham, 2020 Sanchez, Parra, Ozden, Rijkers, Viollaz & Winkler, 2021 Channa & Sangeeta, 2020 Kramer & Kramer, 2020	Question 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 in interview guide for employees	Content analysis as an open-ended question to understand the factors that affected employee engagement during mandatory work from home as traditional or voluntary work from home, as a component of FWAs was found to be a driver of employee engagement during conventional times.

Appendix 2: Respondent Consent Form

Gordon Institute of Business Science

University of Pretoria

Dear Sir / Ma'am

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

I am conducting research on how a mandatory work from home context that was influenced by the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic impacted employee engagement.

The estimated duration of our interview is one hour. The aim of this interview is to explore the common drivers of employee engagement during the lockdown period through your experiences.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

All information that you provide will be treated confidentially and reported without identifiers. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or myself. Our details are provided below.

	Shanelle M. Padayachee (Researcher)	Dr Gloria Mbokota (Research Supervisor)
Date	04 July 2021	05 July 2021
Contact number	079 890 0478	011 771 4000
Email address	20803002@mygibs.co.za	mbokotag@gibs.co.za

Participant Name: _____

Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Appendix 3: Interview Guide for Managers that were involved in implementing mandatory Work from Home

Gordon Institute of Business Science

University of Pretoria

Name:

Date:

Industry:

Start Time:

End Time:

Question 1:

What were the actions taken by organisations to promote employee engagement during working from home through the pandemic?

- 1.1 Describe the organisational structures before mandatory work from home was implemented
- 1.2 Elaborate on the policies, resources and other practices that were implemented or created to support mandatory work from home

Question 2:

What were the employee engagement benefits that organisations believed they achieved by implementing mandatory work from home?

- 2.1 What organisational benefits were noticed?
- 2.2 What benefits associated with the employees have been noticed?

Appendix 4: Interview Guide for Employees that were that were mandated to Work from Home

Gordon Institute of Business Science

University of Pretoria

Name:

Date:

Industry:

Start Time:

End Time:

Question 1:

What were the lived experiences of the respondents prior to mandatory work from home?

1.1 What are your general feelings about working from the traditional office space?

Question 2:

What were the factors of work from home, either positive or negative, that affected employee engagement during the pandemic?

2.1 What are your general feelings about being compelled to work from home?

2.2 Discuss the positive aspects of mandatory work from home

2.3 Discuss the drawbacks of mandatory work from home

2.4 What are your feelings about moving back to the traditional office space?

Appendix 5: Ethical Clearance Approval

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

**Ethical Clearance
Approved**

Dear Shanelle Padayachee,

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

Appendix 6: Codebook – ATLAS.ti

Individual Codes Created

- 1 abundance of online meetings
- 2 additional responsibilities for working mothers
- 3 better interpretation of non-verbal communication
- 4 better social relationships from traditional office space
- 5 better understanding of the business
- 6 burnout signs evident
- 7 caring organisational culture
- 8 coexisting with family
- 9 communication efforts by organisation
- 10 communication was clearer
- 11 communication was face to face
- 12 communication was simpler
- 13 connectivity issues
- 14 cooperative employees
- 15 difficulty syncing calendars for online meetings
- 16 drop in employee attrition rate
- 17 easier collaboration from traditional office space
- 18 easier to get work done from office
- 19 easier to not be fully present in online meetings
- 20 employee management of work-life balance
- 21 employee need to show relevance
- 22 employee personality and work-life balance
- 23 employee reciprocation to organisational support received
- 24 employee wellbeing initiatives supported
- 25 employees felt proud to be part of the organisation
- 26 employees felt trusted
- 27 employees missed human interaction
- 28 employees willing to go above and beyond normal duties
- 29 employees work harder
- 30 employers trusted employees
- 31 encouragement of online interaction and socialisation
- 32 evidence that work from home is possible
- 33 experimental period for flexibility initiatives
- 34 family organisational culture
- 35 family structure
- 36 fear of job loss
- 37 feeling of isolation
- 38 financial benefits noticed
- 39 flexibility was allowed prior to covid-19
- 40 flexibility was denied prior to COVID-19
- 41 flexible work arrangement preferred
- 42 focus on mental health
- 43 happier employees in workforce

44 healthier lifestyle
45 hesitation to go back to the office full time
46 home-schooling disruptions
47 hybrid work arrangement preferred
48 improved communication
49 improved employee productivity
50 improved family time
51 improved organisational performance
52 improved quality of work
53 improved way of living
54 increased stress levels
55 informal check-ins
56 initial uncertainty around work from home
57 initiated up skilling employees
58 interaction was important
59 irrelevant invites to online meetings
60 IT issues
61 IT support provided
62 job security was confirmed
63 lack of informal discussions
64 lack of non-verbal cues
65 lacking areas of organisational support
66 less exercise
67 less reflection time
68 longer working hours
69 maintained good team functionality
70 measures to mitigate burnout
71 mental health impact
72 micromanaging employee work times
73 more clarity during working from the office
74 more exercise
75 more focused deliverables during work from home
76 more personal time
77 no need to micromanage employees
78 no prior insight into work from home
79 office set up preferred
80 office stations was the normal way
81 online meeting etiquette
82 online resources supplied
83 optimisation of work day
84 organisational deliverables achieved
85 organisational financial aid provided
86 organisational policies that include family structures
87 organisational support provided
88 organisations set up for work from home
89 people centric organisational culture
90 physical resources supplied
91 policies cannot be policed

92 policies not updated
93 poorer quality of work
94 positive view of organisation
95 practicality of online meetings
96 pre COVID-19 work from home contingency plans in place
97 prevalent work from home distractions
98 proactive organisational support
99 productivity fluctuated based on variables
100 prominence of digital fatigue
101 reduced employee concentration risk
102 reduced stress levels
103 reduction in number of non covid-19 sick employees
104 reduction in number of sick leave days taken
105 reduction in quality family time
106 reduction in travel expense
107 resources not supplied by organisation
108 safety of employees
109 sense of pride toward organisation
110 social organisational culture
111 structured way of working from office
112 structured work times
113 supported business continuity
114 time management
115 time saving on commuting
116 tired employees
117 too many office meetings
118 unhealthy lifestyle
119 use of online platforms
120 utilisation of online tools
121 virtual team building sessions
122 weight gain
123 weight loss
124 work duties favour being online
125 work from home discipline
126 work from home due diligence performed
127 work from home fatigue
128 work from home has social connotations
129 work from home industry dependent
130 work from home monotony
131 work from home novelty experienced
132 work from home preferred
133 work load fluctuated based on variables
134 work-life balance improvement
135 work-life boundaries blurred
136 work-life conflict
137 workload bottlenecks

Sub-themes Derived from Individual Codes

Research Question 1	Positive Organisational Support Positive Organisational Culture Absence of Organisational Policies
Research Question 2	Prioritisation of Employee Safety Increased Productivity Firm Organisational Commitment
Research Question 3	More Rigid Workday Structure Enhanced Collaborative Relations Importance of Physical Exchange of Information
Research Question 4	Benefits and Drawbacks of Remote Work Adjustment to Employee Lifestyle Perceived Flexible Work Arrangements

Themes Derived from the Sub-themes

Research Question 1	The state of organisational practices during mandatory work from home
Research Question 2	Business continuity
Research Question 3	Negative impact of communication during mandatory work from home
Research Question 4	Impact of work-life balance on employee engagement