Research Report Title

The fluidity of the psychological contract during times of change

23100992

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.

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Abstract

Organisations were forced to let employees work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, a hybrid work environment became the new normal. This paper sets forth to determine how an abrupt transition into a hybrid work environment altered employee's psychological contracts in terms of employee's perceptions of trust, work life balance and perceived organisational support. A qualitative study was conducted on a small government institution that used a hybrid work environment. Semi-structure interviews were conducted with 12 employees. The findings of the study revealed that due to an increase in formol monitoring and control activities moving into a hybrid work environment, as well as the withholding of information arising from no longer having impromptu meetings with teams and information getting lost, respondents did experience a decrease in their perception of trust. The study further revealed that respondents experienced increased strain working from home resulting in an increased work to life conflict. Lastly the study found that the organisation did not meet the employee's perception of perceived organisational support. The overall findings suggest that a sudden change in the working environment can alter the psychological contract and lead to psychological contract breach.

Key words:

Psychological contract, hybrid work environment, trust, work to life balance, organisational support, psychological contract breach

Plagiarism Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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1.1. Introduction and Background to the Research Problem

Leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019, companies and government representatives were increasingly using buzzwords like “digital revolution”. The pandemic forced many of these institutions to put their money where their mouths were and digitise. It was a time of global business disruption, with businesses temporarily closing their offices and reorganising the way they worked as employees worked from home. Companies invested heavily in information technology infrastructure to ensure continuity of business operations. Employees were however confronted with more changes and challenges. Schools were also affected; children were sent home, adding to the pressures faced by working parents who were now also responsible to take care of their children and be hands-on with their education during working hours. The extensive news coverage of the spreading virus and the reporting of the increased fatalities caused widespread stress. Lockdown restrictions put a halt on social and recreational activities, increasing the anxiety experienced by employees.

Not long into the forced remote working environment, another global trend was observed. Cohen (2021), a reporter for Bloomberg Businessweek, interviewed Anthony Klotz, an organisational psychologist, who had researched resignations. During this interview, Klotz predicted that a wave of resignations was on its way because of pandemic-related epiphanies that included remote work, time spend with family, travelling time to work, passion projects, and the meaning of life and death. Klotz coined the term “The Great Quit”.

Hetler (2023) reported that between April 2021 and April 2022, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics counted that 71.6 million Americans had exited their jobs at a rate averaging 3.98 million people each month, peaking at 4.5 million people. Estrada (2024) indicated that the percentage of workers who want to leave their jobs has since been estimated to be at 95%.

Yet shockingly, the urge to leave jobs reached an all-time high not despite, but because of the measures companies had taken to ensure operational continuity.

Businesses got so much right in digitizing, at the cost of the psychological contract of employees' which business failed to consider during the implementation of all the changes. Employers inadvertently balance infrastructural or monetary investments into the employee, particularly at stressful times, by undermining the psychological contract.

The hybrid work component brings another parallel to the psychological contracts: the tension between physical and virtual workplaces and the intangible dangers represented by the digital frontier. It is easier to see the health and safety needs of a physical workplace with machinery. It is much trickier to grasp the mental dangers of an expectation that an email sent after hours will be attended to almost immediately. When we realise that software and data are expressions of minds and thoughts in virtual rather than mechanical or physical medium, it is easier to see that physical dangers to bodies are perhaps comparable to mental dangers to minds and nervous systems.

1.2 Theoretical Justification

Khor and Tan (2023) were of the view that during the new-normal era of digitalisation and work from home environments it became increasingly difficult to manage employees, considering the absence of work from home policies, the lack of a supportive work environment and the expectation to adopt new technology. Employees were therefore required to allocate more time to documenting when and how duties were executed. There was an increasing grey area between work and home boundaries, unsettling the psychological contract.

Transitioning into a hybrid work arrangement affected work circumstances, which are tied to a specific location and have well-formed relationships with supervisors and colleagues secured to it. The addition of the employer's home as a workspace, resulted in conflict with other responsibilities regarding home and taking care of children, disrupting the work schedule.

The transition period from a work to home schedule during the Covid 19 pandemic was described by Lin et al. (2021) as a time where employees experienced rapid and continual increases in stress because of organisational and societal uncertainties

with limited access to copying resources. This further brought chaos to the emotional experiences of employees while adapting to the new work and life conditions.

During these changes new expectations were built by employees. Gong and Sims (2023) found that disruptions in the workplace, specifically changes in the work environment can ultimately result in a psychological contract breach. The way that this change is handled by organisations sets the expectations, or reinforces current expectations, that will be called up and relied upon by employees, for future change. Rousseau et al. (2018) highlighted that although psychological contracts are dynamic in nature, research is lacking on the change in the psychological contract over time.

Loffert and Diehl (2023) indicated that limited attention has been given to psychological contracts during times of crisis. One of the few studies were conducted by Wu et al. (2021) who examined psychological contracts during the Covid-19 pandemic, within the hospitality industry and concluded that organisations focused on finding a balance between transactional and relational contracts, whilst employees were more intent on a transactional contract in an attempt to protect their own interests.

Wu et al. (2021) further highlighted that the psychological contract is an underexplored topic during times of change. Wu et al. (2021) further explained that very little research has been done on the dynamic nature of the psychological contract during times of crisis, in contrast to human resource practices where a significant amount of research has been done. The rate of unprecedented resignations that occurred from 2021 with the transitioning into a hybrid workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic can be argued as an event that threw the psychological contract between employees and employers into turmoil, that warrants further academic research, which is currently lacking.

Karani Mehta et al. (2024) highlighted that that most of the research conducted on psychological contracts was done in Western countries. There is, therefore, a gap on the psychological contract within an African context and on the fluidity of the psychological contract on a local and international level. It cannot be assumed that the expectations and obligations between employees and employers within a Western European or North American context where most of the research on

psychological contracts have been done will be the same in Africa, considering the vastly different cultures and socio-economical backgrounds. Academic research on psychological contracts in an African context is therefore needed.

There is therefore a gab in the current academic literature on how the psychological contract evolves during times of change that the researcher will address. This change in the psychological contract will be discussed against the backdrop of organisations moving from an at office work environment to a hybrid work environment in an African context.

1.3 Business Rationale for the Study

Work from home arrangements have evolved into a hybrid working model in the post COVID-19 era. According to Opperman (2024) the trend is here to stay, stating that during 2023, 54% of employed adults were permanently working remotely or had a hybrid working arrangement.

Old Mutual (2021) reflected on research conducted by reward management platform Remchannel indicating that the Great Quit was also happening in South Africa; they noted a correlation between a high rate of resignations and shifting workplace expectations. Old Mutual (2021) further highlighted that the staff turnover and accrued leave, which was a debt on company books, posed a liquidity risk to corporate South Africa, yet the same survey found that around 36% of respondents had an expectation that employees must respond to emails after hours. It is therefore questionable if organisations are aware of how employees' expectations from the employer have evolved post the COVID-19 pandemic. Knoesen (2023) interviewed Discovery's Steve Teasdale who noted that although South Africa's context is not the same as many other countries around the world, specifically regarding macro-economic factors including the high unemployment rate, South Africa has however also seen an increase in organisational churn in certain skills.

The recruitment process is a time consuming and expensive exercise for organisations. Moodley (2023) reported that it cost 82 South African businesses almost R24 billion in 2022 to fill the 40,000 vacant positions that resulted from resignations. The costs comprised of specialist recruitment fees, job posting fees,

screening of applicants, interviews, vetting of short-listed candidates, onboarding processes and training cost. This comes at a tremendous cost to companies. Investing in employees through training and development efforts is a luxury that many companies cannot afford, especially in industries with high turnover jobs. In the age of recent phenomena like the Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting, it is just too expensive to hire and train people looking for greener grass a few months later.

Most organisational upheavals including restructurings, retrenchments and changes to long established work arrangements, revolve around breakdowns in confidence and trust, and employer's or business owners' ability to grasp psychological contract theory, at a conscious or unconscious level, may make them better interpersonal negotiators. Psychological contract theory is what elevates a manager of logistics and cataloguer of stock into someone with the ability to attune to an employee's vision for their own life, to show that employee where their vision for their own life is compatible with the organisation's own journey. Futures and visions are intangible, and leadership is the ability to communicate them well enough to win people's trust so that they work together to make the intangible real and both parties gaining, what they expected, in the process.

Braganza et al. (2021) also highlighted the need for organisations to prioritize psychological contracts, stating that organisations must start to nurture and reshape psychological contracts to foster organisational commitment and to increase employee engagement levels.

Organisations can therefore benefit from research on the evolving psychological contract, due to the uncertainty of how employees' psychological contracts have evolved against the cost implication for employers resulting from the "great quit".

1.4. Conclusion

With the number of changes that has occurred from late 2019, there is an increasing demand for organisations to understand the human responses. The evolving psychological contract can help explain the human behaviour. This raises a question on how the psychological contract has evolved over the last three years, more specifically from the pre-covid era, through the highly volatile and uncertain period in

the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, and ultimately to a permanent hybrid work environment.

Since organisations were forced to adjust at an unforeseen rate and scale, the post COVID-19 pandemic environment is an opportunity to review how employees and companies can adapt when the psychological contract between the two parties is bound to change, and how this fluidity of the psychological contract affects the perception of trust, work life balance and perceived organisational support.

As the world experiences shocks that strain managers' capacity for managing physical resources, as the COVID-19 lockdown and the transition to hybrid work scenarios did, the centrality of the relational intelligence it takes to manage psychological contracts will be increasingly relevant. At this point, psychological contract theory should, where it lacks it, be developing interdisciplinary textures that allows it to contribute more robustly to different disciplines while giving business leaders the tools to anticipate their own and their employees' psychological responses to abrupt change. Put differently, it can be argued that only because of knowledge and an understanding of psychological contract theory and how it impacts employees could it be foreseen that there will be a wave of resignations during the unpresented times we found ourselves during the COVID-19 pandemic. Renewed research into the dynamic nature of the psychological contract will therefore become increasingly relevant as we continue to brace an uncertain future.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. The psychological contract

The psychological contract evolved from Social Exchange Theory to better understand how interpersonal relationships in organisations are developed and maintained. Cropanzano et al. (2017) stated that Social Exchange Theory and the psychological contract are both based on the concept of reciprocity and exchange relationships. Successful exchanges are formed when employers show care and concern towards their employees, and employees in return demonstrate loyalty and commitment to the employer, according to Cropanzano et al. (2017). This exchange relationship is therefore beneficial to both parties.

Rousseau (1989) defined the psychological contract as the beliefs of an individual regarding the terms and conditions of a mutual and interdependent agreement between themselves and the employer. Unlike a formal legally binding agreement, the psychological contract is perceptual, and the content and understanding thereof differs from one individual to the next. The psychological contract is different from expectations. Expectations are the general beliefs that employees have about their jobs and organisations, for example that you will love your job or that your office will be painted a certain colour. Psychological contracts in contrast, are the beliefs by employees about what they should receive from the organisation based on the employee's perception on promises that were made by the employer. Therefore, only the expectations that arise from perceived promises by the organisation, implicit or explicit, form part of the psychological contract. Ngobeni et al. (2022) emphasised that despite the informal establishment of the psychological contract, both the employee and the employer must adhere explicitly to the expectations.

An understanding of the content of the psychological contract can be beneficial for employers. Kutaula et al. (2020) stated that since its inception, psychological contract theory has become a source of understanding the complexity in the relationship between employees and organisations, impacting the loyalty and performance of employees. The impact of the psychological contract is however far more reaching. Ahmad and Zafar (2018) indicated that psychological contract fulfilment impacts on organisational citizenship behaviour. Organisational citizenship is viewed as an

employee's perception of "oneness" with an organisation. This results in employees taking on the organisational identity into their own social identity, with organisational successes affecting employees personally and increasing self-esteem and organisational failures decreasing their self-esteem. Klotz et al. (2019) indicated that organisational citizenship results in employees working hard, being positive even when faced with challenges and difficult times, respecting the rights of colleagues and being mindful about helping co-workers.

Soares and Mosquera (2019) concluded in their study that fulfilment on both the relational and the balanced psychological contract impacts on employee work engagement levels. Employee engagement in return impacts job performance. Gupta and Shukla (2019) highlighted that employee engagement positively impacts on several measures of performance, including organisational productivity and profitability, as well as employee performance, covering employee job performance and task performance.

Psychological contract fulfilment further impact on employee turnover retention according to Laulie et al. (2023). High employee turnover directly impacts on an organisations bottom line and therefore cannot be overlooked. Frye et al. (2020) stated that employee turnover increases organisational spending, as it is a costly exercise to replace employees leaving the organisation. This cost is reflective in money spent on recruiting, hiring and training of the new recruits. The impact of high employee turnover is far more reaching than just an immediate cost implication. Frye et al. (2020) further stated that high employee turnover causes resentment amongst the remaining experienced employees as they are often the ones who are tasked with more additional duties and higher targets to compensate for the slower and less experienced new employees.

Considering the various benefits of the psychological contract, it is essential to understand how and when the employee psychological contract form. The psychological contract develops during the pre-employment stage, continues to shape during the recruitment process, throughout the initial interaction and socialisation once joining the organisation and throughout the later experiences of the employee whilst at the organisation according to Rousseau (2021). Rousseau et al. (2018) stated that the psychological contract is formed based on numerous cues,

including communication, social norms and behavioural patterns, that are seen, observed and communicated by the respective parties. The psychological contract is therefore formed based on what the employer did, not only on what the employer said they will do.

2.1.1 Types of psychological contracts

Rousseau (2000) characterised psychological contracts based on employment arrangements, consisting of two dimensions, duration (long term and short term) and performance reward relationship (high, low or no relationship). Based on this typology, four psychological contracts emerged.

Firstly, the relational contract emerges when there is a long-term employment agreement consisting of trust with the employee being committed to remain with the organisation and perform all duties that is expected of him, whilst the employer is committed to offering competitive wages and long-term employment according to Garcia et al. (2021). This relationship is also based on loyalty, with employees supporting the organisation and being committed to the organisation, while the employer will support the well-being of employees stated Lo Presti et al. (2019). All rewards received by the employee is not dependent on the performance of the employee, but rather because of being a member of the organisation. Lastly, employees have an expectation that there will be organisational support, in the form of training and development. Braganza et al. (2021) highlighted that the relational psychological contract is associated with positive outcomes for both parties to the relational contract and will ultimately be more valuable for organisations, as employees are more committed to organisational goals.

The second contract is known as the transactional contract. Knapp et al. (2020) indicated that this contract is based on a short-term relationship, whereby the employee is expected to execute specific duties, whilst having limited involvement within the organisation. The employee will be paid for the specific duties executed. Due to the short-term arrangement between the parties, there will be no training or employee development, provided by the employer according to DiFonzo et al. (2020). DiFonzo et al. (2020) further stated that these contracts are therefore economically focused, limited in scope and executed and concluded within a short

period of time. Braganza et al. (2021) suggested that transactional contracts are traditionally associated with negative outcomes due to the materialistic perception of it.

The third contract is the balanced contract. The employee must develop his skills whilst the employer will nurture the long-term employability of employees within the organisation as well as outside according to Soares and Mosquera (2019). Career development will be based on employees continuously enhancing skills that are required by the organisation while the organisation will ensure that career development opportunities exist according to Clarke and Scurry (2020). The nature of the duties performed by the employee will also be dynamic, changing as the need arises, to ensure that the organisation maintains its competitive advantage according to Rousseau (2000). The employer will in return promote continuous learning whilst assisting employees to execute changing and more challenging performance requirements highlighted Clarke and Scurry (2020). Rewards to employees are therefore based on performance and the contribution towards the firm's bottom line. Both the organisation and the employee are therefore in pursuit of a joint ideology.

The last contract is the transitional contract and is not considered to be a psychological contract per se, but rather a cognitive state reflecting on the change within an organisation and how it is contradictory to previous employment arrangements according to Rousseau (2000). The transitional contact can be received with mistrust from employees, believing that the organisation withheld information from them according to Rousseau (2021). The change within the organisation also brings uncertainty to employees regarding their obligations to the employer.

2.1.2 Psychological contract fulfilment, breach and violation

Wu et al. (2021) stated that psychological contracts and breaches have garnered increasing attention. The adherence to the psychological contract can be viewed as fulfilled, breached or violated. Loffert and Diehl (2023) argues that the psychological contract has been fulfilled when one party to the contract is of the view that the other party has met his obligations, resulting in higher performance and favourable employee attitudes, ultimately affecting the organisation's bottom line. Loffert and

Diehl (2023) further details that a psychological contact breach occurs once an employee is of the view that the employer has failed to deliver on its obligations. Lastly, Loffert and Diehl (2023) stated that psychological contract violation is the emotions experienced by employees when the organisation does not deliver on its obligations, including feelings of disappointment, anger or distress.

Rousseau et al. (2018) indicated that any breach in this psychological contract as a result of employee perceived unfulfilled commitments by the organisation is an upsetting emotional process. The consequences of a breach in the psychological contract have been well documented. Lv and Xu (2018) concluded that a breach in the psychological contract harms employee engagement by reducing the level of person organisation fit. Similar observations were made by Soares and Mosquera (2019) indicating that when employees perceive there to be a breach in the psychological contract, they are more likely to not experience a feeling of engagement whilst performing work duties and conversely, when employees is of the view that the psychological contract is fulfilled will lead to a higher degree of work engagement.

Coyle-Shapiro et al. (2019) focussed on the break down in trust in the organisation, as well as a rise in negative job attitudes, including employees no longer experiencing desired levels of job satisfaction, being less committed to the organisation and ultimately an increase in turnover intention.

Further consequences for the breach in the psychological contract was highlighted by Gulzar et al. (2021) and included the loss of loyalty towards the organisation, employees being unmotivated and not delivering on the required performance measurables. The consequence of psychological contract breach is however further reaching than just towards the employer, with Gong and Wang (2022) concluding that there is indeed an indirect link between the breach in the psychological contract and customer-directed deviance.

2.1.3 Fluidity of the psychological contract and change

Rousseau (2021) highlighted that the psychological contracts is a dynamic construct. Psychological contracts are especially important in employment relationships during

times of transition according to Woodrow and Guest (2020). During times of change psychological contracts needs to be continuously managed and renegotiated according to Reader (2023). It is at such times that organisations tend to become less willing and/or able to live up to all their tacit and their explicit promises to employees according to Henderson et al. (2020). This failure of organisations to follow through is regarded as a breach of contract, and one need not search long to find evidence that most employees currently hold that their employers are guilty, in part or in whole, of breaking their agreement according to Robinson & Rousseau (1994).

Over the past decade, most of the focus around the changing nature of the employment relationship has been directed on lowered job security and corresponding drops in employee commitment, which are often associated with organisational restructuring. According to Arunachalam (2021) the literature generally acknowledges that alterations in the psychological contract between workers and their organisations have been to employees' detriment where they are seemingly disadvantaged in situations where employers want their participation and faithfulness but will not reciprocate with job security and access to opportunities for advancement. Therefore, employee entitlements seem to be decreasing as organisations face increasing competitive pressures that they can only withstand by extracting more dedication, ingenuity and pliancy from their employees. Since psychological contracts are not static, every time an organisation adjusts its human resource practices in response to external environmental conditions, employees gain experience and begin to carefully monitor their existing psychological contracts to reassess and renegotiate both their own and their employer's obligations according to Ma et al. (2019). Information gained by employees as they look at their own and their employers' behaviour will change their sense of what they owe their employers and vice-versa according to Robinson and Rousseau (1994), which often fosters outrage in employees. Rousseau and Greller (1994) say that this results from the employees' realisation that they are being put in the position of bearing risks that were previously borne by the organisation even though the rewards do not seem to be accruing to the new risk-bearers.

The terms of the psychological contract may also be affected by growing resentment among employees who are subjected to unremitting, mismanaged change.

Arunachalam (2021) found that employees had become incredibly resentful because they felt their organisation was perpetually shifting the goalposts in its performance criteria. Resentful employees have a tendency, even if it is only subconscious, to downgrade their sense of what they owe the business, while also developing a growing sense of what the business owes them.

2.2 Employees perceptions in a relational psychological contract

In terms of relational contracts employees expect that employers will have trust towards them, take care of their wellbeing and promote a balance between work and life and the employee will reciprocate by diligently completing their tasks and staying committed to the organisation according to Singh et al (2020).

2.2.1 Felt trust

The creation of a business calls for the ability to manage risk. One of the arenas where this is demonstrated is in the relationships between employees and employers. Whether these employees are founders of the business or not makes little difference to the fact that they must enter psychological contracts with employees on the business's behalf. In executing these contracts, which are intangible and therefore not subject to the same enforceability that literal contracts are, the employers must make an assessment on the employees' trustworthiness. The employees in return must also make an assessment on the employer's trustworthiness.

One of the dilemmas that organisations face is that the employer cannot know whether the employee is trustworthy except with the benefit of hindsight and performance; at the same time, the employer's inability to trust that the employee would perform could be the decisive variable in the quality of the employees' performance. This dilemma was especially magnified by the working conditions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trust is a sensitive notion because it's confidence in a person's willingness and ability to behave in an approvable way; when an employer lacks trust in an employee, it verbally or nonverbally communicates an opinion either of the employee's bad

character or their suitability for their role. Social exchange theory indicates that when employers have confidence and trust in employees, that they are more likely to live up to this assessment by applying themselves to their work, which benefits the business according to Zheng et al, (2019). This self-application extends beyond the technical aspects of their job to their organisational citizenship behaviour according to Lester and Brower (2003). Therefore, this display of confidence and trust within the organisation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in the organisational culture.

While a psychological contract appears on the surface to be about the exchange of the employer's ability to deliver on employee's expectations to ensure employee productivity, it really is a test of the employer's ability to manage and progress despite not knowing everything or micromanaging employees. Trust is therefore the underlying essence of the psychological contract. Employees who feel trusted by their supervisors are influenced by that feeling in ways that influence their workplace demeanours and actions according to Gong and Sims (2023). It could matter less whether the employer actually trusts the employee, the determining factor for the trust relationship is rather whether the employee feels trusted by the employer according to Zheng et al. (2019). Employees can arrive at a sense of being trusted using their employers' behavioural cues according to Bernstrøm and Svare, (2017) and non-verbal communication, body language and other patterns according to Zheng et al., (2019) that incrementally revealed the employers' trust or lack thereof.

Perhaps the greatest burden that the psychological contract places upon the employer is to use influence instead of control, for control signals mistrust in the employees' willingness and ability to control themselves according to Vogelgesang et al. (2021) Managers may think that increasing formal control measures will improve the trust they feel toward their employees, especially if they mistake their relationship to their employees with their own relationships with shareholders and executives, but this backfires with employees and is perceived as managers mistrust by the employees according to Delfino and Van Der Kolk (2021). Control therefore damages the perception of trust and negatively influences the psychological contract which in return could lower employee morale and drives cynical and opportunistic behaviour as employees mentally find justifications to settle scores with their employers.

Haesevoets et al. (2019) tested the relationship between trust and control by examining the changes in feelings of mistrust associated with the utilisation of the carbon copy (cc) feature on emails. They learned that copying (cc) was regarded as monitoring and control, which decreased feelings of trust. Bush et al. (2020) likewise learned that rising workplace policing for dishonourable conduct corroded trust and undermined the leader/follower dynamic, which were connected to counter-productive organisational citizenship behaviour. In short, felt mistrust begets bad faith.

Copying in emails is just one of several behaviours that is open to more than one interpretation, behaviours which, when motivated by mistrust, speeds up this vicious cycle. Mistrust becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy begetting more reasons to mistrust according to Simons and Peterson (2000). Conversely, when a leader signals confidence in the character or suitability of an employee, it can lead to a virtuous circle where the employee vindicates this trust. Some of the ways that leaders can signal this confidence is seeking counsel or assistance from their employees. They can delegate meaningful responsibilities that signal trust without being a set-up for failure, which is where another signal of trust is availing resources. Yet another way that leaders signal trust without setting their employees up for failure is strengthening procedural justice according to Outlaw et al. (2019) so that employees feel their performance is received and assessed on a playing field designed to give them a fair chance.

2.2.2. Work to life conflict

Delanoeije et al. (2019) highlighted that a hybrid work environment, where employees are allowed to execute some of their working activities from home during some periods in the week, by using information and communication technologies, is increasingly becoming more prevalent across the world. Organisations are increasingly using a hybrid work environment to allow employees to combine work and home roles according to Bellmann and Hubler (2021). The hope was that a hybrid work environment would give employees more autonomy in how to work and when to work, to allow for more flexibility where employees will be able to schedule their working hours, with taking their home demands into account according to stated Bellman and Hubler (2021).

Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, however painted a different picture. The work life balance for most did not materialize. Palumbo (2020) found during the early stages of the hybrid work environment that the work life balance was negatively affected, with employees who worked remotely experiencing increased work to life conflict, triggered by more work-related fatigue that negatively affected the perception of work life balance. Williams and McCombs (2023) viewed work to life conflict as a state of work pressures negatively impacting on responsibilities of the employee's family roles.

This work life conflict can swing either way with work interfering with life and/or vice-versa according to Gong and Sims (2023), but it is worth focusing on work's interference with life as employees work under the impression that they would enjoy greater flexibility and lessened work life conflict according to van der Lippe and Lippényi (2020), who further contented that in many instances, they were working under a delusion.

The unexpected change in work brought about by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions may have created a work to life conflict pandemic. With whole families living together, there was no time gap between the strains of employment and the strains of family. Individuals whose work roles called for them to be authoritative while their families knew them as nurturing and accommodating didn't have the benefit of, a clear boundary or a commute to and from work, which would have given them time to "code-switch" as per the findings of Jachimowicz et al. (2021), resulting in a behaviour work life conflict. Social media posts circulated where people encountered their spouses or parents' work persona with horror or amusement. Various news platforms tracked lockdown divorce trends. Switching to working from home may seem a novel idea until one realises there is nowhere else to go: the local restaurant was someone else's workplace, and that is closed as are hair salons, schools, and childcare centres. While none of these strains are about employers as such, strains from work or home can interfere with employees' ability to operate in both work and home roles. Furthermore, the suddenness of these changes leaves little time for anyone to figure out work and family boundaries, according to Carnevale and Hatak (2020). There should therefore be no surprises if the strains of one spill over, in real time, to the other.

The ambiguity and uncertainty around abrupt transitions to work-from-home schedules, whilst not adequately prepared for the transitions, can create employer-employee expectation gaps for appropriate boundary-crossing behaviours. A senior may think that frequent check-ins, synchronised activities, milestone monitoring and short deadlines are a fair trade-off for working remotely, while an employee can see this as boundary control according to Perlow (1998) and therefore, mistrust. There are many opportunities for a work life conflict to arise as a business tests a work-from-home schedule.

Employees tend to be distressed by frequent boundary-crossing events. Braukmann et al. (2019) surveyed employees from different industries who ended up taking some of their work home. They found that despite flexible work hours, they were often disturbed by work life conflicts. It must be considered that the work-from-home schedule because of the COVID-19 restrictions correlated with increased disruption, stress and opposition towards work. Regular boundary-crossing events during the pandemic resulted in heightened feelings of work to life conflict according to Gong and Sims (2023); who further indicated that felt mistrust between employee and supervisor would worsen this conflict if the latter were unyielding on formal control measures including meetings and countless telephone calls, giving the former no latitude to negotiate and juggle their home and work priorities so as to get to everything they needed to do.

Frequent disruptive episodes, in particular, could drive employees to being territorial over their spaces according to Ashkanasy et al (2014), worsening the vicious cycle where mistrust begets bad faith. When bosses tighten control measures that infringe on the flexibility of the hybrid work environment — with home representing a frontier of challenges that work is not directly privy to — it worsens the employee's sense of work life conflict. Workplace disruption may increase feelings of work to life conflict, and mistrust is implicated in the dynamic between workplace disruption and work to life conflict.

There is often an expectation in the psychological contract that organisations will have policies to help employees find work-life balance according to Kraak et al. (2019) who further posit employees will not necessarily receive the benefit of such

policies unless employers are actively involved in their implementation. Supervisors were also blindsided by the pandemic; they, too, were often navigating their own shifting responsibilities and pressures. These may have absorbed attention that could have been spent on tweaking policies and exercising discretion on the specificities of work demands on employees in their charge. They did not have first-hand experience of their employees' challenges in order to lobby for the appropriate changes. So even if the employers had the right intentions and the business had the correct policy, the business, through those tasked with managing the risk of employee relations by displaying sensitivity to their constraints as talents, could still easily fall into a breach of the psychological contract. The employees could still understandably feel let down.

As staff members are allocated work tasks to perform at home, for which they are insufficiently prepared, they might require additional help from their seniors. This is when supervisors would build that buffer, that interpersonal social capital, by empathising as home needs clash with previously established work hours. This is exactly when supervisors may signal a denial of the aforementioned trust. Employees may rationally acknowledge the weirdness of the situation, and the legitimacy of work demands while still harbouring an underlying hostility towards the unintended slights and other frequent signs of mistrust, and the work life conflict. This builds resentment and cynicism about the employer's commitment to the psychological contract. We've drawn out how the relationship of felt trust is implicated in the experience of work life conflict and breaches in the psychological contract; a work-from-home schedule can be experienced as an untenable breach of the psychological contract insofar as it aggravates feelings of mistrust and work life conflict.

2.2.3 Perceived Organisational Support

It matters that businesses look after their staff as they remain abreast of their industries' innovations and advancements; motivated and retained staff may be one way to build on institutional memory. After all, organisations are not arbitrary gatherings of bodies, but teams united by shared goals that call for them to have visions, missions, values and strategies that help them meet those goals. These are ideally put together in optimal configurations that allow organisations to win as high

a sustainable return on investment for as low a cost as they can — striking a holistic balance between effectiveness and efficiency.

What makes this balance possible is ensuring employees are supported by their organisations and are directly aware of it. After all, employees embody the organisations' balance between efficiency and effectiveness, the "sweet spot" where the return on investment has worked out. They are given varying types of support on the one hand, and they give labour and other contributions to the organisation on the other hand as part of the reciprocity contained in the relational psychological contract.

Perceived organisational support is employees' general perception on the degree to which their organisation is concerned about them, their health, their wellness, and appreciates their efforts and contributions according to Chen and Eyoun (2021)

The question for organisations is about what tokens of support they can give to their employees that they will value enough to ensure the organisation yields a return on investment. The literature suggests that there is a sense in which employees should be incentivised to reach a subjective appraisal of the support that justifies playing a role in ensuring progress. These efforts include being aware of employees' needs, validating their sense of pride when they have made valuable contributions, and explicitly approving of their efforts to present the best of their character at the workplace according to Ruzain (2024). Organisations can further enhance employees' commitment and connection to the organisation by thoughtfully engaging their feedback, their inputs and their solutions, while celebrating their achievements, incorporating their desire for job security into the organisation's architecture and using culture and communication to keep morale high according to Guchait et al. (2015). Kansoy (2023) indicated that organisations that want buy-in on their goals first need to signal buy-in on their employees' individual priorities and goals, particularly where those overlap with the organisation's. These indicators play out in mutual interaction, so the perceived organisational support of the individual is related to the organisation's realisation (through its managers, for example) of this symbiosis and interaction.

The perceived organizational support for employees develops according to what the business contributes to them: if the business cares about their well-being, endorses their efforts to create social identities, and rewards their contributions, employees perceive and directly feel the organizational support according to Eisenberger (2001).

Ruzain (2024) comes at the notion of organisational support from another angle, one that prioritises being interested in employees' ideas. Organisations can support their staff by developing helpful approaches in the areas where employees need support in and out of work, taking their positions on this into consideration. This can raise the perceived organisational support of employees.

What also enhances employees' perception of organisational support is when their thoughts about the organisation — both good and bad — are received and processed well. After all, they spend much of their time and life on business premises or in some connection with the organisation, so having their views on it taken into consideration may strengthen their sense of being supported by the organisation according to Guchait et al. (2015).

2.3 Hybrid work

Adekoya et al. (2022) stated that when remote working was first researched in the 1970s; it was thought of in terms of "working from home" as opposed to the centralised workplace. Adekoya et al. (2022) further stated that today, it is typically facilitated by digital assistive technologies and information and communication technology (ICT) that enables communication across the work environment while reducing the need for commutes to and from the workplace. Remote working is thought to offer both employers and employees a sufficient amount of work flexibility according to Wheatley (2017). Since only a few organisations offered the option of hybrid work, prior studies only focussed on the inconsistencies in the practice thereof according to Kaduk et al. (2019), making it a challenge to determine the experiences of hybrid work on different people and the changes within individuals over a period that can affect hybrid work according to Delanoeije and Verbruggen (2020). This complicates researching hybrid working outcomes among individuals who permanently work on this model and those who seldomly are afforded the opportunity

to work remotely according to Wang et al. (2021). Likewise, Lapierre et al. (2016) was of the view that prior research on remote working suffered from selection bias as remote working was predominantly available to people who were in positions where they could elect it. The COVID-19 pandemic took choice out of the equation for many, forcing businesses to win as many advantages out of remote work arrangements as they could.

Furthermore, the pandemic pressurised organisations to rapidly arrange a selection of infrastructure to enable working from home according to Williamson et al. (2020). Employees and employers use remote working to inculcate flexibility into their work, and to increase work engagement and productivity, to enhance job autonomy, work–life balance as well as job satisfaction while lowering business costs, employee turnover intention and commuting costs according to Ter Hoeven and Van Zoonen (2015), Bessa and Tomlinson (2017) were however of the view that employers might be less optimistic about the prospects of hybrid work environments because of some anticipated drawback like employee isolation, limited communication, disengagement, work intensification, diminished commitment as well as their and own loss of control over employees' work processes. Additionally, an unaccommodating work culture, unhelpful health and safety policies as well as managerial concerns about performance can constrain the effectiveness of remote working indicated Kossek and Lautsch (2018).

Chapter 3: Research questions

3.1 Introduction

Almaliki (2023) indicated that formulating well-crafted research questions aligning with the primary objective of the study charters the course for the entire investigation and ensures that the research does not deviate of course. This section sets out the research question and steers the research with the three sub-research questions that emanated after reviewing the literature in Chapter 2.

As COVID spread starting the end of 2019, various authorities and governments prescribed health and safety regulations that prompted businesses to have their staff work remotely. In some instances, this meant overhauling functions and responsibilities, shifts and rosters as well as many other aspects of the lived terms of employment overnight. For many, the actual transition to remote, hybrid and virtual workplaces was deceptively quick. For beneath the appearance of simplicity — laptops moved from office desks to home desks — lurked this reality, for which many were still figuring out the language: nobody had had an opportunity to get ready for this new work reality.

The psychological contract is a dynamic arrangement that gradually unfolds from the pre-employment phase throughout the different stages of employment. Since this contract is dynamic, it keeps on evolving. As we went into lockdown in early 2020, the terms of the psychological contract started to change, this contract kept on changing as expectations from the employer evolved from the initial hard lockdown to a work from home arrangement and ultimately a hybrid working environment. The perception of employees regarding the employers adherence to the expectations also changed.

Rousseau et al (2018) highlighted that although the psychological contract is a dynamic construct, that little experiential attention has been given to how the psychological contract changes and evolves over time.

Businesses are built on a relationship of reciprocity that is ultimately steering the working relationship. The psychological contract is therefore of the utmost

importance and is subject to change in times of crisis. However, business leaders and employers can evidence a lack of understanding of the psychological and interpersonal posture they must assume for the maintenance of this relationship through managing the expectations within the psychological contract. The research question is therefore: “How has the perception of adherence to the psychological contract of employees evolved moving into a hybrid work environment post the COVID-19 pandemic?” The following three sub-questions arose from the literature.

1. How has employee’s perception of trust in the organisation changed moving into a hybrid work environment?

   Gong and Sims (2023) indicated that managers who already struggled with the delicate use of influence in the at office work environment fell into fear moving into the hybrid work arrangement, as they were used to exert power over employees, not influence, and were no longer sure how to manage their subordinates. The new means of managing subordinates in a hybrid work environment resulted in managers sending out new ques and behavioural patterners that was observed and interpreted by employees and shaped their perception of trust in the hybrid work environment.

2. How has employee’s perception of work life balance changed moving into a hybrid work environment?

   Moving into a hybrid work environment post COVID-19 pandemic it has been challenging for parents to juggle childcare with their normal paid work, however the positive side was deemed to be increased flexibility that came with the hybrid work environment and was seen as a strategy to increase work life balance. However, despite the increased flexibility Craig and Churchill (2021) found that parents are increasingly under greater time pressures.

   It needs to be born in mind that moving into a hybrid work environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, required a significant adjustment period for employees as they had to learn new technologies, whilst being confronted with unclear job instructions taking up a lot more of employees’ time according to Zoonen et al. (2021).

During the initial hard lockdown there was a lot of strain on specifically parents who also had to assist children with school. Parents also had no help at home, as during the pre-pandemic period. The question arises if employees have settled into a work life balance since life went back to normal with schools opening and people having access to various forms of assistance and help whilst they still work in a hybrid work environment.

3. How has employee's perception of organisational support changed moving into a hybrid work environment?

Wood et al. (2020) highlighted that over the last decade increasingly more importance was placed on the health and wellbeing of employees, resulting in the desired work life balance impacting on employees becoming more important to researchers and practitioners alike to nurture employee wellbeing.

Alshaabani et al. (2021) indicated that organisational support can impact on organisational citizenship behaviour as well as employee engagement. Van der Ross et al. (2022) found that during times of crisis employees are more dependent on organisational support.

The literature indicates that employees require more support during times of crisis. However, managers are also employees and also require organisational support. It is therefore unclear if management still provide the expected organisational support when they do not see subordinates daily to do an interpretation on what support the subordinates might require.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1. Introduction

This chapter lays out and explains the philosophy and execution of this study by examining these salient elements: the population, level and unit of analysis, sampling method, sample size, research instrument, data collection process, and data analysis procedures. It also shows the quality control measures that were used to bring about research coherence, completeness and correspondence with the emerging realities of hybrid workplaces.

This chapter also discusses the limitations of the research design and methods, particularly the timelines as well as ethical considerations and the ethical clearance process. It also explores the transferability and credibility of the results as other disciplines use different research philosophies to wrestle with comparable questions.

4.2 Purpose of research design

Research design charts the path on how the research will be steered according to Polonsky & Waller (2919) while justifying the philosophies, approach, strategy and time horizon of the research, as well as the research methodology.

According to Saunders and Lewis (2018) page 116, descriptive research attempts to accurately describe “persons, events or situations”; it is useful for deepening what will, later in this report, be shown to be phenomenological or experiential knowledge, on a specific event or issue. In this instance, the issue is how the relational psychological contract, in terms of trust, work life balance and organisational support, of employees evolved moving into a hybrid workspace, representative of organisational change. The study will examine the elements of psychological contracts as well as their mutability, flexibility and durability in the face of transitions to hybrid work environments.

4.3 Philosophy

My research philosophy will take on an interpretivist perspective to better understand the social phenomena of the fluid employee psychological contract. Cuthbertson et al. (2020) highlighted that an interpretivist philosophy sets about to discover meaning from diverse individual viewpoints. Employee psychological contracts differ from one employee to another as employees shape their own expectations from the organisation. Therefore, as employees have their subjective expectations from the employer, an interpretivist philosophy will be best suited to delve into the viewpoints of the of employees.

Methodologically, interpretivists prefer qualitative approaches for in-depth exploration according to Saunders et al. (2019), allowing nuanced exploration of respondents' experiences and perceptions. This in-depth information of the evolving psychological contracts of employees were obtained through semi structured interviews to allow the researcher the get a rich understanding of respondents' perception.

Axiology is a branch of philosophy that deals with value; it is connected to ethics. Interpretivists axiologically acknowledge that qualitative research is often not a value-neutral discipline. They strive to empathise with subjects according to Saunders et al. (2019). This researcher was mindful of his positionality as a cisgendered male in South Africa; he was cognisant of biases and values that threatened to cloud his ability to empathetically "hold space" as respondents recalled, not the state of being they thought they should have had, but the state of mind they were actually in.

4.4 Approach selected

Subjective evidence of respondents lived experiences and perceptions was analysed to understand how the transition to hybrid work arrangements affected their perception of the employer delivering on the employees perceived expectations in the evolving psychological contract. A qualitative methodology was used since Saunders et al. (2019) indicated that it helps researchers to obtain a deep understanding and new insights from the research, by considering existing principles. Although Rousseau (2021) indicated that the psychological contract is a dynamic

construct, Wu et al. (2021) highlighted that there is still uncertainty in how the psychological contract changes during times of crisis. Moving into a hybrid work arrangement during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent “great quit” pandemic served as the backdrop of the employee / employer crisis.

In addition to the absence of judgement, the qualitative approach called for a type of psychological proximity to the research participants, and to avoid the perception of indifference and detachment of the researcher according to Saunders et al. (2019). The preference for qualitative over quantitative data was further justified by Braun and Clarke (2022) that indicated that a qualitative research design is helpful to better understand behaviours, experiences and beliefs of people. Loffert and Diehl (2023) further stated that qualitative research is well suited to study the multi-faceted and complex psychological contract.

This openness to the reality of where people find themselves in their expectations from the employer in a hybrid work environment allows for an inductive approach to theory development; this is where hypotheses are developed from observations, as opposed to an approach where pre-existing theories of what “should” be happening are imposed over the person. This empathetic openness to speakers’ subjective experience and lived reality exposes the researcher to fresh data that forms previously unseen patterns, that further textures known patterns, calling for the expansion of hypotheses in the research process according to Farmer and Farmer (2020). Prior to the research it was still unclear how the psychological contract of employees evolved, shaping their expectations of the employer in times of crises. Qualitative research often enlists an inductive approach, which guides the researcher to approach their subject matter without preconceived ideas, following it into empirical data that indicates which questions are worth exploring according to Brinkmann (2020).

Qualitative research seeks to understand participants’ lived experiences from their perspective using methods like ethnographic research, grounded theory, and phenomenological studies marked by an inductive approach where observations and data collection take priority over the corroboration, perhaps even the formulation, of specific hypotheses or theories according to Farmer and Farmer (2020); for these reasons, an interpretivist inductive approach chosen for this study. The employees

lived experience in the changing work arrangement impacting on the psychological contract, forms the basis for the inductive approach.

4.5 Methodological choices

A mono-methodological choice is when either a qualitative or quantitative data gathering method is used; this counts as a single ("mono") data gathering method. I used a mono methodological choice as I used a single data gathering method due to the time constraints imposed on completing the research project. The mono method employed still allowed for the in-depth investigation of the research question on the changing psychological contract of employees in a hybrid working environment.

The literature indicated an underdevelopment of insight on the fluidity of the psychological contract, and on how this fluidity played out during the COVID-19 pandemic transition to hybrid working places from the perspective of employees; mono-methodological qualitative research can rectify this by shedding light on, for example, if employers fulfilled the employees psychological contract in terms of organisational support, since Van der Ross et al. (2022) found that during times of crisis employees are more dependent or organisational support.

4.6 Strategy

The research strategy contains specific objectives that requires the systematic gathering and interpretation of data according to Rahi (2017). Again, a qualitative research strategy, with a specific phenomenological approach that studied states of consciousness and direct experiences that allowed the researcher to answer research questions using the participants' experiences was used. According to Neubauer et al. (2019) a phenomenological study may help us understand how certain phenomenon or events are experienced by people. The qualitative phenomenological study set out to understand how hybrid work employees' psychological contracts changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, that resulted in "the great quit" phenomenon, through the account of individuals. Bouncken et al. (2021) highlighted that complex phenomenon yielded particularly interesting insights through qualitative research, especially through individuals' first-hand accounts

Data collection happened through in-depth semi-structured interviews using a questionnaire; with employees who transitioned into a hybrid work arrangement during the COVID-19 pandemic and was still within a hybrid work arrangement. Saunders and Lewis (2018) described a questionnaire as data gathering by asking respondents the same questions in the same order. Wegner (2020) indicated that questionnaires work well to measure perceptions of the respondents. This suited researcher to explore the respondents' perceptions of their psychological contract. The advantage with doing semi-structured interviews was that it allowed respondents an opportunity to ensure that the questions are correctly understood and allowed the researcher to probe the responses given to ensure understanding and reliability of the answers. Data analysis was done thematically, enabling the researcher to search out patterns and develop an understanding of the respondents' perspectives

4.7 Time horizon

The researcher used a cross-sectional study, conducted during September 2024 as part of the requirements for the Masters in Business Administration degree. This timeframe allowed the researcher to work on clarifying understanding on the phenomena of the change of psychological contracts during the COVID-induced transition to hybrid workplaces. Saunders and Lewis (2018) indicated that with a cross-sectional study data will be collected for one period in time and that the data will represent a "snapshot" of events or experiences to describe a phenomenon.

The timeframe determined some of the study's aspects: the sample selection, for example, had to be identified and interviewed within this short window. Considerations like participant availability led to the selection of individuals employed by the same organisation as the researcher; this organisation fulfilled key criteria in that it had accepted hybrid work arrangements since the advent of COVID.

The researcher conducted interviews once off. This was sufficient for the research to determine how psychological contracts have changed as per the research questions.

4.8 Population

The population, includes all items under study including individuals, consisting of those who show to have the specific behaviours, trades and characteristics investigated by researchers according to Saunders and Lewis (2018). Here, the population of interest was made of employees within a government entity that transitioned to a hybrid work model in 2020, comprising of both remote and office work arrangements as well as alternating days. Operations became active within virtual teams. Larson and DeChurch (2020) described virtual teams, as teams set up for remote collaboration and for functioning with limited face-to-face interaction. The organisation that was selected was a government institution based in Pretoria, South Africa that employs 44 employees. All employees moved to a remote working arrangement during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in March 2020, and since transitioned into a hybrid work arrangement, a practice that the organisation intents to sustain. Participants were therefore selected from this organisation, as all staff was permanently office based before the pandemic and transitioned into a hybrid work arrangement, affecting the psychological contract due to the transition. The organisational policy allows for employees to work remotely 50% of the month, with the other 50% at the office in Pretoria. Twelve individuals were selected to partake in the semi-structured interviews, and all twelve agreed.

4.9 Unit of analysis

According to Saunders and Lewis (2018) a unit of analysis can be people, organisations or things. The chosen unit of analysis was used to ensure credibility, since the selected group of participants provided authentic perspectives based on their personal experiences. Therefore, the unit of analysis was the perceptions and lived experiences of employees who transitioned from an office-based work environment to a hybrid work environment.

4.10 Sampling method and size

The researcher conducted the research at a small government organisation, amongst non-management level team members, who worked for the specific government organisation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in an at office work

environment and transitioned to a hybrid work environment post COVID-19 pandemic. This criterion guaranteed that the participants had an evolving psychological contract within the same work environment. The criterion further only included non-management level employees as mangers are seen as the organisations as they take and implement decisions on behalf of the organisation.

The researcher employed a purposive sampling strategy, intentionally selecting specific participants to ensure higher levels of data relevance to address the research questions as proposed by Johnson et al. (2020).

Saunders and Lewis (2018) also indicated that purposive sampling is used to reach a small sample size during qualitative research. Twelve participants were purposively invited to partake in semi-structured interviews. All twelve agreed to partake in the study. This sampling approach aligned with Bell et al. (2019) highlighting that purposeful sampling will maximize a deep understanding of relevant concepts instead of broadening it. The researcher used his judgement to select the participants who met the criteria and was best suited in answering the research questions, providing a deeper understanding into the phenomenon.

Qualitative research requires that data reach a point where no more new comments are received from participants, known as saturation, highlighted Wu et al. (2021). Saturation is usually reached be conducting between 10 and 15 structured interviews according to Braun and Clark (2022) that found 97% of common themes immerged by 12 interviews. The researcher considered the small office size consisting of only 44 employees in total, of which 36 is at a non-management level, and used his professional judgement to select the sample size of 12.

4.11 Measurement Instrument

Haven and Van Grootel (2019) highlighted that the researcher is an integral part of the measurement instrument since the role of the researcher includes concluding on the gathered data, which will incorporate subjectivity into the analysis and conclusion. The researcher therefore reflected on axiology in research and his positionality as a cisgendered male in South Africa to throughout be aware of biases.

The researcher designed a research interview guide with semi-structured interview questions. The interview guide included introductory remarks, reason for the research and topics covered, questions to be asked and closing remarks. The interview guide further ensured that there was consistency across the interviews. Foley et al. (2021) highlights that semi-structured interview allows the researchers to probe answers from the respondents as well as asking respondents to elaborate on answers, allowing for more insightful information to be gathered.

4.12 Data gathering process

The researcher made use of a single data gathering approached, called a mono-method for data gathering. The researcher only set out to gather data after obtaining ethical clearance (see Appendix 1) from the Gordon Institute of Business Science. The researcher decided to gather data at a government institution, where the researcher is also employed. The researcher identified eligible participants based on the criteria that was discussed at length in section 4.10 above. The researcher sent an email to 12 people who met the eligibility criteria, indicating the purpose and objective of the research, what the responsibilities of the participants will be and the interview procedure. The eligible participants were requested to respond whether they are interest in participating along with availability options.

Prior to scheduling interviews, the researcher shared the informed consent form (see Appendix 2) with the participants, and they were requested to sign and return it to the researcher prior to the interviews. Saunders et al. (2019) highlighted that providing respondents with the research themes prior to conducting interviews, can enhance credibility of the research. For this reason, the researcher shared research themes with the participants prior to conducting the interviews during September 2024.

Following the interpretivist approach alongside the research objective of determining how the psychological contract of employees evolve during times of change, by considering descriptive statements with explanations from the respondents lived experiences, interviews were employed at the selected research instrument of choice. Throughout the interviews, the intent of the researcher was to understand the topic solely through the viewpoints, perspectives and experiences of the

respondents. The researcher used semi-structured interviews in the interpretivist inductive approach to gather data.

The researcher conducted a pilot interview prior to conducting the interviews. The researcher ensured that the pilot interview closely resembled the target group and used the same sampling and data collection methods to ensure that the administration will progress without any hindrances as dictated by Saunders et al. (2021). The pilot interview further helped to construct and enhance the research interview guide as it tested how the research questions were understood.

The interviews were conducted online through Microsoft Teams. Participants were informed in the beginning that the interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Participants were further reminded of the informed consent forms that were signed and the implications thereof. Brinkmann (2020) highlighted that the informed consent form included the reason and the scope of the research, while highlighting to the participants that any identifying information will be held confidential and that they can withdraw from the study at any time. This encourages participants to freely express themselves during the interview. Participants were also afforded the opportunity to ask any questions or raise any concerns that they might have.

Alternative names were used in the research to safeguard the identity of participants. Pseudonyms were therefore allocated to participants and used to indicate the quotations used in Chapter 5, to ensure their confidentiality. The aim of the research was to get first-hand accounts of the participants evolving psychological contracts and their expectations of the organisation during times of change. Highlighting to participants the focus placed on confidentiality in the study, ensured participants to be more at ease.

To get the most useful and fruitful discussions the researcher made use of open-ended questions during the semi-structured interviews allowing the participants to accurately describe and narrate their lived experiences and perceptions. The researcher also asked follow-up questions to respondents, to clarify or further elaborate on discussions where needed.

The audio recordings that were transcribed making use of Microsoft Teams were downloaded and transcription mistakes were corrected. The transcripts were reviewed to ensure that all disclosures that might impact on participants confidentiality was removed. The cleaned transcripts were used to manually analyse the data. The audio recordings as well as the transcripts will be stored for a 10-year period. None of the stored information will contain identifiers to protect respondents' confidentiality.

Table 1

Participant information and interview details

Respondent number	**Gender**	**Race**	**Interview Duration (minutes)**
1	Female	African	49:15
2	Male	African	47:37
3	Female	African	38:39
4	Male	African	38:54
5	Male	African	80:21
6	Male	African	58:34
7	Female	African	59:20
8	Female	African	48:21
9	Female	African	52:22
10	Female	African	31:57
11	Male	African	44:36
12	Male	African	39:01

Note. Data collected by the researcher during September 2024 (Source: Researcher's compilation)

4.13 Analysis approach

Polonsky and Waller (2019) indicated that qualitative data analysis consisted of various steps, including the processing, transcribing, identifying segmenting and lastly the coding of data. After the data has been coded the researcher sets out to look for commonalties amongst the codes to identify themes. This will assist the researcher to create an overall thematic structure to the data. The role of data

analysis is to clarify the data, shaping it into information that will assist the researcher to address the research problem and questions. Thematic data analysis which the researcher applied consisted of preliminary analysis, thematic analysis and lastly interpretation.

All the interviews conducted by the researcher was transcribed and manually coded. The coding entailed the researcher assigning key words to text segments. This required the researcher to meticulous read and re-read the transcripts, highlighting key phrases and assigning codes to the phrases. Once codes emerged the researcher set out to create themes between the various codes by considering commonalties between the codes as was done by Ngobeni et al. (2022). The themes were then tied back to the research questions. The researcher identified multiple codes, which were narrowed down to 15 codes. These 15 codes resulted in 5 themes that was used to address the research questions, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.14 Quality controls

According to Brinkmann (2020) data quality includes trustworthiness elements like credibility, dependability, transferability and lastly confirmability. The researcher ensured credibility by utilizing a semi-structured interview guide, that was created by considering existing literature, to prepare the researcher, and lastly limit bias with the questions that was formulated for the qualitative research. The interview guide also facilitated the data comparison during the data analysis stage. The researcher further made use of a pilot interview to ensure that the questions were clearly formulated and well understood. The verbatim transcription of the audio recordings further ensured the credibility of the data.

Brinkmann (2020) further indicated that transferability relates to the extent that findings from research can be extended to a broader population. The researcher made use of a purposeful sampling technique to ensure that the target population of employees who worked at an at office work environment and moved into a hybrid work arrangement and accordingly had an evolving psychological contract stemming from a changing environment was selected. To meet the requirement of transferability, the researcher ensured that the requirement of thematic saturation is

achieved by considering recommendations from various scholars on sample size for saturation.

Confirmability requires that there is alignment between findings and data, whilst acknowledging that the researcher might be subjective with biases. The researcher must therefore minimize his bias. This was achieved by consulting other researchers on various aspects. Furthermore, an interview guide with open questions was used to mitigate the researcher having to interpret participants views, but rather giving them a voice to express themselves freely.

Dependability depends on the consistency and trustworthiness of research outcomes. This was assessed with the consistent responses that were given by participants when using the interview guide.

4.15 Limitations

A limitation with the study was the fact that human resource policies within the organisation that could impact on employee expectations of the employer were not considered. These include training policies which is responsible for learning opportunities, organisational reward system including cash and non-cash rewards that can impact om expectations within the psychological contract and lastly how organisations empower employees to have more control on what they do and how they do it.

A second limitation was the fact that a cross-sectional study was done. It is noted that the content of the psychological contract can change at any given point in time due to a wide variety of events.

Thirdly, the population was not a representation of the population of South Africa. The impact of race and gender relations on the content of the psychological contract was not considered and therefore might make it difficult to extrapolate the results.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the data collected from participants who transitioned into a hybrid work environment resulting in a change in expectations of the employer and ultimately affecting the psychological contract is presented. Chapter 2 and 3 revealed a gap in the fluidity of the psychological contracts, especially in times of a crises. It was affectively the COVID-19 pandemic and crisis that necessitated the changing work environment. To address this gab, data was obtained from an organisation that transitioned into a hybrid work environment, altering the expectations of the employees.

5.2 Presentation of findings

Chapter 3 indicated that the main research question intended to investigate the fluidity of the psychological contract during times of change. The researcher set about this by structuring the interviews into three parts, aligned to the three research questions discussed in Chapter 3:

1. How has employee's perception of trust in the organisation changed moving into a hybrid work environment?
2. How has employee's perception of work life balance changed moving into a hybrid work environment?
3. How has employee's perception of work life balance changed moving into a hybrid work environment?

This chapter focusses on the analysis of the responses that was provided by the participants. The analysis includes the 15 codes, that related to 5 themes as discusses in the analysis approach in Chapter 4.

Table2

The fifteen codes and five themes in response to the research questions

Themes identifies that respond to the three research questions		
Code	**Theme**	**Research question**
Technology	Increased formal control measures	Research question 1
Micromanagement		
Meetings		
CC function		
Gossiping	Withholding of information	
Transparency		
Policies and procedures	Inconsistencies in treatment of employees	
Favouritism		
Organisational inconsistencies		
Hours worked	Work life conflict	Research question 2
At home distractions		
Increased stress		
Feedback	Supervisor support	Research question 3
Development		
Wellbeing		

Note. Codes and themes that emerged during the data analysis. (Source: Researcher's compilation)

5.2.1 Research question 1

How has employee's perception of trust in the organisation changed moving into a hybrid work environment?

Hybrid work arrangements consisting of a combination of in-office work as well as remote work has become the new normal for millions of people around the world. These work arrangements were initially embraced by employees as it can contribute to flexibility, however four years down the line the hybrid work model has proven not to be without challenges. It can be argued that the hybrid work model has been the biggest test of the trust relationship between employer and employees. As the world

transitioned into the new normal, employees' expectations from their employer also shifted. Employees expected that the organisation will trust them to do their work without direct supervision as well as keeping them up to date with information that will impact on their employment. Any perceived deviation by the employer of the employee's expectation of trust can lead to a break in the psychological contract. The findings for research question 1 is presented under Theme 1, Theme 2 and Theme 3 below.

5.2.1.1 Theme 1: Increased formal control measures.

The transition into a hybrid work arrangement required organisations to implement various formal control measures to effectively manage output. Team members are still responsible to achieve set targets as per their formal performance agreements and mangers are mandated to allocate employees the resources that is required to achieve the targets as well as monitoring and managing output and intervene when there is any under achievement. One of the biggest challenges for managers is the monitoring of work when they no longer see employees at the office daily. The way that organisations went about managing employees to ensure output, therefore also evolved as the word transitioned to a hybrid work arrangement. Organisations incorporated technology, started to micromanage team members, increased the number of meetings that was held with employees as well as copying multiple people in emails as a way of managing and controlling employees.

Technology

The use of technology accommodates the working relationship between employees and employers, by facilitating communication, and collaboration resulting in all employees staying connected and abreast of the project requirements and developments, allowing for successful completion. However, when utilized excessively the monitoring and surveillance through the various technologies can contribute to employees' feelings of not being trusted and to a certain extend that their privacy is being invaded. Therefore, the extent to which the technology is used to monitor employees will impact the employees' psychological contract in terms of the trust that they expect to receive from the employer.

Respondents did not feel that technology was used to effectively communicate and to encourage collaboration, bur purely for monitoring purposes. Employees felt that the organisation did not trust them to do their work, even though they never gave the employer a reason to doubt them. Employees felt that the organisation had an ill-informed perception that employees need to be at the office to work. The organisation ended up managing employees time, to ensure that employees are engaged with work activities for eight hours, instead of managing employees' output.

Respondent	Response
1	*"When somebody is working from the office, it was always assumed and accepted that they are working, however moving to a hybrid work arrangement, it became difficult to monitor people's activities or performance when they are no longer around. The organisation therefore upgraded our technology with Microsoft 365 and one of the features are that you can see if somebody is online. All our actions on the internal systems have an audit trail that can be verified to see what time actions were taken."*
2	*"The organisation thinks that they can only trust you when you are at the office. When you are working from home, they do not trust you. The organisation started tracking whether we are logged into the system. If it appeared to them that we are not logged in, they will call us to find out with what we are busy."*
3	*"The organisation believes that when you are home, that you are not working, even though they can see that you submit the task or the duties that were allocated to you when looking at your stats. Despite this we must constantly be available and locked in on Teams so that the managers can reach us anytime. We no longer get called on our cell phones, we get messaged and called on Teams, sometimes for petty things that they could just have send an email for. These interactions are over and above the time set aside for the regular meetings that we started with during COVID and continued with in the hybrid work environment."*

6	*"The days I am working from home, I get significantly more calls on Teams from my manager than what I would get on the days that I am at the office, almost as if she wants to make sure I am in front of my computer the hole time. I take it that although it is not something that is formally communicated, but the number of calls I get on Teams gives me an indication that we are being monitored, when working from home. When we are both at the office it is completely different as she might not engage me at all."*
7	*"The organisation can tract whether we are online or not. I think that the trust has reduced when moving to a hybrid work environment, because you are not in the office where they can see you. So, the manager does not know if maybe you are working or if you are busy with your own personal stuff. So, I think the trust has decreased a little bit, although sometimes you find that you can be in the office but still not be productive."*

Micromanagement / Lack of autonomy

In a hybrid work environment, management could increasingly feel the need to closely monitor work output and be more direct in the execution of employee's tasks, to feel assured that the work is being done. This can manifest in managers being more descriptive in how they want tasks to be executed, leaving little to no discretion to employees on the execution. Employers might also start dictating to employees in which order their daily activities must be performed, planning employee's workday on their behalf. If employees feel that their judgement and skill set are questioned and that they no longer have autonomy over their own work or that they are being micromanaged, their perception of trust will be altered. Eudemonic well-being of employees is also depended on having autonomy over their work. The decrease in eudemonic well-being and lack of autonomy will also impact on employee engagement levels.

The respondents expressed that there is an increased reporting on their daily activities, accompanied by interreference by management on how they should be doing their work. Inputs by management does not result in an improved product, but

merely suggest the preference of the specific managers. Employees felt that their quality of work has decreased due to management meddling into their work with constant suggestions and that they are no longer trusted to do their work.

Respondent	Response
2	*"When I was working at the office before COVID, and there was load shedding and we could not work, it was never a big issue. When we started to work from home, we had to submit a daily schedule of the hours that there will be load shedding during official office hours. We then had to indicate how we will make up for those two hours that we would be affected by load shedding."*
4	*"You will express how you will execute a project that is allocated to you, but most of the time you will be overruled, and instead of arguing, you just accept the manager's approach. Even when I know that it is not the right way of doing it or that it won't work the way that the manager instructed it must be done, but for peace and progress you just accept it knowing that a document or a concept will be changed 14 or 15 times. The manager will instruct to change something to this and then again to change it to something else. You just change it. But in terms of making your own decision on work, it does not happen. Sometimes you feel like you produce your best work, but then with interference from the manager, the quality is reduced."*
6	*"What gets under my skin is when I have five or six tasks that has been given to me and I constantly get calls asking where is this or why is this not being submitted? When the tasks were assigned the same day. However, whilst working on one of the projects you are told to drop it and do something else that they consider to be a priority. Not even three minutes after you have submitted the priority project, you still get asked about other jobs that you are supposed to do on the day, as if the entire day you were not doing anything. You cannot start and finish one thing, the manager gives constant instruction on leave that, do this first, when there is no need to*

	prioritise the one thing over the other. This can be a bit frustrating sometimes."
7	*"It feels that I am working with a script, meaning that there is outlined steps on how I must do my job as opposed to me designing how I am going to be executing my job to get the kind of end results that they are looking for."*

Increased meetings

When moving to a hybrid work environment, an increase in meetings is to be expected to ensure that all employees are informed of all organisational issues and are aligned with their tasks and organisational goals. Organisations must be mindful that the increase in the number of meetings that the organisation has with employees can disrupt their workflow. Furthermore, if employees suspect that there is no purpose for a meeting, except to indicate their plans for the day and address their previous days performance, or for the manager to ensure that all employees are on duty, it will create a perception that the employees are not trusted to manage their own workflow and duties, altering the psychological contract.

The respondents felt that there was a significant increase in meetings moving to a hybrid work environment, not to communicate organisational information, but rather to discuss daily operational activities of the employees, which was not the norm prior to the new work environment.

Respondent	Response
3	*"We used to only have one meeting a month to discuss production, but after COVID and into our hybrid work arrangement, we now have three meetings a week, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays where we must discuss our production. It is demotivating when you are continuously reaching your targets without fail, but you still must log into three meetings a week to explain your production and action plans for the day and the following day."*

6	*“Since working remotely during Covid into the hybrid working arrangement we have two meetings daily, one in the morning to give an update on what we plan to do for the day ahead and another meeting towards the end of the working day where we discuss what we've done and items that is still outstanding.”*
7	*“We now have daily eight-minute meetings online where we discuss our plans and cases for the day. We also must be logged on to Teams throughout the day.”*

Copying in mails (CC function)

Copying of multiple people in a single email is often done to keep everyone in the organisation informed when disseminating general information. This ensures that information is distributed throughout the organisation in a uniform manner ensuring that people do not get different interpretations of the same information leading to confusion and misunderstandings. However, when managers copy multiple people in emails with specific tasks for one employee, this can send out the wrong message. Employees can interpret it as their work being scrutinized my multiple individuals in the organisation and as a source of surveillance, leading employees to mistrust the employer. The overuse of this practice can therefore increase competition and mistrust amongst colleagues instead of fostering collaboration and trust.

The respondents reported that their managers do copy other people in emails with tasks allocated to them. The interpretation for this was twofold, that managers were doing this to facilitate the monitoring of employees or for the manager to be able to proof to their supervisor that the work was allocated. Both these scenarios however result in the employees viewing it as increased formal control over them and decreasing the trust.

Interview	Response
3	*“Since working in a hybrid work arrangement, my manager will frequently copy my senior manager in mails send to me with tasks that is assigned to me. In those cases, I do not know if the instruction is from the senior manager and if she wants to see that the manager did*

	indeed allocate the task and that the manager constantly feels the need to prove to the senior manager that they did their part, but it does make me feel that I am being monitored that I will do something in a set time."
4	*"Management copies senior manager and other managers in mails to us. It creates an element of, I will say mistrust, because you are talking to me, but you are including other people that are not related to the specific task that you are giving me in the mail. It now feels that other people also monitor me if I have done or have not done the tasks."*
6	*"The administrator gets copied in all mails send to me by the manager. The days I am working from home, the administrator was instructed to follow up numerous times a day on the progress of the project that was emailed to me. However, when I send the manager an email with progress on the project and copy the administrator in the email, she constantly voices her disapproval of me copying the administrator saying I must only send it to her."*
7	*"The manager will copy the senior manager in specify tasks allocated to me. This was not always the case, when being at the office full time, my manager will just speak to me at my desk if there was a task that I needed to do. It is a way of them shifting the blame, to be in a position to say that they did allocate the tasks, so if there are any possible delays in the execution of the task that senior management knows who is responsible for the delay. I usually think to myself whether there was really a need to copy my senior manager."*
9	*"Senior Managers get copied in mails with instructions to us. I do not think that it should be done in that manner. I think we should be allowed an opportunity to engage with our manager first before issues are escalated to the next level. It does not make me feel trusted enough to be able to do the work."*

5.2.1.2 Theme 2: Withholding of information

There needs to be open and effective communication in an organisation to nurture trust. Prior to a hybrid work environment, it was quick and convenient for a team

leader to call an immediate meeting with his team members to provide them with feedback or with information, soon after obtaining it. Team members could also ask for clarity to address any uncertainties that they might have. This two-way communication ensures that employees have a voice and feel heard to build trust in the organisation, which was easy to facilitate during in office interactions. The lack of face-to-face interaction between employees and managers in a hybrid work environment can make it difficult to maintain trust. The transition into a hybrid work arrangement required organisations to reinvent how information can be disseminated amongst employees. Failure to do so will be interpreted as the organisation withholding information, leading to employees distrusting the employer and impacting on the psychological contract.

Gossiping

When employees do not get information from their managers or through other official channels, it leads to an increase in speculation and rumours amongst colleagues to fill the gabs between the available information. These informal channels lead to misinformation spreading through the organisation. This can create a toxic work environment where employees no longer trust their colleagues and the organisation.

The respondents indicated that lately there has been an inconsistent flow of information from the organisation, resulting in more speculation and gossiping amongst employees. As a result, employees are growing increasingly distrustful of the organisation.

Respondent	Response
3	*"We will normally hear news in the corridors from other colleagues on the days that we are at the office and think that the rumours will be addressed. This never happens, in certain instance we only see the rumours play out when the internal communication is received that changes have been implemented. This causes a lot of uncertainty regarding our current work environment, on how it will change and how next our every move will be tracked and monitored."*

Transparency

Transparency is required to build and maintain trust within an organisation. The withholding of information creates a perception of secrecy and dishonesty. When employees feel that their employer is hiding something from them, a breakdown in trust occurs. In a hybrid work environment, where communication is traditionally more challenging, the absence of transparency is damaging to employees' perception of trust as employees feel that they are kept in the dark.

The consensus from the respondents were that the organisation is indeed lacking in communicating relevant information that will have an impact on them and their employment. This has resulted in increased feelings of uncertainty, resentment, and mistrust.

Respondent	Response
4	*"The organisation is no longer forth coming with information. They are not telling us the big picture and only give us information in drips and drabs. It is more a case of you get the information on a need-to-know basis when it is affecting you directly, which might in certain cases be to delight the managers, instead of just painting a clear picture up front for everyone to be in the loop. You cannot plan as you are awaiting certain information."*
6	*"We hardly get proper updates on what is happening except for maybe an e-mail. There is usually no explanation on what is happening. This creates a bit of distrust. The level of transparency is not at what it should be. I'll give an example that we had. The organisation sent an e-mail about bonuses that will be paid. Thereafter, we were called by our manager and informed that the bonus pool was small, and that the CEO will take a decision on allocations in consultation with the managers. No criteria for the allocation were ever provided. I have wondered about what the outcome will be if I am not in the good books of the CEO or my manager as there was no criteria. My perception was that it might be allocated on relationships and not on performance. With the*

	allocation of bonuses, because the organization is not open on discussing the allocation criteria, it creates a bit of mistrust."
7	*"The thing is that management is not coming forward to you and informing you of what they have planned or if there are any other expected changes. You just see in real time how events unfold, and new things being implemented. The organisation does things behind closed doors. The take decisions there. Employees are not consulted or even asked for inputs, even when employees have a lot to contribute to project decisions that gets taken and relate directly to our work, in which we are the experts and have far mor granular detail on what will and will not succeed."*
11	*"The organisation is not telling us everything that we need to know. This was clear transitioning into a hybrid work environment, up to now."*

5.2.1.3 Teme 3: Inconsistency in treatment of employees

How organisations treat employees has a profound impact on the perceived trust relationship. Once employees observe that there is an inconsistent treatment of colleagues it will have a negative impact on the perceptions of trust. If employees note that certain colleagues are held to a different standard or get more favourable treatment it, will it create a sense of unfairness, suspicion, and resentment, eroding the perception of trust and affecting the psychological contract of the employee.

Policies and procedures

All organisations have policies and procedures in place for employees to know what is expected from them as well as what sanctions will be imposed if a non-adherence to the policies and procedures are observed. The adherence to and the application of policies and procedures are not voluntarily, and the implication of non-adherence thereto is not discretionary. Managers must ensure that all employees adhere to these policies and procedures, and when there is a non-adherence, the repercussions thereof must be implemented in line with the organisational policies and procedures without fear or favouritism. Failure to uphold the consistent

application of the organisational policies and procedures will erode the trust relationship and alter the psychological contract.

Respondents experienced that manager used discretion in applying policies and procedures and that there was no consistency. This has made employees suspicious of the motives of the organisation and eroded their perception of trust.

Respondent	Response
2	*"Since COVID the organisation targets certain people. There was an instance where a colleague was not working from his home in Pretoria, but from his parent's house in another province. The office managed to track his location, and he was faced with a disciplinary. He is not the only person who has worked from parents houses in another town or city, you hear a lot of people doing it, but nothing is done in those circumstances."*
3	*"When certain employees make mistakes with their work, the managers will brush it off as nothing as a simple small mistake that anyone could have made, and try to keep it quiet, however other employees are not that fortunate, a similar mistake gets widely reported on by management and the employer will try to charge the employee with gross negligence."*
5	*"The organisation will rush to take decisions against certain employees, expressing that the decision is in line with the disciplinary code of conduct, however with other employees you can see that they do not have the same appetite for action and will consult with employee relations and human resources to delay the process or get a justification not to continue with the process. In certain cases, I get a feeling that the organisation does not consider all relevant facts prior to taking a decision against an employee, whereas with others there is more time spend to hear the side of the employee."*
9	*"Certain divisions allow for more flexibility in terms of their hybrid work arrangements. Certain managers allow their divisions to work from home 70% of the time and allows the team members to pick*

	the days that they want to be at the office. Other divisions only allow for 50% work from home and the manager gets to decide the schedule. The reason for this is not clear and there is no guidance or explanation for this in the published employee value proposition document."

Individuals are not treated the same / Favouritism.

Favouritism in common in most organisations and it has a significant outcome on the perceptions of trust. When a perception exists, that certain employees are favoured over others, it can result in resentment amongst employees. Although favouritism might be more difficult to observe in a hybrid work environment, employees still teach out and speak amongst one another when instances of favouritism is observed. This creates factions within teams as well as eroding the trust relationship.

Respondents did observe various incidents of favouritism, from more favourable work arrangements to better opportunities. This has created resentment and division amongst team members, eroding the trust experienced in the teams.

Respondent	Response
3	*"I have been called to come into the office for a specific meeting and would then ask if I can also swop another day around, to work from home a day I would work from the office, as I will now attend work from the office on a day that I am meant to work from home. This request always gets declined, when I know that other colleagues get to swop their days around."*
5	*"There are certain managers who do treat people differently. They have their favourites, and they will get all the opportunities and praises in the organisation. Managers will also highlight all the good things about certain people to top management, whereas with other colleagues they will inform top management of every mistake, no matter how small."*
6	*"There are certain colleagues that is always in the dob boxes, no matter what, whilst other colleagues can get away with murder.*

	There is no fairness in the organisation, and I do not think that that people are treated equally. Certain people can leave the office early without any problems, but I get told to put in leave when I want to leave an hour early to attend an event of my child."
8	*"We work in an exceedingly small organisation, and you can pick up that senior management gives the same people all the opportunities to develop and benefit them. The opportunities are not equally distributed and there appears to be no merits or criteria for the ones that are getting the opportunities. This was evident moving to a hybrid work environment and management needed extra help to get everyone fully settled in as certain people needed more assistance. It is my observation that those decisions were taken based on favouritism."*

Inconsistencies in what organisation say they will do and end up doing.

When there is misalignment between what the employer say they will do, and end up doing, it undermines the trust relationship. This so called "say-do gap" results in a disconnect between what the employees expect and their reality, questioning the reliability of the organisation and altering their perception of trust within the organisation.

Respondents did experience the "say-do gap" and became more cynical about the organisations promises, affecting the organisational culture and willingness of employees to be active in organisational events.

Respondent	Response
1	*"There definitely was a lot of promises that was made to us, but we are not kept, moving into a hybrid working environment. We made plans in terms of career progression moving into a hybrid work environment, but nothing that the organisation said they will do has been done. They have just gone quite on what was going to be implemented regarding my role development. I no longer ask for updates."*

4	*"The organisation will make promises; however, they do not stick to those promises. It just goes quiet."*
8	*"The organisation does not do as they. Sometimes they will have ideas that is an innovative idea for the growth of the employees. But at the end of the day, when they must put it into practice, they never do it."*
9	*"Recently we were told to produce ideas on what to do for an event and we send forth our ideas. We received communication to vote for the idea that we like but then nothing happened. Nobody comes back to you to say no, it has been cancelled, it's not going to happen anymore, or the reasons why it is off, we just move on like nothing has happened. I also think that when this happens that people become more reluctant to trust the employer going forward. So, for instance, now this Heritage Day people were not committed to giving ideas due to the employer not previously adhering to what they said. We lose interest because we do not trust the process."*

5.2.2 Research question 2:

How has employee's perception of work life balance changed moving into a hybrid work environment?

A hybrid work environment was once thought to be a working model that emphasised the work life balance that employees expected from organisations. After the COVID 19 pandemic this working model become the reality for millions of people worldwide, including in South Africa. However, the hybrid working model did not deliver on employee's expectations as anticipated. The work life balance was confronted with work life conflict, negatively affecting the psychological contract regarding the work life balance that was expected. The findings are presented under theme 4 below

5.2.2.1 Theme 4: Work life conflict

Employees embraced the hybrid work environment expecting flexibility, allowing for better planning and utilization of time, freeing up time to spend on hobbies, friends,

and family, the much-desired improved work life balance. However, four years into the hybrid work model, respondents are confronted with increased working hours, more at home disruptions and increased levels of stress that is negatively affecting the expected work life balance.

Workload / Hours worked.

Respondents have a nine-hour workday, including a one-hour lunch break. With an office based in Gauteng, certain employees found themselves travelling between Johannesburg and Pretoria, with certain respondents reporting daily travelling times of up to three hours per day in extreme cases. The view moving into a hybrid work environment was that work life balance will improve due to a decrease in travel time. However, employees found themselves working longer hours at home than they would at the office. The longer working hours and in certain cases the increased workload resulted in a decrease in work life balance.

Respondent	Response
2	*"I find myself working till after eight in the evenings. It interferes with my family time. My son is there at that time, and he wants to speak to me, and I must explain to him that I am still working. Previously when I left the office, I would leave unfinished work until the following morning. Managers understood that and there were never any issues or concerns about it. When I got home, it was exclusively family time."*
4	*"It is not easy when working from home. My personal time has decreased. I find myself starting work earlier in the mornings and will still be working long after I was meant to finish with work for the day."*
5	*"Look, I think when I work from home, I work longer hours as compared to when I come to the office. I am overworked."*
8	*"You end up working more hours at home. You tell yourself to push with one last task every time. It does affect your family time, because you end up using the little time you would have with them to work."*

12	*“My workload is too much; I am not able to manage it.”*

At home distractions

Not all employees working at home are alone whilst working. Respondents experienced various environmental and family distractions whilst working from home resulting in having to work beyond the normal working hours to compensate for the distractions, negatively affecting their work life balance.

Respondent	Response
3	*“My little daughter does not always understand, and she wants me to do things with her. It is hard. Because I still have deadlines and targets to achieve. It puts a lot of pressure on me.”*
4	*“My family sometimes does not understand that I must work from home. They will consistently come in and ask question or request something, and sometimes it's a bit awkward, especially when you are in between meetings, and they come in. They will start interacting with you while you are trying to concentrate on the work that you are busy.”*
5	*“You get stressed when you are working from home and then boom, there is no power. You have no network, or the network is bad. You are not able to easily connect with colleagues on Microsoft Teams. One of the things stressing me about working from home is the issue of power outages and loadshedding.”*
8	*“There is construction around my area that is distracting as well as a neighbour coming from somewhere playing his music loud while you are in the meeting.”*
9	*“I have realized that my family, when I'm working from home, call me more often than they would when I am when working from the office, because they know I will be at the office.”*

Increased stress

Respondents experienced increased levels of stress working from home because of increased family pressure to do more tasks for them that would normally be the case. Respondents also had difficulties transitioning between the work and private roles increasing strain. The increased levels of strain and stress experienced resulted in a decrease in work life balance.

Respondent	Response
1	*"I feel that within the hybrid model there is a lot of clashes between my work and my personal life since there are no clear distinctions between the two worlds. My laptop is permanently open, so at any time when I feel that I am behind with something, I will go and work, even in the evenings and during the weekends. There are no longer any boundaries between my work and personal life. When I was office based, I would never think about work at home, and now I do think about it at home. Constantly being reminded and thinking of work is increasing my stress levels. I find myself stressing about work constantly, even when I am sitting watching TV."*
2	*"My family is putting a lot of pressure on my when I work from home. They expect lot more from me, now that I am working from home. They require me to do a lot, which is not required from me when I am working at the office. At home I get calls from family with things I need to help them with, but when I am at the office, they will not call."*
4	*"My manager will call me during lunch time and ask where I am. I will say that I stepped out for lunch. They will respond by asking me why I am taking lunch when I am working from home. They expect you to work through your lunch hour when you work from home. These expectations are unreasonable and makes me feel under a lot of pressure."*

8	*"I do not tell my parents that I work from home. If they know they will expect me to go over to their place, take them wherever they need to be for them to do all their choirs."*

5.2.3 Research question 3

How has employee's perception of work life balance changed moving into a hybrid work environment?

When transitioning into the hybrid work environment employees kept their expectation that the organisation will value their working contributions and prioritize their wellbeing. The organisations focus moved to prioritizing resources to ensure that there is still work continuity. In the rush to get employees set up to work from home and ensure that targets are achieved, leaving little to no time for adjustment, questions are raised whether organisations are still meeting the employees' expectations regarding organisational support. The findings for research question 3 is presented under Theme 5 below.

5.2.3.1 Theme 1: supervisor support

The employee's perception of their supervisor's support will shape there believe on whether the organisation is delivering on the overall expectation of organisational support. The support that respondents required was regular feedback from their managers, managers developing employees and a commitment to their wellbeing.

Feedback

Feedback is a powerful tool that managers can use to support their teams. The feedback will help employees know what they are doing well and on what they can improve. This feedback can assist employees to develop their skills, allowing career progression.

Respondent	Response
1	*"I do not receive any feedback from my manager, and I do not like that, it makes me feel uncomfortable because you are not sure if you are doing the right thing. I would appreciate feedback."*
2	*"Managers are not communicating clear performance requirements."*
5	*"Feedback from managers would be helpful. It can assist to helps you improve on your work, especially if you are lacking. Compliments will motivate you to push harder. It would be nice to get this."*

Development

One of the expectations that employees have under the umbrella of organisational support is career development and enhancement. This requires that managers assist to enhance employee skills, map out career paths with the employees, allocate resources and couch employees.

Respondent	Response
1	*"My manager never suggests interventions that can develop my career. This will include courses or exposure to something new that will give me new skills that will be useful to me in the future within the organisation. It is always me making suggestions into what I think I should be doing, and I wish that my manager can be more proactive in that because it would be nice to know that they care about my future."*
2	*"We do have a bursary program. The only issue that I have in terms of studying is the career progression. What are you going to do with those qualifications? Our structure is very flat, with limited career possibilities."*
7	*"The employer does not care whether you grow, whether you achieve your goals or not."*

9	*"I went to the manager asked him to delegate some of his duties to me because I want to learn new things and grow. The manager never did it."*

Wellbeing

A supportive manger will create a psychological safe environment, and ensure the overall health, happiness, and productivity of his team, by ensuring that employees have a work life balance and reduced stress levels.

Respondent	Response
6	*"I do not think the company cares about us.*
7	*"Your well-being is not a priority."*

5.3 Conclusion on findings

The semi-structured interviews indicated a nuanced view on the evolving psychological contract of employees working in a government institution, that transitioned into a hybrid work environment. The researcher investigated three research questions, each to provide more depth and detail of how some expectations within employees' relational psychological contract evolve in times of organisational change. The results indicated that the expectations of employees, and the psychological contract, did indeed change in the hybrid work environment. Employees perception of trust was altered due to the managers increasing formal control measures to ensure output which was interpreted by respondents as mistrust. Respondents further highlighted the perception that the organisation was withholding information from them since being in a hybrid work environment, as well as inconsistent treatment of employees, as other factors that negatively shifted the perception of trust.

Respondents also revealed that there was an increase in work to life conflict when working from home, negatively affecting the work to life balance of employees and negatively affecting the psychological contract. Lastly, it was noted that respondents' precipitations of the employer's adherence to their expectation of organisational

support did not change, as the consensus was that the employer did not adhere to it during the at office-based work environment.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of the research was to delve into the fluidity of the psychological contract of employees and how their expectations from the employer evolved moving into a hybrid work environment.

The transitioning into a hybrid work arrangement post COVID 19 signalled the beginning of a notable change confronting both organisations and employees' word wide. These changes resulted in the expectations that both parties had of one another evolving as organisations adapted to cater for the new normal. The post COVID 19 period, ushered in a trend of employees no longer feeling that organisations met their unwritten expectations, arguable violating the psychological contract resulting in the phenomena coined "the big quit". This phenomenon began in early 2021 and was characterized by a global surge in resignations as employees reflected on their work-life balance and career goals.

South Africa was not exempt from "the big quit" and companies found themselves with higher resignation rates due to shifting workplace expectations. This had significant implications for organisations as it not only resulted in a loss of critical skills, but also an increased cost implication to recruit new employees.

Loffert and Diehl (2023) highlighted that there was limited research done on the evolving psychological contract, specifically during times of change. The change from an office-based work environment to a hybrid work environment, coupled with the "big quit" phenomenon served as the backdrop for the need for the research.

The research findings presented in Chapter 5 that relate to the above mentioned evolving psychological contract will now be examined by considering and comparing the data from the 12 semi-structured interviews that were conducted with the literature review discussed in Chapter 2.

6.2 Discussion of research sub-question 1

How has employee's perception of trust in the organisation changed moving into a hybrid work environment?

The research delved into how employees psychological contract evolved in terms of their expectation of being trusted by the employer as well as trusting the employer. Gong and Sims (2023) viewed trust as the ability to depend on others good intentions. This trust is essential in the working relationship as Lester and Brower (2003) highlighted that when employees have a perception of trust towards the employer, they reciprocate by increased performance as well as organisational citizenship behaviour. Zheng et al. (2019) highlighted that employee's perception of trust from their employer might have a more direct impact on their behaviour, than the employers actual trust. Bernstrom and Svare (2018) highlighted that the employees' perception of trust originates from their managers behavioural cues, whilst Zheng et al. (2019) argued that the trust is inferred by the employee whilst observing their managers attitudes and behaviours. Moving into a hybrid work environment employees continued to observe the behavioural ques of their managers. Any observed changes to the behavioural cues will impact the employee's perception of trust. In the hybrid work environment, there were various changes within the behaviours of managers that were observed by employees. Managers had to revisit how teams were managed to continue performing at the levels prior to the hybrid work arrangement. This necessitated managers to adopt new behavioural cues that was interpreted by the employees to give context and meaning to the perception of trust. Cho and Choi (2019) highlighted that trust becomes more crucial for organizing working relationships in hybrid work teams, since interactions on digital platforms is viewed as impersonal, superficial and evokes uncertainty in people. Moving into the hybrid work environment employees had the expectation that the employer will trust then to do their work when at home. However, employees noticed an increase in formal control measures by the organisation, withholding of information as well as inconsistencies in the treatment of employees, resulting in a change in the perception of trust in the relationship.

6.2.1 Theme 1: Increased formal control measurers

Within the office-based work environment, managers observed employees daily and the consensus were that employees were working, merely based on the grounds that they were at their workstations. With minimal interactions or surveillance imposed by managers, employee's observation of the behavioural cues of managers were that they are trusted to independently perform their work duties. Transitioning into a hybrid work environment this perception of trust was tested. Gong and Sims (2023) highlighted that when managers are not able to directly observe employees, there is an increased fear by managers that the employees will reduce their task focused behaviour. This was a sentiment that was shared by almost all employees. The view was that the employer only believed that the employees were working when at the office and that they were busy with private activities or duties when at home. This perception of the employer not trusting the employees to work whilst at home, persisted even though employees continuously performed in accordance with their performance contracts and achieved their targets. This distrust experienced by employers about whether employees were indeed working from home resulted in the increased formal control measure instituted by the organisation.

The general theme when considering the responses from the respondents was that since moving to a hybrid work environment, the organisation was more focussed on managing the time of employees, rather than the actual output. Respondents viewed this as the reason for the increased control measures. Managers focus was on closely monitoring how the employees spent their nine working hours a day, by ensuring that the employees were virtually present at their workstation for the duration of the time. The respondents did not feel that the organisation was prioritizing the results and the deliverables that they were responsible for.

Bush et al. (2020) highlighted that when employers increased their monitoring activities that it had the less desired outcome of eroding the leader/follower relationship. This was also the consensus of the respondents. They no longer felt trusted to deliver on their work duties, further creating an extremely negative work environment where employees felt that they were permanently questioned on their whereabouts and that they always had to have an explanation for everything that they did.

Costa et al. (2018) explained that erosion in trust leads to a decrease in organisational citizenship behaviour by employees. The respondents also had a lack of participation in the projects that they were a part of, no longer going the extra mile and just doing as they were told. Whilst working at the office full time there was a general sense of employees bouncing ideas off one another and getting different viewpoints from a diversity of colleagues to ensure that only the best quality of work was delivered as employees had pride in their work and saw the work as a reflection of themselves. In the hybrid work environment, with the increased control measures imposed by the organisation leading to the erosion of trust, employees no longer felt that they are part of the organisation.

The respondents experienced the increased formal control measures imposed by the organisation in various forms. The employer invested in technology for the dual purpose of facilitating the move to a hybrid work environment and to enhance productivity. However, respondents experienced the use of technology by the organisation to surveillance employees to ensure that they work a full nine hours. Other formal control measures observed included being micromanaged, an increase in the number of meetings with management, and management copying other people in mails.

6.2.1.1 Use of technology

The organisation invested heavily in computer infrastructure during the COVID-19 pandemic. All employees got laptops and VPN. Microsoft 365 software was also installed on all computers. It is undisputed that the use of technology is necessary in a hybrid work environment to allow for the flexibility to work from anywhere in the world, whilst still allowing for collaboration within teams and ensuring that there is enhanced communication throughout the organisation. The implemented technology however does not come without pitfalls, most notable the over-surveillance of employees. Respondents indicated that they had to log onto the Microsoft Teams platform daily and be available on the Microsoft Teams platform for the duration of their working day. The login time, as well as the logoff time of Microsoft Teams gets tracked. The Managers of the respondents called the team members on the Microsoft Teams platform during the day, to ensure that team members were indeed at their

working stations at home. In instances where calls were not answered via the Microsoft Teams platform, explanations had to be given as to why the team member was not available. No interviewee commented on the positive outcomes that the use of technology brings into the hybrid work environment. Their focus was mainly on how technology was used for over-surveillance, resulting from a lack of trust about whether employees were indeed working from home.

6.2.1.2 Micromanagement / Lack of autonomy

Autonomy is the extent to which an individual has freedom to carry out their tasks. Cho and Choi (2019) found that when virtual teams have higher autonomy in the execution of their duties, there is an increase in the perception of trust, whilst less autonomy equated to lower levels of perceived trust. When employees have little to no autonomy over their duties, it is seen as a form of management control over employees. Robert and You (2018) indicated that the extent to which an employee has freedom to conduct their tasks impacts on the trust relationship between employer and employee. Costa et al. (2018) shared this view emphasising that a decrease in autonomy, decreased the trust relationship that an employee has with their manager.

Managers were not used to managing teams remotely and were uncertain on how to go about it. This resulted in an increased amount of direct involvement with the daily duties of their teams. Respondents expressed a feeling that their workday was planned for them by their respective managers. They were no longer left to plan the order of their duties like they used to. Previously respondents could perform their duties with minimal input from their managers, however this has changed. Throughout the day managers will now constantly call to ask what the progress of their projects are, and they will constantly interject to stipulate how the interviewee must go about in executing on the project. This micromanagement of the project diminishes the employees' sense of empowerment and confidence. Respondents were employed based on their technical skills within their specific domain and now feel that this is no longer valued and trusted. Respondents ended up doing as they were told, which increasingly resulted in wasted time as projects had to be reworked as the instructions from management did not add the desired value to the project. The change in the level of autonomy within the hybrid work environment was

interpreted as the organisation increasing control measures resulting in employee's reduction of trust in the organisation.

6.2.1.3 Increased meetings

Moving into the hybrid work environment, an increase in meetings were to be expected. Meetings become critical to assure that there is alignment between colleagues to ensure that everyone is still on the same page, considering that regular office chats might no longer happen. The meetings should serve as a platform to encourage teamwork and foster collaboration and ensure that no one in the team is feeling isolated. Lastly, the meetings should allow the organisation a platform to be transparent so that all employees are aware of all developments regarding the organisation and their employment.

Across the board the respondents indicated that there was indeed an increase in the number of meetings moving to a hybrid work environment, however it was found that the meetings were not held to facilitate the flow of information or to encourage collaboration. Meetings were held at set intervals. The reason for the meetings were for employees to give an indication of their work plans and to indicate and discuss their planned output. Respondents did not deem the number of meetings to add any value. The respondents viewed the meetings that were held as an increased control measure that was implemented due to a lack of trust on the side of the managers.

6.2.1.4 Copying of others in emails

Haesevoets et al. (2019) studied the impact of making use of the copy function in emails and the impact thereof on the perceived perception of trust of employees. It was found that coping other people in emails increased employees' feelings of mistrust as it was viewed as a form of monitoring and controlling employees.

Moving into a hybrid work environment, respondents noted an increase in the instances of management copying other people in emails. Respondents indicated that they understood the rational for this in instances where it served to keep other team members informed about a project that these colleagues were a part of or in instances where colleagues could possibly add value to a project by collaborating.

This was however not always the case. There was an increase in cases where a manager will copy the senior manager in an email with a specific task to a team member. To team members this represented a lack of trust that the manager has in the employee, but also as a sign of an eroded trust relationship between the manager and his senior manager. The copying of a senior manager in emails further made team members feel that their autonomy was undermined and that they were micromanaged.

6.2.2 Theme 2: Withholding of information.

Although the transition from an office-based work environment to a hybrid work environment offered numerous benefits including flexibility and work life balance, it also came with challenges, notably regarding the sharing of information. In an office setting there is a flow of information originating from casual conversations to impromptu meetings. However, in the hybrid work model reliance is placed on scheduled virtual meetings and interactions. The inability for spontaneous interactions may result in the organisation unintentionally withholding information. Choi and Cho (2019) indicated that there is a reduced likelihood of information sharing in virtual teams. Critical information that would normally be shared in spontaneous meetings may now be overlooked and forgotten by the time there is a virtual meeting scheduled. This can lead to the withholding of information or result in information being lost in translation. Fonseca and Peters (2018) indicated that when organisations regularly disseminate information it can assist with increased trust within the organisation. In cases where there is a withholding of information, whether intentional or not it is perceived as undermining the trust relationship between employees and the organisation.

One of the critical themes that emerged amongst the respondents was that there was a perception of the organisation increasingly withholding information from employees. This resulted in heightened anxiety and uncertainty amongst employees about their roles as well as the organisation's direction. Respondents expressed increased stress levels due to the uncertainty from the organisation no longer being as forthcoming with information as they were used to during the at office work arrangement. Respondents further felt that they were left out of discussions that

impact their work and futures and that there was diminished faith in the organisation and erosion of trust.

The perception of the organisation withholding information from employees manifested in an increase in corridor talks/ rumours as well as there being a perception that the employer is not transparent with employees.

6.2.2.1 Rumours

Paek and Hove (2019) indicated that rumours are a form of sensemaking. Rumours become increasingly more prevalent during situations of uncertainty. Rumours originate when unauthenticated information is communicated between people. Sobering (2019) reflected that a lack of information and trust is a fertile ground for rumours. Liff and Wikstrom (2021) explained that rumours create mistrust between organisations and its employees potentially resulting in loss of productivity and cooperation.

The respondents found that there is an increase in corridor talks on the days when working at the office. The corridor talk is not about catching up with colleagues but rather trying to find out about what is happening at the office regarding various issues pertaining to their employment, as the employer is not forthcoming with information. The organisation has an employee value proposition that includes the terms for the hybrid work arrangement. Over the last 3 years there has been constant and unexpected changes made to the employee value proposition that caught employees off guard. Respondents indicated that you would see when managers secretively speak to one another, and you will overhear glimpses of what is said and know that they are speaking about something that will affect the employees. As the organisation is approaching a financial year end, speculation is on the increase as to how the employee value proposition will change resulting in the spreading of rumours.

6.2.2.2 Transparency

Albu and Flyverbom (2019) viewed transparency as more than just the sharing of information and the quality of the information but also as the way in which organisations go about to share information with employees with the intend to

increase their productivity or to get their buy-in. Grimmelikhuijsen et al (2019) expressed the importance for organisations to indicate how and why a decision was taken to increase trust. Busser and Shulga (2019) highlighted requirements for transparency, namely that information given must be useful, truthful and substantial.

Transparent behaviours in a hybrid work environment will therefore require managers to be open to feedback, communicate honestly and clearly and must be in the habit of sharing information. Respondents indicated that in the hybrid work environment, management decisions are taken without clarification or indicating the basis for the decision. This impacted respondents in several ways. With the lack of transparency in the decisions taken, employees decision making ability regarding their work was affected as they do not take all developments into account when executing tasks resulting in wasted time to redo the tasks as and when more details become available. The organisation also loosed out on opportunities for collaboration and skills transfer by not openly communicating reasons for decisions so that employees could fully understand the implications of the decisions and engage one another to find the best workable solutions. This could be a reason for the lack of innovation that the respondents experienced in the organisation.

The required performance expectations were another area of concern lacking transparency. Respondents expressed a concern regarding the performance expectations moving into the hybrid work environment. Targets that used to be fixed al of a sudden changed on a regular basis, without clear communication and discussion. There was also a trend of insufficient transparency around performance standards and respondents found that their final year end appraisal scores were lower than what they scored themselves. This came as a surprise as there were never any indications given to them during the year that any area of their performance was lacking.

Respondents expressed an increase in mistrust due to the lack of transparency on behalf of the organisation. This mistrust further increased feelings of uncertainty amongst respondents.

6.2.3. Theme 3: Inconsistency in the treatment of employees

Trust in organisational leadership is critical as employees have far less control over the behaviours of their managers, than the control that these managers exert over them. The perception of an employee's interaction with managers therefore play a significant role in the development of trust in the manager according to Matta et al. (2020). Furthermore, the perception of the manager's technical skills, interpersonal skills and behavioural consistency further impact the employee's development of trust in their manager according to Lee et a. (2019). Ralph and Barling (2023) concluded that Social Exchange Theory and the employees psychological contract describe why inconsistency in management behaviour would lead to an increase in employee distrust.

Inconsistent treatment from managers therefore impact on employee's perception of trust. This includes certain team members being afforded more leniency, better opportunities or getting more recognition. These behaviours from management can evoke a feeling of unfairness amongst employees, questioning whether these decisions were based on merit or on favouritism.

Katz-Navon et al. (2020) highlighted that feelings of mistrust towards managers can impact on employees' goals and performance impacting production, decrease employee wellbeing, counterproductive work behaviour and ultimately increase organisational staff turnover.

Ralph and Barling (2023) viewed the phenomenon referred to as "inconsistent leadership" as leaders who inconsistently apply rules. Respondents vied the leadership style of their managers as that of inconsistent leadership. Respondents found that there were inconsistencies in how their managers applied organisational policies, how they treated employees as well as an inconsistency between their commitments and their actions. All these actions result in respondents feeling demotivated, no longer collaborating with other employees and most notably loosing trust in the organisation.

6.2.3.1 Policies and procedures / Procedural justice

Matta et al. (2020) indicated that inconsistency in procedural justice affects the perception of organisational trustworthiness. Respondents were of the view that there was inconsistent application of disciplinary actions against employees. Respondents indicated that while certain employees made mistakes in their work it was swept under the carpet, whilst when other employees made similar mistakes, they were taken on in terms of the organisational disciplinary code for gross negligence. Other respondents recalled how people were taken on for not working from their home in Gauteng whilst working remotely when other employees did the same with no repercussion for them. Inconsistencies regarding procedural justice did not only affect the trust relationship between the organisation and the manager, but it also caused division amongst employees, creating a toxic work environment. Employees developed a tendency to now be more reserved due to fear of action being taken against them in case they did something wrong. Respondents felt that there was a decrease in psychological safety as employees felt that they cannot speak up and further observed more tension amongst colleagues.

6.2.3.2 Individuals are not treated the same / Favouritism.

Mollerstrom (2022) described favouritism as giving preferential treatment to one person at the expense of another. Hsiung and Bolino (2018) found that favouritism leads to distrust between employees and their managers as well as relational team conflict, impacting employee job satisfaction and well-being. There was a general concern amongst respondents regarding favouritism. Instances of favouritism was observed by mangers towards specific team members receiving preferential treatment, better opportunities, and more exposure. Favouritism was further observed towards specific divisions within the organisation with employees indicating that the executives looked favourably upon specific teams and divisions allowing for them to have better terms for their hybrid working arrangements. Not only did this impact the perception of trust towards the organisation, but it also resulted in gossiping amongst colleagues, and competition amongst colleagues and the different divisions.

6.2.3.3 Inconsistency between what employer says it will do and does.

Respondents cited numerous occasions where the employer committed to do one thing but did not follow through on it. This affected respondent's perception of trust within the organisation and made them more hesitant to get actively involved in organisational events, since there is always doubt on the organisation following through with it.

6.2.4 Conclusion: Sub-research question 1

The organisation increased monitoring activities to ensure that employees are working their full workday. This is however not a bullet proof approach as managers will never be able to fully know what their employees do every minute of the working day. Employees begun to perform to the measure that was imposed to tract that they are indeed working, instead of working towards their objectives that contribute to the organisational strategy. This can lead to employees spending time to work around the imposed measures instead of spending the time on their actual work. The excessive monitoring has however resulted in the erosion of the trust that employees had towards the employer.

As information sharing became an increasingly more planned activity on the part of the organisation due to an inability to have impromptu meetings, there was a decrease of information flow from the organisation to employees, resulting in an increase of the spread of rumours and employees questioning the organisations transparency regarding decision taken. The lack of information sharing further increased the distrust that has developed towards the employer.

Managerial inconsistencies in terms of how policies are applied as well as observed instances of favouritism has cast doubt and reservation on the trustworthiness of the organisation. Employees now question on whether decisions were taken based on merit or due to favouritism.

Transitioning into a hybrid work environment eroded the perception of trust that employees had in the employer, decreasing organisational citizenship behaviour as there is a perceived violation of the psychological contract.

6.3 Discussion of research sub-question 2

How has employee's perception of work life balance changed moving into a hybrid work environment?

The research investigated employees work life balance in a hybrid work environment and the impact that it had on their expectations of the organisation. COVID 19 has accelerated the speed at which organisations transitioned into a hybrid work environment and created a new normal for millions of people. Transitioning into the hybrid work environment, resulted in employees creating new expectations from the employer, affecting the psychological contract. The intertwined work and non-work roles of individuals became an unchartered territory for most since the home became an office as well. The purpose of the study was to determine if employees perceived that the organisation delivered on their expectations of a work life balance within the hybrid work environment.

6.3.1 Theme 4: Work life conflict

Allan et al. (2021) highlighted that the work life balance that employees expect from the employer remains an elusive but desired state. Moving into a hybrid work environment caught most people off guard. Although most people always feel that working from home will be bliss, the practically and the consequences thereof is not always as idyllic as the idea thereof. Respondents found that working from home resulted in an increase in working hours, more distractions, and an increase in the level of stress experienced, negatively affecting their work life balance and impacting their psychological contract.

6.3.1.1 Working hours.

Delanoeije et al. (2019) indicated that hybrid work blurs the boundaries between work and personal time, since people find themselves more inclined to still focus on work tasks, after their working hours, when at home, disrupting the work life balance.

Respondents found themselves working more than the nine working hours that is required of them when working at home. Respondents indicated that this was not an

issue for them in the beginning as they were cutting down on travelling time and was therefore willing to put in the extra time. However, over time extra duties were allocated to them which resulted in more time spend working over and above the time that they would have spent to travel. Extra duties did not always relate to their direct tasks and outputs but was of an administrative nature to keep record of their daily activities and report on daily activities. The time spend on an increase in meetings also affected respondents. This required respondents to work more hours to still deliver on their set targets. Respondents also felt that there was an expectation from the employer to prioritize tasks that was allocated on short notice, towards the end of the day, even though the manager knew it would require the respondents working longer hours. Respondents also raised concerns about an increased workload in the hybrid work environment, forcing them to work longer hours. Respondents also raised concern regarding unrealistic deadlines that is set, resulting in increased working hours. Most employees found themselves working longer hours when it was not requested from them. They would continue working because they were at home and in front of their computer. These employees struggled to set boundaries and kept on pushing work at the expense of their families. Three of the respondents however indicated that they managed to set clear boundaries regarding their working hours, and it was communicated to their managers. In instances where something was allocated late in the afternoon and it was indicated that it was urgent, the three respondents would communicate with the manager to manage their expectations of when they will deliver on the task. However, most of the respondents did not manage to set any boundaries regarding their working hours.

The findings from the respondents were similar as the results of previous research, indicating that several factors contributed to employees working more hours than they would at the office, negatively affecting their work life balance.

6.3.1.2 At home distractions

Golden et al. (2006) found that family members are more inclined to interrupt employees while working at home with insignificant and non-emergency related requests. This impacted on their work and disrupted their work life balance, as these distractions resulted in extra time spend working later the day.

The respondents expressed plenty distractions that they experienced at home. Family interactions and demands was one of the distractions that most respondents highlighted. This included mostly little children and helpers at home that does not necessarily fully grasp that people still have set target that needs to be achieved daily, even when working at home. Children and helpers at home will interject at the most uncalled time when respondents were intently focused on specific tasks. This would break their attention, and it will take an extended time to get back into their though process.

Family was not the only distraction that the respondents experienced. Load shedding whist working at home was a major frustration and distraction for employees. This sometimes resulted in work coming to a complete standstill as it was on occasion accompanied by connectivity issues, with most respondents requiring internet connection to be working on the organisational systems. This was not an issue at the office as the office is equipped with alternative power sources.

Respondents also highlighted distractions from colleagues. Respondents sometimes require assistance from other colleagues, whilst sometime help is requested from them. When at the office, a quick discussion will be held with the first colleague that they think might be able to assist and they will quickly be able to continue with their task. Whilst working from home, this is not that easy. Colleagues are not always immediately available resulting in respondents having to wait to be contacted back. Sometimes due to uncertainties with the projects that they were working on, they struggled to continue without the assistance from their colleagues. When colleagues do call for assistance, respondents found that it does take longer to help someone virtually than what it would have been in person, resulting in prolonged distractions before returning to their own tasks.

The respondents confirmed prior research indicating an increase in distractions at home, resulting in a need to work later in the evening to compensate for the time lost with the distractions experienced. This impacted on their work life balance as less time was available for family and friends.

6.3.1.3 Increased stress

Delanoeije et al. (2019) argued that the inability to transition between the work and home roles are stressful on employees and impact on work-life balance. This was a similar finding by Song and Gao (2019) who found that hybrid work increases employees stress, compared to an office-based work environment.

The findings from the respondents reflected comparable results. Respondents indicated that transitioning between their work roles and family roles is not that easy. Dressing up to go to the office would start mentally preparing employees for their work roles and by the time they reach the office they would have already transitioned into their role as a working professional. Working at home, the boundaries are blurred with employees not easily transitioning into the distinct roles. This causes uncertainty amongst employees as there are no clear boundaries between the two roles with employees constantly having to be aware and alerted of both work and personal issues, causing increased stress and exhaustion. The situation is made more stressful with family putting increased pressure on respondents with increased expectations that was not previously the case.

Respondents experienced an increase in stress working at home, resulting from increasing family pressures and inability to seamlessly transition into their distinct roles. This finding is in line with previous research. The increase in the stress experienced by employees, decreased the work life balance, affecting the psychological contract.

6.3.2 Conclusion: Sub-research question 2

Moving into a hybrid work environment was embraced by employees with certain expectations of the organisation. It was expected that there will be more balance between work and life, due to employees having more freedom to plan their day, allowing them to fit more into it. The expectation from the increased flexibility was a cut down in wasted time, allowing for more time with family and friends. Although respondents did experience flexibility and was able to do the odd errant during working hours, most employees found themselves working longer hours, have more distractions that negatively impacted their working schedule and ended up

experiencing increased levels of stress, negatively affecting the desired work life balance. The expectations that employees had in terms of the psychological contract was therefore not met moving into the hybrid work environment.

6.4 Discussion of research sub-question 3

How has employee's perception of work life balance changed moving into a hybrid work environment?

Transitioning into a hybrid work environment altered the dynamics between organisations and employees. Within the new landscape, employees' need for organisational support will still be an expectation, however employees view of the organisation delivering on the expectation might change. Respondents raised concerns regarding supervisor support, affecting the perception of organisational support. The concerns raised included lack of manager feedback, lack in developing employees and doubts on whether the organisation prioritized wellbeing.

6.4.1 Theme 5: Supervisor support

Eisenberger et al. (2002) indicated that since supervisors have the authority to act on behalf of the organisation to direct and evaluate employees, supervisor support is indicative of organisational support. Shi and Gordon (2020) highlighted that when managers are supportive of their subordinates, the subordinates will more likely view the psychological contract as being fulfilled. The respondents also clarified that organisational support is seen through how supportive their managers were.

6.4.1.1 Feedback from supervisor

Gordon et al. (2019) highlighted that supervisor feedback and encouragement is a form of supervisor support and can lead to higher engagement levels and reduced turnover intention. Respondents expressed that they would like their managers to have regular feedback sessions with them regarding their progress, but this is not the case. Respondents also indicated that there was no public recognition for work well done to encourage employees. Respondents lacked motivation to really try and excel in their jobs. The respondents highlighted that although they had an

expectation to have regular feedback in the hybrid work environment, which was the same expectation in the at office environment, the employer did not deliver on this expectation in both work environments, negatively affecting the psychological contract.

6.4.1.2 Development of employees

Perkins et al. (2022) highlighted that employee's expectation of their career and personal development form part of their psychological contract and further emphasized that the expectation of development extends beyond increased remuneration. Clark and Scurry argued that the employees psychological contract reinforces that they should expect career management and career progression in return for delivering on the operational results of the organisation.

In line with the research, respondents had expectations from the organisation to develop them to function at a higher level and role as well as to promote and support career progression. Employees need to do a professional development plan annually. Employees see the plan as nothing more than a tick box exercise as the managers do not discuss it with employees to implement actions to deliver on it. The fact that it is seen as a tick box exercise resulted in employees not applying their mind to it when doing is, as they do not believe it serves a purpose.

Respondents indicated that managers do not delegate work to help employees learn new skills or to prepare them for higher roles. The only time when delegation of duties will happen is when managers are swamped with work and there is an urgent request that needs to be dealt with. Respondents expressed an interest to assist management more for the opportunity to gain experience and develop new skills.

Respondents indicated that the organisation awards bursaries annually. Although this on face value appears to be a gesture to develop employees it is not that straight forward. There is no formal discussion throughout the year about the training needs for employees' developmental goals. Managers sign off on the approval of the bursaries without having a formal discussion with employees regarding their goals and career progression. On successful completion of a qualification for which a bursary was awarded, there is no career progression. The manger does not engage

the employee to discuss their new goals or consider options on how the employee can be accommodated to practically apply the academic knowledge that was acquired by recommending a secondment to another division. Respondents expressed a perception that the bursaries were awarded because the organisation had budgeted for it and not with the intention to develop and prioritize career progression.

Respondents further viewed the organisational structure as flat with little career progression. This demotivates the employees regarding career development, although it is something that they expect from the organisation. Although the organisation has a flat structure, the organisation is not considering seconding employees to other divisions for them to gain new skills, which is something that the respondents desired.

All respondents indicated that there was no change in their expectation of career development moving into a hybrid work environment, however the status que regarding the organisation delivering on this expectation is the same as during an at office work environment.

6.4.1.3 Employee wellbeing

Karatepe and Kaviti (2016) found that applying employee-focussed practises, focusing on employee wellbeing increase employee's perception of management support. Subjective employee wellbeing benefit organisations in various forms, including higher job performance, increased level of employee engagement, higher sales, and reduced costs according to Gordon et al. (2019).

Respondents were unanimous that the organisation did not care about their wellbeing since certain concerns were previously raised with management that negatively affected their wellbeing and management did not address or resolve their concerns. The lack of the organisational support for employee wellbeing did negatively affect the psychological contract. This was however like the at office work environment.

6.4.2 Conclusion: Sub-research question 3

Respondents indicated that they did have an expectation for organisational support. The expectation included that the organisation would provide them with regular feedback, provide career development and be concerned about their wellbeing. The expectations that the respondents had, was the same as the expectations during the at office work environment. The respondents expressed that the organisation did not deliver on this and that it negatively impacted the psychological contract.

6.5 Conclusion and discussion of results

In conclusion, the researcher investigated the fluidity of the psychological contract during times of changes. The three research questions delved into various aspects of employees' relational psychological contracts, specifically, trust, work life balance and organisational support.

Three themes were identified that shaped employee's perception of trust in the hybrid work environment. Firstly, respondents experienced an increase in formal control measured employed by managers to ensure achievement of deliverables. These included managers using technological platforms to ensure that employees are indeed signed in and working. There was also an increase in the number of meetings that was held to discuss daily plans and production. Respondents did not find this to be adding any value, as managers could see who was not achieving targets and rather spend time with those specific employees. Respondents found that the increase in meetings where all staff discussed their daily plans and contributions consumed so much of their time that they found themselves having to work longer hours to compensate for the time spent in meetings. Respondents also observed an increase in the number of times that people got copied in emails to them. It is noted that in some instances it can be beneficial to facilitate communication when more than one person is working om a project. This was however not the case. Respondents got a sense that there was mistrust from their managers about them actioning the task, but also a sense of the manger trying to proof to the senior manger that the task was indeed allocated, signalling that the manger, might also mot feel trusted by his manager.

A second theme that emerged regarding the perception of trust, was respondents view that the organisation might be withholding information from them. This resulted in a lot of corroder talk as some people became aware of information that was not widely shared and tried to solicit more information from other colleagues. This highlighted one of the down sides of a hybrid work environment. Managers need to be intentional to schedule meetings, with an agenda indicating all the discussion points to ensure all information gets disseminated. Calling impromptu meetings as managers became aware of new developments, in an office-based work environment, was one of the factors that increased the perception of trust. The opposite is not the case in a hybrid work environment.

The last theme that emerged regarding the perception of trust was instances of perceived favouritism. Respondents indicated that specific employees get all the exposure and opportunities within the organisation, without any objective justification why they got the opportunities and not others. Respondents also raised the issue of the organisations not consistently applying the organisational policies and procedures, specifically the disciplinary code. The made respondents feel mistrust not just towards the organisation, but also towards other colleagues. Respondents felt that this created a toxic environment and reduced their organisational citizenship behaviour.

The second research question attempted to determine the change in the perception of work life balance. Respondents observed that there was an increase in work to life conflict. Respondents found themselves working longer hours for various reasons. The reasons include due to disturbance during the day, the number of meetings but also because they were pushing themselves as they were home and wanted to finish what they were busy with. Respondents also felt an increase in stress and pressure. The increase in feelings of stress originated from the organisation expecting more from respondents, but also from family members expecting more from the respondents. Family did not always understand or respect the boundaries, that respondents had to do their work during working hours and cannot do more family responsibilities during this time.

The last research question investigated respondents' perception of perceived organisational support. Perceived organisational support considered training and

development, and wellbeing. Respondents wanted to develop and have opportunities to move into higher roles. The organisation does offer bursaries, but respondents did not feel that there was any involvement from managers to plan their career paths with them and facilitate this growth path with respondents studying further. Respondents felt left to their own devices about what they wanted to study further, without formal discussions with managers. Respondents did also not think that the organisation cared about their wellbeing, only about their output.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

Most companies were caught unprepared when their employees had to move over to a work from home schedule during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time of crisis, it was expected that employees and managers would find it difficult to continue with operations as normal, making managers vulnerable not to notice a breach in the employee psychological contract. Since then, technology has advanced leaps and bounds to allow organisations to convey more meaningful communication. However, the intensity of the disruption accompanied with minimal periods of shared working locations, still hampers organisations to sufficiently communicate contextual information. Supervisors facing more challenges and still needing to achieve work goals, may be unaware of elements of employees' relational psychological contract, including the perception of trust, work to life balance and organisational support. An unintended consequence of managers not being aware of employees' expectations, could lead to a breach in the psychological contract, with employee's performance affected.

After the COVID-19 pandemic the world has changed. A hybrid work environment has become the norm for most professionals. The COVID-19 pandemic also had employees take stock of what matters to them in life. Advances in technology has made it possible for professional skilled employees to work from anywhere in the word, and for any company around the world. Employees are no longer bound by city borders, allowing them to have more career and work opportunities. Employees no longer stay with one employer for their entire career. This was evident with a significant increase in resignations during the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in the phenomenon "the great quit". The research is conducted against the backdrop of a hybrid work environment that is here to stay. The literature has highlighted that the psychological contract is a dynamic construct with little research conducted on the psychological contract during times of change and organisational crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent hybrid work environment is representative of such a change and crisis. As indicated, companies were caught off-guard with the sudden government regulations and restrictions that was imposed and

implemented immediately. Companies had to prioritize information technology systems at a cost, consuming significant amount of managers time, who still had to account for production. This propelled companies into crisis mode. Similarly, employees were also thrown into crisis mode as they had to start working from home, faced with more home and family pressures, whilst having to learn innovative technology and still perform. There was no adjustment period for both parties. During these transformations expectations that both parties had from one another changed.

The researcher investigated how this workplace disruptions, can affect the ques that managers send out to employees when adopting new practices, and in return being interpreted by the employees and shaping the perception of trust, work life balance and perceived organisational support. These disruptions can have an impact on the employees' psychological contract, leading to contract breach if employees are of the view that the organisation is not delivering on the expectations.

The researcher made use of a qualitative methodology since this allowed the researcher to gain a deep understanding and insights into the perceptions and first-hand experiences of respondents as highlighted by Saunders et al. (2019). Braun and Clarke (2022) also encouraged a qualitative methodology to allow the researcher to better understand behaviours and experiences of people. Since limited researched has been done on the psychological contract in times of crises, a deductive approach was followed to allow the researcher to obtain new insights on the experiences of respondents without making predetermined predictions of what employees' experiences will be. As highlighted by Brinkmann (2020), the inducive approach allowed the researcher to approach the respondents without any preconceived ideas, whilst semi-structured questions allowed respondents to freely express themselves, and allowing the researcher the opportunity to ask follow-up questions to clarify his understanding.

7.2 Research summary

The findings revealed that employees did view the psychological contract as breached. The expectations that the employees had relating to trust was not met by the employer. Moving into a hybrid work environment, managers increased formal control measures to ensure that employees were indeed working. This was

interpreted by employees as a sign of mistrust on the part of the employer. Respondents felt that they were monitored to ensure that they were indeed working nine hours a day, instead of managers manging the output that the respondents were responsible for. The sudden move to a hybrid work environment, left managers and the organisation with no time to reflect and rethink their communication strategy towards their employees. Respondents observed that the organisation was not as forthcoming with information as during the at office work environment. Communication now had to be more planned, structured, and intentional. This was not prioritized as managers were to be focussed on managing employees' time. The decrease in information sharing and communication from the organisation increased the mistrust that employees had towards the employer, leading to corridor talk. Although the withholding of information, or lack of sharing of information might not have been intentional by the organisation, but more because of not being able to quickly adjust with using the new technology and communication strategies, paired with not being intentional due to other priorities, does not matter. Zheng et al. (2019) highlighted that the actual trust of the employer does not matter, it is the employees feeling and perception of trust of the employer, which might lead to a breach in the psychological contract.

Employees were further confronted with a work to life conflict within the hybrid work environment. Whilst employees were no longer commuting to offices daily and cutting down on travelling time, initially it was not problematic for them to put in additional time. However, it quickly became the norm to work longer hours, and respondents viewed it as an expectation from managers to work longer hours since they were working from home. Respondents were finding themselves working longer hours, not just because of managers expectations, but because they were in front of their computers and found themselves wanting to finish tasks with which they were busy. Various distraction at the home also affected their efficiency, resulting in respondents having to work longer hours to compensate for the time lost from the distractions. This resulted in respondents having less available time for family. Respondents also expressed that various family members had more expectations from them, further increasing the pressures that they were experiencing, increasing work to life conflict. The work to life conflict negatively affected employees' psychological contract.

Lastly the researcher considered respondents' perception of perceived organisational support. Respondents' perception was that the organisation was not delivering on their expectations of organisational support during the at office work environment and was also not delivering on their expectations in a hybrid work environment. Respondents indicated a lack of growth opportunities and the perception that the organisation not caring about their wellbeing as areas of concern.

Breaches in the psychological contract can result in a reduction of organisational citizenship behaviour, reduce work engagement levels, decrease productivity, and increase employee turnover intension.

7.3 Theoretical implications

The psychological contract can contribute to better understanding the intricacies of a hybrid work environment from both employers and employees' perspectives. By obtaining insights from employees in a government institution in South Africa, regarding their experiences within a hybrid work environment, the researcher made use of the psychological contract to shed light on factors that might foster the effectiveness of hybrid working environments. Valuable insights can be obtained by scratching beneath the surface of the psychological contract reciprocity to shed light on employment relationships during times of organisational crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic, along with the new work environment has increased employers and employees demands. This includes an increase in the need for trust between the employer and the employee. A need by employees that the organisation will trust them do their work, and organisations to trust employees to do their work. The psychological contract requires exchange between both parties and any failure to deliver on expectations could result in breach in the psychological contract. The breach in the psychological contract can come from either the organisation or the employee, although most research has focussed on psychological contract breach by the organisation. In a hybrid work environment where organisations must trust that employees are working from home can lead to psychological contract breach by employees in instances where they end up not doing work when at home. The research findings contribute to the current knowledge on psychological contracts by investigating the impact of the disruption on the workplace by moving to a hybrid working environment in terms of the feelings of trust experienced by employees.

Previous literature and empirical reviews focused on the impact of events happening at the on-site work premises of the employer according to Aiyenitaju (2022), not on the affective events experienced whilst working from home. Although employees have desired a work-life balance, limited attention has been given to the importance of this to the psychological contract. Since the hybrid work arrangement has become popular with organisations, the impact of the expectation to achieve a balance between work and life, impacting on the psychological contract is becoming more relevant. The research indicates how the conflict between the work to life balance has impacted the perceptions within the psychological contract.

A hybrid work environment requires a different management style than an office-based environment about managing employee's performance. In an office-based environment managing performance can take form in casual face to face conversations or quite observation, however in the hybrid work environment it will be less subtle and more explicit inquiries. Managers need to reestablish trust in a hybrid work environment and may themselves require additional management training. The research indicated how changes to existing managerial practices resulting from the move to a hybrid working environment, has affected employees' perceptions of trust, work-life balance and perceived organisational support.

7.4 Practical implications

From a practical point of view, it is clear that remote work and hybrid working environments are increasingly being adopted by more organisations due to the evolving work environment. Organisations must therefore start to reconsider their current work policies and practices to sufficiently cater for hybrid work environments. Organisations must prioritize building employer and employee trust, by creating a supportive environment. This can be achieved through structured communication with employees, clarification of organisational and individual goals and measuring these goals, not managing employees working time. Managers must have regular check in session with employees to give them a platform to raise concerns. Managers must also actively manage, facilitate and foster career development, giving employees exposure to different divisions within the organisations, specifically in cases where employees have an interest in the work being conducted in a different

division. It is critical for organisations to reflect on their expectations for managing hybrid employees and to actively consider their remote working requests. This requires organisations to create a safe space where employees can articulate their desirable working conditions and have platforms to discuss best practices amongst colleagues.

Organisations must create clear boundaries that must be respected by managers. Organisations must therefore be made aware of the fact that when working from home, some employees work longer hours with shorter breaks. Organisations should encourage employees to take regular breaks, including taking their lunch breaks away from their desks. Managers should also refrain from allocating new tasks to employees towards the end of the day, as certain employees might feel pressured to start working on it and work longer hours during the evening to finish it. Team meetings must not be held to discuss individuals daily work plans, consuming more of employees' times that will require them to work longer hours in the evening to make up for the lost time. Meetings must be planned and intentional with specific agenda points to facilitate the flow of information between the organisation and employees and ensure that employees are abreast of all organisational developments, avoiding corridor talks and rumours that increases distrust.

Hybrid environment employees in return, must implement personal strategies to ensure working effectiveness and assume responsibility and accountability for their work, signalling to managers that they can be trusted. This will necessitate employees to communicate clear boundaries with family members not to be distracted during working hours, allowing them to prioritize their work and to finish with it in this time. This will also reduce employee pressure and work to life conflict.

Employers and employees must realize that a change in working condition can alter the psychological contract as both parties form new expectations from one another. In instances where the newly formed expectations are not met, it can result in in a breach in the psychological contract. It will therefore be in the best interest of both parties to renegotiate their psychological contracts where the inputs from one party will meet the requirements of the second party, and for them to provide inputs to successfully sustain the mutually beneficial reciprocal exchange. Employers must be cognisant that all aspects of performance requirements, specifically in hybrid working

environments, are not covered by legally binding contracts and organisations must therefore make their expectations from employees clear, whilst also actively soliciting the employees' views on their expectations.

7.5 Limitations and suggestion for future research

The main limitation with the study is that a single organisation within the public sector was surveyed. The results for a private company may have different results since employees in a private company can have different pressures resulting from market driven competition, impacting on employee / employer expectations. The public sector also tends to have more levels of authority than the private sector which can impact on employee / employer expectations as authority is diffused over more levels with some responsibility even restricted due to legislation and policies.

The study only focussed on the expectations of employees in a hybrid working environment. It must be noted that employers also have certain expectations from their employees in terms of the psychological contract, which was not considered.

Since managers act on behalf of organisations, employees form their expectations on the behaviours and interactions from their respective managers according to Safitri (2024). Future research may be conducted on leadership and the impact that leadership styles have on creating and managing employees' expectations in a hybrid work environment.

Psychological contracts can be very complex, and there can be various factors that can mitigate the impact of psychological contract breaches according to Ngobeni et al. (2022). Future research can contribute to remote work and psychological contract theory by researching which factors can moderate the impact of psychological contract breaches in a hybrid work environment.

Lastly, Braganza et al. (2021) highlighted that transactional psychological contracts are becoming increasingly more prevalent in changing work environments. Future research can be conducted on which elements of a transactional contract will be most likely be expected from employees in a hybrid work environment.

7.6 Conclusions

During times of organisational change, employees reevaluate their expectations of the organisations, following the observation and interpreting of the ques that managers signal. In a hybrid work environment increased control measures imposed by managers can be interpreted as a sign of lack trust, negatively affecting the psychological contract. The research also indicated that a hybrid work environment increased work to life conflict because of working longer hours, home distractions and experiencing increased pressure from both the employer and family. Lastly, organisations must priorities the support that they provide to employees in terms of training and development as well as their wellbeing. Since unexpectedly investing heavily in information technology infrastructure most companies neglected training and support of employees. It is therefore critical of organisations to be aware of shifting expectations from employees that can impact on the psychological contract and result in psychological contract breach.

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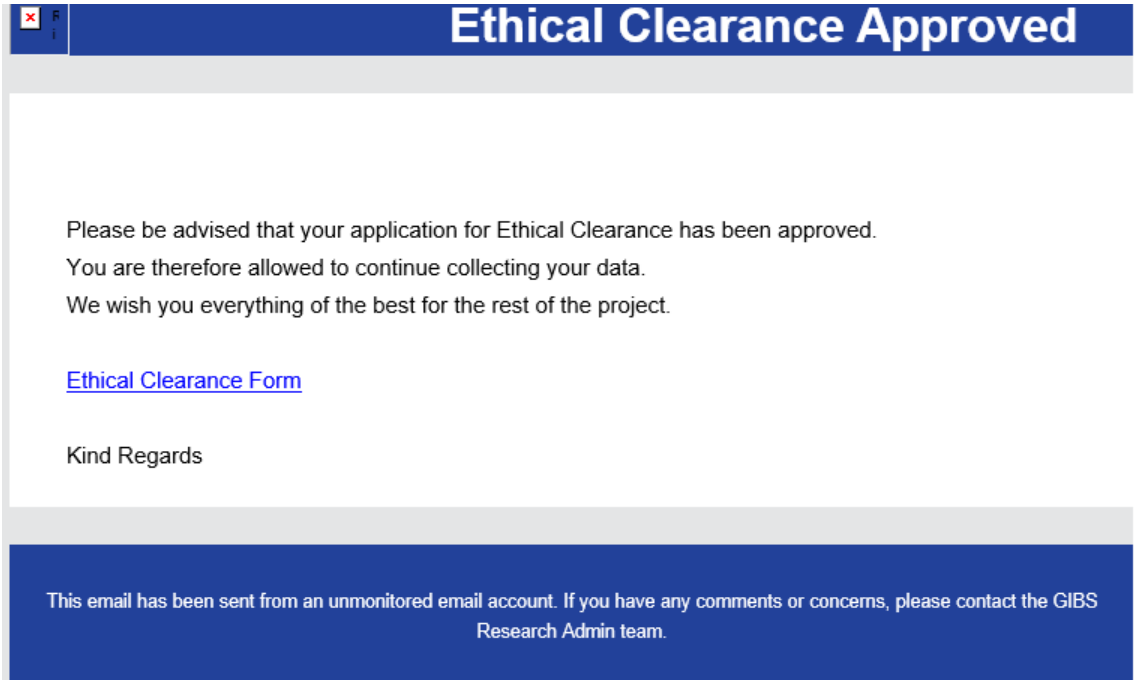
9. Appendix 1 – Ethical Clearance



Ethical Clearance Approved

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.
We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Ethical Clearance Form

Kind Regards

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

10. Appendix 2 – Informed Consent

Informed Consent:
Note: this form must be signed before the interview starts, including recording (audio, video, and transcribing)

Dear participant,

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 2023/2024

I am conducting research on the fluidity of the psychological contract, relating to the employee perception of trust, organisational support and work life balance when moving to a hybrid work environment.

Our interview is expected to be **no more than an hour**, which will help me understand, how the employee psychological contract evolves when the work arrangement and environment has changed.

Please note: **Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty**.

All data will be reported without identifiers.

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

	Supervisor	Researcher
Name:	Michele Ruiters	
Phone:	011 771 4000	
Email:	ruitersm@gibs.co.za	23100992@mygibs.co.za

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____