

**The Impact of Trust, Hybrid work, and  
Employee Engagement on South African  
Employees.**

**Mabel Boitumelo Maketa**

20793962

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## **Abstract**

The shift from traditional ways working to a hybrid work has been adopted by most organisation since the pandemic. This has an impact on how employee engage and trust each other. The presence or absence of trust can enable or hinder organisation performance and employee engagement in hybrid work as trust is the foundation of employee engagement. This study will explore how to build trust and engagement in a hybrid work environment. The literature was built on the existing literature on employee engagement and trust focusing on the relationship between hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement.

A quantitative research method was used for this study to determine the relationship between hybrid work, trust, and engagement. Data was collected using online survey from 134 South African employees who are working in a hybrid work environment. The research findings were tested using descriptive statistics, validity, reliability, correlation and regression.

Findings from the study demonstrated that the relationship between employee engagement, hybrid work, and trust. It also demonstrated that there is no relationship between trust and hybrid work. Considering this study's findings, it supports the criticality of engagement while working in a hybrid which includes honest feedback between managers and employees. It also supports the importance of trust between managers and employees, which increases collaboration and communication. The study contradicts the other studies done by the researchers that say hybrid work influences trust between employees, a quantitative study is recommended for future research to explore this contradiction.

*Keywords: Hybrid, trust, employee engagement, communication.*

## 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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Mabel Boitumelo Maketa

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Date

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility

EFA: Exploratory Factor Analysis

JD-R: Job Demands Resources

SET: Social Exchange Theory

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

# Chapter 1: Research Problem

## 1.1 Introduction

Trust has been known for a long time to be an important aspect of an employee and the success of an organisation. As the "social glue" that holds people in an organisation together, it encourages teamwork, dedication, and a common sense of purpose (Schilke et al., 2021; Weiss et al., 2021). When employees switch between working from home and the office, this kind of hybrid work setting makes trust even more important. The hybrid environment brings about new problems regarding teamwork dynamics, planning, and communication, all of which depend on trust (Dinh et al., 2021; Gratton, 2021). Therefore, companies need to put trust-building efforts at the top of their list of priorities to make sure that flexible work arrangements do not make employees less engaged.

People used to trust each other within organisations by engaging in-person with colleagues, which consistently showed they were competent and reliable (Kähkönen et al., 2021). However, the Coronavirus pandemic has caused a shift in the way people work towards remote and hybrid work, which has caused issues in building trust (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). Not being able to see each other and relying more on digital tools for conversation have made it harder for employees to trust their leaders and co-workers (Abgeller et al., 2024; Dinh, et al., 2021). Even though hybrid work is still new and complicated for many companies, it is important to know how to build trust in these kinds of settings to keep employees engaged and the company performing well.

Trust motivates employees, which in turn increases employee engagement, according to Aboramadan et al. (2020) and Mehmood et al. (2023). This improves work performance, satisfaction, and retention. Trust can determine how effectively an organisation functions and how employees perform their duties. It impacts workplace perception and response (Lee et al., 2022). Since employees have less direct authority and greater independence, trust is crucial to keeping them motivated and on track with the organisation goals.

Hybrid work, which involves work in the office and at home, presents challenges and trust-building opportunities. Hybrid work's flexibility can increase independence, job satisfaction, trust, and engagement (Parker et al., 2020). However, being physically distant from team members might make it tougher for them to communicate and collaborate, leading to

isolation and mistrust (Fayard et al., 2021). Because of this, firms must be careful when creating hybrid rules, and processes to develop trust and address the issues associated with this work style.

Building trust in a hybrid workplace is difficult since individuals do not communicate as much as in a normal office environment (Gratton, 2021). Coffee breaks and hallway chats help employees bond and establish trust (Dinh et al., 2021). Building trust with co-workers without these conversations may make employees less willing to work together. Abgeller et al. (2024) suggested the use of technology to facilitate virtual meetings and allow remote employees to interact.

Building trust in a hybrid workplace also requires good leadership. Leadership shapes an organisation's culture and fosters trust (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). In a hybrid workplace, especially when employees work from home, leaders must work hard to create and maintain trust. Being honest with employees, offering them regular feedback, and demonstrating that you understand and care about their issues helps achieve this (Dinh et al., 2021; Wang, 2021). Leaders in hybrid work environments must also be mindful of the danger of trust loss and be prepared to manage issues.

Traditional ways of managing performance need to be reconsidered when dealing with a hybrid working arrangement. When employees work remotely with little to no direct control, it is important to believe that they can manage their time and get things done. According to Abgeller et al. (2024), companies should stop micromanaging and instead focus on outcomes-based performance measures that stress trusting employees' skills and judgement. This change not only helps build trust but also makes employees more engaged by making them feel like they own it and are responsible for their work.

Additionally, the hybrid work setting means that justice and inclusion need to be looked at again. Employees who work from home may not feel linked to their co-workers who work in the office or may think that chances and resources are not being shared fairly (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). To build and keep trust in a hybrid work environment, companies must make sure that all employees, no matter where they work, have the same chances to learn, grow, and be recognised (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021). To do this, management needs to work hard to make sure that everyone who works there feels appreciated and supported.

Getting people to trust each other in a hybrid environment is challenging in many ways and needs a broad approach. Organisations need to think about how to navigate hybrid work and produce ways to build trust at both the individual and organisational levels. To do this, leadership needs to be reconsidered in things such as the use of technology to make links easier, and all parts of the work experience need to be fair and open to everyone. Putting building trust first in hybrid work enhances employee engagement, performance, and a strong, adaptable workforce (Schilke et al., 2021; Mehmood et al., 2023).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

A hybrid working style has challenged the aspect of trust within organisations more especially on the employee level, creating a new set of opportunities and challenges. Despite the benefits of flexibility and autonomy, many organisations are failing to build and maintain trust in this new workplace (Gratton, 2021). Traditional trust-building tactics that rely on face-to-face encounters and visible leadership fail in hybrid work (Dinh et al., 2021). Therefore, it becomes crucial for companies to find innovative ways to develop trust between hybrid employees.

The lack of spontaneous, informal relationships in ordinary offices is worrying (Gratton, 2021). Casual breakroom talks and unexpected meetings help employees create trust and camaraderie (Dinh et al., 2021). In a hybrid environment, when these chances are restricted, individuals may struggle to trust their co-workers, resulting in alienation and disengagement (Fayard et al., 2021; Kaur & Mandal, 2024).

Hybrid work might also worsen communication and cooperation issues. Disagreements, miscommunications, and a lack of openness may weaken confidence when team members are physically apart (De Souza Santos and Ralph, 2022). Since virtual interactions sometimes lose non-verbal signals and subtleties, digital communication technologies might hinder successful communication (Wang et al., 2021). This makes it hard for employees to trust their manager and colleagues, causing disengagement.

Hybrid work environments can magnify leadership difficulties. Experienced leaders may struggle with hybrid office management (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). Team members may feel distant and unsupported without physical presence, making it hard for leaders to build trust (Dinh et al., 2021). Ultimately, when there is distrust, it can negatively affect employee

engagement and performance. The hybrid work paradigm may create feelings of inequality and favoritism if remote employees feel excluded (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

Resentment and mistrust may also reduce employee collaboration (De Souza Santos & Ralph, 2022). To make all employees feel valued and involved, companies must address these issues collectively.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the body of knowledge on building and maintaining trust and engagement in a hybrid workplace. According to the study, how remote employees trust their employers' influences employee engagement and the performance of both the organisation and employees (Mortensen & Haas, 2021; Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2023). The paper covers this topic to help businesses navigate hybrid work more efficiently.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research is to explore the role of trust in enhancing employee engagement within a hybrid work environment. The study seeks to identify the key factors that impact building trust in hybrid work and to examine how trust impacts employee engagement. The findings of this study will contribute to the strategies of how organisations can foster trust and enhance engagement in a hybrid work environment.

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

- To determine the relationship between hybrid work and trust.
- To determine the relationship between employee engagement and trust.
- To determine the relationship between hybrid work and employee engagement.

### **1.5 Rationale of the Study**

The rationale for this study is that the future of work is constantly changing, and a hybrid work environment is becoming the norm in the world after the COVID-19 pandemic. Companies have moved to hybrid work setups; therefore, it is important to know what makes employees engaged and productive in these situations. Additionally, as an important part of organisational culture, trust has a big influence on how employees think and act, especially in places where employees have less direct control and more freedom (Abgeller et al., 2024; Ahmad et al., 2021).

Although it has become common for employees to work hybrid post COVID-19 pandemic, not much study has been done on how to build and keep trust in these settings. Most research on trust and employee involvement has been done in traditional workplaces, where people usually talk to each other face-to-face and are physically near each other (Kwon & Kim, 2020; Schilke et al., 2021). But trust works differently in a hybrid work environment because employees need to rely more on digital tools for contact and may not have as many chances to talk to each other informally and without planning to (Dinh et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021).

This study fills that gap by looking at the hybrid work environment and how trust is formed and maintained in those kinds of situations. Companies that want to set up or improve their hybrid work policies and procedures will benefit greatly from the study's results. Businesses can create a culture of trust by learning about the dynamics that make a hybrid work environment trustworthy, which will boost employee motivation and overall business success (Mehmood et al., 2023).

The study's focus on the hybrid work setting is also current and important, as the global work scene is always changing. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more people are using virtual and hybrid work. Hybrid work is expected to remain important in the workplace in the future of work (Gratton, 2021). Because of this, there has never been a bigger need for a study that investigates the unique problems and chances of hybrid work. The findings of this study will contribute to what is already known about hybrid work and provide organisations with the opportunity to succeed in this new way of working.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study could change how research and management are done in hybrid work environments. Firstly, the study will add to the body of academic writing on trust, employee engagement, and hybrid work by looking at how a hybrid work environment builds and keeps trust. Many people around the world are using hybrid work, but there are not many studies on its complexity (Gratton, 2021; Kähkönen et al., 2021; Naqshbandi et al., 2023); therefore, this is very important to this research.

This study will help managers and organisations to get their employees more involved and improve their work in hybrid work. Finding things that build trust and evaluating leadership and communication styles will help hybrid companies build trust (Parker et al., 2020). This

is especially important for businesses that have trouble keeping the trust and cooperation of their remote and hybrid employees. The study's focus on hybrid work setting also addresses a major issue that many businesses have on how to manage and motivate employees in a hybrid work environment (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). As more companies use flexible work arrangements, it becomes important for businesses to build and keep employee trust. The results of this study will help businesses understand hybrid work and find ways to connect and keep employees in this new setting.

Additionally, the study will also help people learn how to build trust and participation in a workplace that is agile. Hybrid work needs to be fair and open to everyone, giving all employees the help and chances they need to do well (Gratton, 2021; Mehmood et al., 2023). This study will show how trust can be used to make the workplace more welcoming and helpful for everyone, including businesses. This study could boost trust in hybrid work environments and help businesses get their employees more involved and improve their work. The study fills in a crucial gap in the literature and offers useful insights that will help companies thrive in a fast-changing work environment. It will also add to the future of work conversations.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

This chapter introduced the study of employee trust and engagement by presenting the introduction, problem statement, purpose, and objectives. The chapter also discussed the study's significance and rationale for building trust and engagement in the hybrid work environment. The next chapter will be the literature review of the constructs of the study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents different pieces of research related to building trust and employee engagement in the hybrid work environment. The literature will be reviewed according to subthemes, which include a hybrid work environment, employee engagement and building trust. The literature will review the relationship between trust and employee engagement in a hybrid work context. The other section explains the theoretical framework on which the study is conducted.

### **2.2 Hybrid Work Environment**

#### **2.2.1 Background and Definition of Hybrid Work**

Hybrid work refers to an environment that allows people to work flexibly from home or in an office (Fayard et al., 2021; Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2019; Luring and Jonasson, 2024). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, companies used offices as a place to work using flexible or fixed time, and employees had opportunities to collaborate, innovate, learn, and have face-to-face conversations (Fayard et al., 2021; Wang, et al., 2021). After the COVID-19 pandemic, the way people work has changed and a hybrid working arrangement has become normal, allowing people to do a mix of in-office and online work. (Fayard et al., 2021; Kaur & Mandal, 2024). The traditional office job shifted from fixed work to tasks that can be done from a variety of locations and times.

Hybrid work has changed over time because of progress in technology. Digital tools for contact, like email, videoconferencing, and teamwork platforms, make it easier to work in a different location. Organisations began providing part-time or full-time telecommuting in the early 2000s (Fayard et al., 2021). Despite these advances, most organisations still preferred in-office work and saw remote work as an exception (Gratton, 2021).

Companies worldwide enacted lockdowns and social distancing to stop the widespread infection of COVID-19, and organisations had to quickly switch to remote work. This quick transition revealed the worldwide possibilities and constraints of remote work (Fayard et al., 2021). Companies that were wary of remote labor found it viable and helpful in sustaining production and operations throughout the epidemic (Wang et al., 2021). As the

pandemic continued to spread and people were forced to stay at home, it became evident that work would not return to the way it was pre-pandemic. Instead, several organisations chose a hybrid strategy. The hybrid workplace balanced remote work's flexibility with in-person collaboration (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). Hybrid work also addressed remote work's drawbacks. Remote work has advantages, but it also causes isolation, communication, and teamwork issues (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

Hybrid work adoption is complex, organisations need to carefully create hybrid work policies to address fairness, performance assessment, and trust. Employees working remotely may feel isolated from their coworkers or disregarded for possibilities (Fayard et al., 2021). Managers may struggle to objectively assess performance when employees are not always in the workplace (Parker et al., 2020). Hybrid work has also prompted concerns about the physical office. Office design and functions are changing as more employees work remotely. The conventional workplace is now seen as a venue for collaboration, invention, and social contact rather than a place where employees spend all their time (Fayard et al., 2021). This transition has led to new workplace designs that emphasise cooperation and innovation.

Technological advances and evolving social expectations have led to decades of work practice change, culminating in the hybrid workplace. While the COVID-19 pandemic enhanced hybrid work acceptance, it is likely to remain a contemporary workplace staple. Therefore, it becomes crucial to address potential challenges that come with hybrid work, as they evolve to ensure employee well-being and organisational success (Gratton, 2021).

## **2.2.2 Characteristics of Hybrid Work**

According to Xie et al. (2019), hybrid work has four main categories which are “the demand for constant learning, multitasking, lack of boundaries, and non-work-related interruption”. “Demand for constant learning refers to the level at which an employee's job requires him or her to participate in continuous learning of new technologies, knowledge, processes, and applications to remain up to date”. “Multitasking involves balancing competing work demands in a given timeframe”. “Non-work-related interruptions are incidents that disrupt or delay an employee's progress on their work duties”. Lack of boundaries refers to the “breakdown of distinct boundaries between work and non-work items” (Xie. et al, 2019; Paruzel et al, 2022).

### **2.2.3. Benefits of Hybrid Work**

A hybrid work environment has several advantages for companies and employees. Flexibility is one of hybrid work's biggest benefits. Employees may pick where and when to work, improving personal and professional management. Flexibility improves work-life balance, which is linked to employee happiness and well-being (Gratton, 2021). Nowadays, employees seek flexibility to work around their demands and lifestyles. The hybrid approach allows employees to work from home, where they can also take care of a family, as well as be in the workplace, where they can continue to collaborate with coworkers (Fayard et al., 2021).

Besides freedom of time, hybrid work may boost productivity. While the influence of remote work on productivity has been debated, research suggests that many employees are more productive when they work remotely due to autonomy (Qu & Yan, 2023). Autonomy improves work happiness, stress, engagement, and productivity (Naqshbandi et al., 2023). A remote work environment may boost productivity due to fewer interruptions, no daily travel, and the freedom to customise the workplace (Gratton, 2021). A more balanced workday in hybrid work boosts employee well-being. While exclusive remote work may lead to isolation and fatigue owing to the absence of social connection and the blurring of work-life boundaries (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). The hybrid approach reduces these concerns by enabling employees to work remotely yet still collaborate and socialize in person. Balance improves mental health and reduces burnout (Naqshbandi et al., 2023).

A hybrid work arrangement may also save money, and fewer employees at the workplace every day reduces real estate and operating expenses (Teng-Calleja et al., 2024). Some firms use hot-desks or shared office spaces to reduce the need for huge, permanent offices. These cost savings may be spent on employee development or technological infrastructure to boost corporate performance (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

Hybrid work improves employee satisfaction and productivity, which allows companies access to more talent. Companies may recruit globally to acquire a diverse and talented workforce (Gratton, 2021). In sectors with strong demand for specialized talents but limited local supply, this is crucial. Offering hybrid work arrangements helps companies recruit and retain top personnel, providing them with a competitive edge (Wang et al., 2021).

Hybrid work boosts organisational agility. Today's fast-paced corporate environment requires swift adaptation to market demand changes and external disturbances (Naqshbandi et al., 2023).

The hybrid work environment allows companies to increase their personnel without office space, supporting agility. This flexibility improves efficiency and response to new possibilities and problems (Fayard et al., 2021). Hybrid work may boost employee engagement. Research shows that employees who have control of where they work are more engaged, which boosts performance (Aboramadan et al., 2020). The hybrid approach allows employees to work as they choose, which boosts motivation and commitment. This has a positive impact on the organisation and may improve innovation, quality, and customer satisfaction (Mehmood et al., 2023).

Finally, hybrid employment minimizes workplace and transportation emissions, improving environmental sustainability. Reduced office travel can significantly reduce an organisation's carbon footprint (Fayard et al., 2021). Companies must commit to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability as they become increasingly essential. Hybrid workplaces may reduce environmental impact, save money, and improve employee's overall well-being (Teng-Calleja et al., 2024).

In conclusion, companies and employees appreciate hybrid employment because of its benefits. Post-pandemic hybrid work is popular for its flexibility, work-life balance, and productivity. As hybrid work techniques improve, businesses must leverage these benefits to create a workplace that fosters employee well-being and performance (Naqshbandi et al., 2023).

#### **2.2.4 Challenges of Hybrid Work**

Hybrid work offers numerous benefits, but firms must address its drawbacks to make it work. Communication issues may be a major issue. Hybrid work environments can lead to miscommunication since employees operate from different locations and utilise different communication platforms (Wang et al., 2021). Employees who seldom encounter one another may not be able to understand body language and tone of voice, which are crucial to successful communication (Dinh et al., 2021).

Multiple technologies like email, video-conferencing, and instant messaging make communication harder. These technologies are essential for working from home, but improper use might divide teams (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). Office employees may have informal conversations that remote employees may not necessarily have, and this can damage trust and transparency. Leaders need to establish clear communication guidelines and ensure that all employees have access to the same information to address these issues (De Souza Santos & Ralph, 2022; Dinh et al., 2021).

Remote employees seldom encounter their co-workers and managers, making it challenging to get to know them (Dinh et al., 2021). This might result in employees feeling isolated and unmotivated to carry out their duties.

When employees suffer from isolation, managers may struggle to keep their teams working together in a diverse workplace. If managers fail to interact with their teams frequently and consistently, they may struggle to track employees' progress, ensuring that everyone is on the same page with the company's goals (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). This might hinder teamwork and communication, ultimately hurting the team's performance. To deal with this problem, managers need to make sure they are in regular contact with their team and make sure that all employees, no matter where they work, feel like they belong (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

Another issue is keeping trust in a hybrid work environment. Building and keeping trust is hard when employees work from home (Mehmood et al., 2023) but it is important for employee participation and the success of the business. When employees do not talk to their manager and co-workers face-to-face, they may not trust them as much because they may feel like they are not being fully seen or heard (Parker et al., 2020, Gillet et al., 2024). Inequality can also happen when team members are physically separated; online employees may think they are being handled differently or poorly than their co-workers who work in the office (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

There is a chance of having micromanagement issues in a hybrid work setting, which makes it even harder to keep trust. When managers feel like they need to keep a close eye on what their remote employees are doing to make sure they are working, it can make employees feel like they do not have any freedom or trust (Dinh et al., 2021). Micromanagement can make employees feel like their manager do not trust them to do a

good job of managing their work, which can make them lose interest in their jobs (Mehmood et al., 2021)

To get around this problem, managers need to focus on results instead of methods and trust their employees to get things done without constant control (Parker et al., 2020). Another problem with hybrid work is that it can be hard to keep the culture of the company constant. Shared experiences, routines, and casual discussions build organisational culture in typical offices (Gratton, 2021). In a hybrid workplace, people work at different times and places, making it difficult to maintain culture (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

Organisations must work hard to maintain and improve their culture in hybrid work environments. Sharing the company's values, hosting virtual team-building activities, and allowing employees to interact from wherever helps achieve this (Fayard et al., 2021). Leadership has the responsibility to create a strong, inviting environment to make sure all employees feel like they belong and are working towards the same goals (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). Working in a hybrid setting can make it tougher to control success and advance in one's career prospects. In this work environment where people work from anywhere and at different hours, managers may struggle to accurately evaluate performance and provide everyone with equal career advancement opportunities (Wang et al., 2021). Some remote employees may feel like they are not as good as their co-workers who work in the office, especially when it comes to being seen and having access to opportunities (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

In conclusion, the only way for companies to get around this problem is to create fair and clear performance management systems that work everywhere (Parker et al., 2020). This could mean giving regular comments, setting clear, measurable goals, and making sure that all employees have the same opportunities to advance their careers (Gratton, 2021). Companies can make sure that all their employees do well in a hybrid work environment by levelling the playing field (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

### **2.3. Trust-building in Hybrid Work Environments**

#### **2.3.1 Definition and Evolution of Trust**

Rotter (1967) initially identified trust as interpersonal, which is the expectation that the trustor can rely on what the trustee says. Moreover, Schilke et al. (2021); Weiss et al.

(2021); and Mehmood et al. (2023) define trust as the ability to take risks to expose oneself to the vulnerability of another person. Yuan et al. (2022) identify trust as the belief that other people will contribute to their well-being without any harm, and Abgeller et al. (2024) identify trust as sensations and ideas mediated. Ding et al. (2021) and Lee et al. (2022) characterized trust as affective and cognitive. Affective trust is based on the emotional connections between employees and management, while cognitive trust is based on the skills and reliability of coworkers and managers (Ding et al., 2021).

Trust is important for building relationships, moral support, and performance. Trust is essential to the operation of social connections, from tight bonds to contacts with distant strangers. It can help reduce the complexity of social interaction (Schilke et al., 2021; Dinh et al., 2021; Weiss et al., 2021) and can be influenced by the behavior of individuals (Yuan et al., 2022).

### **2.3.2 The Impact of physical separation on trust**

Hybrid work settings change team trust-building due to physical isolation. When employees are not co-located, it is harder to build and sustain trust (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021; Teng-Calleja et al, 2024). The absence of spontaneous contact and casual meetings in a conventional office environment might hamper interpersonal trust, which is essential for efficient cooperation and teamwork (Dinh et al., 2021). Regular, informal encounters enable co-workers to see each other's work practices, dependability, and honesty, thus building trust (Schilke et al., 2021). These conversations help employees bond and appreciate one another. These prospects are greatly diminished in a hybrid work environment, where people may work remotely for long periods. Employees may struggle to interact with co-workers due to distance (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

Not seeing each other in person can also lead to virtual distance, which is when team members lose their mental and emotional link (Siegrist, 2021). Virtual distance can make employees feel more alone and separate, impacting team trust. Some remote employees may feel excluded from critical communication, which could make them trust their co-employees and manager less (Wang et al., 2021). If people who work from home do not have the same relaxed, unplanned ties as people who work in an office, they may feel left out.

Additionally, not being there in person can also make it hard to read non-verbal cues like body language and facial expressions, which are important for trust and connection (Fayard et al., 2021). In-person talks and non-verbal cues like understanding, truthfulness, and attention help build trust. When people work together and talk to each other digitally, these non-verbal cues could be missed or read wrong, which could lead to misunderstandings and trust problems (Dinh et al., 2021).

Another thing that might make it hard for managers and employees to trust each other is that hybrid work environments can make people feel alone. Managers may be able to see how employees work and give them comments in real-time, which builds trust and responsibility (Parker et al., 2020). In a hybrid workplace where people work between the office and home, it might be harder for managers to keep an eye on performance and give comments on time. Mehmood et al. (2023) say that employees may feel like they are not valued, which can hurt trust and openness.

To keep team members from losing trust when they are physically apart, companies need to make sure they have regular, important interactions with each other, no matter where they are located. Virtual talks, check-ins, and team-building events can help connect employees who are in and out of the office (Gratton, 2021). Organisations should also encourage employees to talk to management and co-workers about problems and give feedback openly and honestly (Fayard et al., 2021). By encouraging openness and inclusion, companies can help people who work with others get along and stop feeling physically alone (Dinh et al., 2021).

Companies must understand the need for fairness and justice in hybrid work settings. Mortensen and Haas (2021) reported that employees working remotely should have the same opportunities for professional growth, respect, and job advancement as people who work in an office. Companies can build and keep employee trust by treating all employees the same, no matter where they work. Isolation at work makes it harder to build trust, but regular contact, fairness, and inclusion may help. Technology and an attitude of openness and honesty may help hybrid teams work together even though they are in different places and build trust (Wang et al., 2021).

### **2.3.3 The role of communication and technology in building trust**

Building trust at work depends on good communication, but being physically separated may make it hard to talk to others in hybrid work settings. Communication must be clear,

purposeful, and consistent in a hybrid work setting where people work from home or in different places to build and keep trust (Fayard et al., 2021). Digital tools such as email, video-conferencing, and instant chats are used frequently by employees in hybrid workplaces, and it can be hard for people to talk to each other as often as they would like. These tools are needed for a scattered workforce to stay in touch, but they make it harder to consistently communicate with one another. It is harder for employees to figure out tone and meaning in emails and calls because they do not have body language (Gratton, 2021; Wang et al., 2021). This could lead to misunderstandings, bad communication, and a loss of trust.

Video conferencing allows more people to stay in touch but also has some problems. A bad internet link or a software bug could stop people from communicating, which can often cause frustration (Fayard et al., 2021). Too many "Zoom fatigue" meetings can make people lose interest and trust in communication. To get around these problems, businesses need to use reliable, easy-to-use communication tools that let teams talk to each other meaningfully (Dinh et al., 2021).

Building trust in hybrid work contexts requires technical communication skills and message content and delivery. Transparent, honest, and sympathetic communication builds trust by making employees feel heard and appreciated (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). Leaders and managers set the tone for organisational communication. They must communicate openly by offering pertinent information, updating personnel, and encouraging feedback (Gratton, 2021).

Maintaining trust in hybrid workplaces requires regular communication, employees working remotely may feel isolated and disconnected from their co-workers and the company (Parker et al., 2020). To keep employees informed and motivated, organisations should schedule frequent check-ins, team meetings, and one-on-one sessions. Socialisation and team building are essential for creating trust and camaraderie among team members (Dinh et al., 2021).

In hybrid work situations, communication must be clear and consistent. Employees may become confused, frustrated, and distrustful of unclear communication (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). Organisations must explicitly identify and use communication rules and procedures throughout the organisation. Set expectations for response times,

communication channels, and update frequency (Fayard et al., 2021). With clear instructions, companies may eliminate ambiguity and enhance employee trust.

Hybrid work situations need empathy for successful communication. Employees working remotely may often experience loneliness, difficulty managing work and life, or job insecurity (Dinh et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Empathetic leaders and managers must acknowledge these obstacles, give assistance, and offer adaptable solutions where available (Dinh et al., 2021). Empathetic communication shows employees that the company cares about them, thus building trust.

Organisations should also promote feedback and communication improvement. Employees should feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, issues, and ideas for better company communication (Gratton, 2021). Organisations may show they value trust in hybrid workplaces by aggressively seeking and reacting to feedback (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). Building and sustaining trust in hybrid workplaces requires good communication. Due to physical isolation and digital communication methods, organisations must prioritise clear, consistent, and empathic communication. Regular encounters, clear communication norms, and empathy may establish trust and encourage employee engagement and organisational performance in a hybrid work environment (Fayard et al., 2021).

#### **2.3.4 Leadership and trust in hybrid work**

Building and sustaining trust in hybrid workplaces requires leadership. The shift from in-office to hybrid work demands leaders adjust their management style to handle a distributed workforce. Hybrid situations, where physical separation might impair trust-building, need even stronger leadership to generate trust, transparency, and involvement (Dinh et al., 2021).

Transparency in leadership affects hybrid work environment trust. Leaders must communicate openly to develop confidence in hybrid workplaces because employees may not see daily activities (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). Leaders must be transparent about the company's objectives, issues, and choices and frequently update employees. Transparency makes employees feel informed and confident since their leaders are honest (Gratton, 2021). Another key leadership trait that builds trust in hybrid workplaces is empathy. Empathetic leaders care about their employees' well-being and are aware of their needs,

which builds trust and solid connections (Dinh et al., 2021). Active listening, assistance, and flexibility in fulfilling employees' needs show empathy (Parker et al., 2020).

Another key leadership attribute that affects hybrid workplace trust is consistency. Fair leaders treat people equally and follow through on pledges to create a predictable and stable working environment, which builds trust (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). Consistent leadership helps soothe employees who feel detached from the company in a hybrid context, building trust (Gratton, 2021). Trust in hybrid workplaces is also built via leadership feedback and appreciation. Regular feedback and appreciation are crucial for trust and engagement in hybrid workplaces when leaders may not see employees (Parker et al., 2020). Leaders should provide constructive comments to help employees to develop and celebrate their successes. This creates confidence by demonstrating that a leader honors and acknowledges employees' efforts and promotes continual progress and excellence (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

Hybrid workforce managers must be flexible. Managing a distributed workforce, coordinating work across locations, and balancing remote and in-office demands are distinct problems of the hybrid work paradigm (Naqshbandi et al., 2023). Leaders who can adapt to these issues and create new solutions enhance employee trust by showing they can handle the intricacies of the hybrid work environment (Dinh et al., 2021). Leadership flexibility is being open to new ideas and methods and adapting plans and practices depending on feedback and changing circumstances (Gratton, 2021).

In conclusion, building and sustaining trust in hybrid workplaces requires efficient leadership. In a hybrid work environment, honest, compassionate, consistent, and flexible leaders build trust and engagement. Leaders who can prioritise communication, support, and cooperation may develop trustworthy connections with their people and create a work climate that fosters individual and organisational success (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

### **2.3.5 Psychological safety and trust**

Trust and psychological safety go hand in hand. Employees are more likely to believe in their co-workers if they feel free to talk about their feelings and thoughts (Mehmood et al., 2023). When employees feel mentally safe, they are more likely to try new things, take chances, and have open conversations without worrying about being judged or punished (Schilke et al., 2021). Being open and ready to share are important parts of building trust

because they encourage team members to be honest, work together, and respect each other.

The fact that team members are physically separated makes it harder to create a safe environment for them to work in a hybrid setting. Employees who work from home may feel cut off or separated from their co-workers who work in the office, which can make them feel left out or ignored (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). This can make people feel less safe, so they may be less likely to speak up or share their ideas when they are not in the office. Organisations must work hard to include all employees, no matter where they work, to deal with such challenges (Gratton, 2021).

In hybrid work situations, leaders are very important for making sure that everyone feels psychologically safe. They need to demonstrate to their employees how to feel safe by ensuring they listen to their concerns, recognise their work, and encourage open communication (Parker et al., 2020). Leaders can build trust and encourage a culture of innovation and ongoing growth by making sure employees feel free to say what they want (Dinh et al., 2021).

Another important thing that helps build psychological safety and trust in hybrid work settings is effective communication. Since employees do not get to talk to each other every day, conversation must be planned and open to everyone, giving everyone a chance to share their opinion and join conversations (Fayard et al., 2021). Clear communication routes and rules should be set up by organisations to encourage open conversation and feedback. To make sure their team members feel noticed and supported, leaders should also check in with them often (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). By putting communication first, businesses can create a safe space for employees at work, which boosts trust and gets employees involved.

Another important part of psychological safety is being able to disagree with someone in a healthy way. At times and places, people who work in a hybrid setting may not understand each other, have different work styles, or have different goals, which can cause arguments (Dinh et al., 2021). Leaders and managers need to give their employees the tools and training they need to manage conflicts well so that they can keep trust and feel safe. This could mean giving people training on how to settle disagreements, offering mediation services, or making it clear how to handle arguments (Gratton, 2021). Employees can keep differences from getting worse and hurting trust by making it easy for people to talk about them constructively.

A shared workplace's psychological safety also depends on how fair and equal the work is. No matter where they work or how they are scheduled, employees must feel like they are being treated fairly and that their efforts are respected (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). Gratton (2021) says that companies should make sure that all employees have the same access to resources, chances, and praise. Companies can build trust and psychological safety among their employees by promoting a culture of fairness and equality (Dinh et al., 2021). This will lead to higher levels of engagement and performance.

## **2.4 Employee engagement in hybrid work environments**

### **2.4.1 Definitions and theories of employee engagement**

Organisational study has focused on employee engagement since it is linked to productivity, satisfaction, and turnover. In his 1990 landmark work on employee engagement, Kahn (1990) described it as the "harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles," when people express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally while performing their roles. This approach emphasises the comprehensive character of engagement, including employees' emotional and cognitive interest in their jobs.

"Meaningfulness, safety, and availability" are Kahn's (1990) three psychological criteria for involvement. Safety is the ability to express oneself without fear of negative consequences. Meaningfulness is the value employees place on their work. Availability is their belief that they have the physical, emotional, and psychological resources to fully engage at work. According to this paradigm, these environments encourage employee engagement, which improves performance and well-being (Kahn, 1990).

Beyond Kahn's paradigm, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is another popular employee engagement concept. The JD-R model says that job resources (like autonomy and group support) and job demand, such as workload and mental demands, affect how engaged employees are with their jobs (Kwon & Kim, 2020). This model says that people are more focused at work when the tools are better than expected. When there are not enough resources and high standards at work, burnout and disengagement rise (Kwon & Kim, 2020).

The JD-R model works well in hybrid work situations, where it can be hard to balance job needs and resources. In hybrid work, it can be hard to find a good work-life balance and get

used to working in different types of settings. Hybrid work offers freedom and flexibility, which can make people more engaged if they are managed well (Fayard et al., 2021). This way of working emphasises the need to provide sufficient resources to assist hybrid employees to avoid the drawbacks of this work paradigm.

Additionally, Soares and Mosquera (2019) define employee engagement as involving people expressing themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally while performing their roles. Moreover, employee involvement now includes emotional and social components. The organisational environment, leadership, and team dynamics increasingly affect engagement as well as individual motivation (Gratton, 2021). This comprehensive approach to engagement matches hybrid work contexts, where individuals must traverse complicated social and organisational factors to stay engaged.

#### **2.4.2 The role of trust in employee engagement**

Trust is a key factor in getting employees to collaborate and engage, especially in hybrid workplaces where people are physically separated, which makes it harder to build and keep trust in the usual ways. Trust means that employees are ready to be open to what other people do because they believe that what other people do will either help them or not hurt them (Lee et al., 2022). When people do hybrid work, trust is very important to make sure they feel safe, appreciated, and linked to their company even when they are not there in person. Trust is critical for improving employee engagement, as employees feel more secure and appreciated in their roles (Soares & Mosquera, 2019).

According to Mehmood et al. (2023), trust mediates organisational practices and employee's performance. It affects how employees see and react to their workplace. For example, employees who trust their manager and co-workers are more likely to feel free to take chances, share their ideas, and do their best work. Psychological safety creates a positive work environment, which increases engagement (Dinh et al., 2021). Trust might be tougher to create and maintain in hybrid work environments due to less interaction. Lack of teamwork might make employees feel isolated and less likely to trust co-workers and managers (Parker et al., 2020). This disconnect can make employees disengaged, less productive, and more inclined to quit. To avoid this, organisations should prioritise trust-building programs that cover hybrid work's mental and physical gaps (Gratton, 2021).

Clear and consistent communication is one of the greatest methods to create trust in hybrid work environments. Leaders who openly discuss organisational goals, issues, and standards establish trust and inspire employee participation (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). To maintain this trust, regular check-ins, feedback sessions, and team meetings are required. This allows employees to voice issues, get assistance, and communicate with their colleagues (Dinh et al., 2021).

Building trust also means showing that you can be counted on and that you know what you are doing. When employees believe their manager and co-workers are trustworthy and skilled, they are more likely to be interested in their work (Kwon & Kim, 2020). In hybrid settings, this can be done by making sure that everyone on the team has the resources, tools, and help they need to do their jobs well, no matter where they are located (Grzegorzczak et al., 2021; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024). Leaders can build trust and get people more engaged by showing that the company cares about its employees.

Finally, an attitude of fairness and inclusion in hybrid workplaces builds trust. According to Mehmood et al. (2023) employees are more likely to be engaged with their work and feel loyal to the company if they think they are being treated fairly and that their contributions are valued. This is especially important in hybrid settings, where employees may not trust each other because they think there are differences between online and in-office employees. Businesses need to make sure that all their employees, no matter how they work, have the same chances, resources, and praise (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

### **2.4.3 Challenges to employee engagement in hybrid work**

Hybrid workplaces provide distinct obstacles to employee engagement. Remote employees' diminished visibility is a major issue. Traditional offices allow employees to be seen by managers and co-workers, which may boost recognition and promotion. Remote employees in hybrid workplaces may feel forgotten or devalued due to their less apparent contributions (Naqshbandi et al., 2023). If employees feel unappreciated, this diminished visibility might demotivate them. Organisations must take steps to make remote employees feel valued and visible. Regular performance assessments, virtual presentations, and remote employee recognition and incentives may be included (Gratton, 2021). In hybrid work situations, organisations may boost engagement by making all employees feel valued.

Burnout may also hinder hybrid workplace participation. Hybrid employment gives flexibility but may blur work-life boundaries, causing overwork and burnout (Wang et al., 2021).

Working from home may make it hard to unplug, resulting in longer hours and more stress. Physical and mental fatigue hinders effort and commitment (Wang et al., 2021; Pulido-Martos et al., 2021). To minimize burnout, companies must promote work-life balance and task management. Clear work hours, breaks, stress management, and mental health aids may help (Parker et al., 2020). Prioritizing employee well-being may prevent burnout and sustain engagement in hybrid workplaces.

Aligning remote and in-office employees is another hybrid work environment engagement issue. Hybrid work can isolate and alienate remote and in-office employees (Naqshbandi et al., 2023). Remote employees may feel disconnected from the team and culture, lowering engagement. In contrast, in-office employees may view remote employees as less engaged, increasing team friction and discontent (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). To tackle this challenge, companies must encourage unity and collaboration among employees regardless of location. Team-building activities that incorporate remote and in-office personnel, frequent virtual meetings that bring the team together, and efforts that foster a shared purpose and belonging are examples (Gratton, 2021). Companies may boost engagement and make employees feel appreciated by building a cohesive and inclusive workplace.

## **2.5 Strategies for trust-Building in hybrid work environments**

### **2.5.1 Leadership strategies for building trust**

In hybrid work settings, trust must be built and kept up by having good leadership. When using hybrid work, leaders need to change their tactics to deal with the unique problems that come up because team members can easily feel alone and distrustful when they are not physically together. To build trust in these situations, servant leadership, transformational leadership, and always being honest are the best ways to go (Dinh et al., 2021).

By giving team members more responsibility and helping them grow professionally, leaders show that they care about their employees' well-being and building trust (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). This method creates a helpful workplace where employees feel appreciated and dependable, which is very important for keeping them interested in hybrid settings. Being honest and consistent is also important for building trust in hybrid work settings. Integrity is important for gaining confidence, and leaders who constantly follow the rules, make fair choices, and keep their promises show it (Fayard et al., 2021). Leaders who make inconsistent choices or are made for no reason can quickly lose trust, especially in a hybrid

setting where employees may already feel removed from the organisation. Leaders need to make sure that all employees, no matter where they work, are treated equally (Gratton, 2021).

### **2.5.2 Enhancing collaboration and communication**

In hybrid work contexts, where physical separation might hinder communication and comprehension, trust requires good communication and teamwork. Organisations must improve hybrid team communication and cooperation to solve these issues (Fayard et al., 2021). One of the best ways to communicate is via technology. Using digital tools such as video conferencing, instant messaging, and collaboration services like Slack and Microsoft Teams allows remote and in-office employees to communicate (Gratton, 2021). These solutions enable real-time communication, which is crucial for transparency and team unity. However, organisations must educate and assist employees to ensure they can utilise these technologies to improve communication rather than complicate it (Wang et al., 2021). Another key to hybrid workplace communication is regular check-ins. Leaders should meet with their teams daily or weekly to discuss initiatives, difficulties, and feedback (Dinh et al., 2021). These check-ins keep employees motivated and informed, eliminating misunderstandings and building teamwork. They also allow employees to share problems and get help, which builds trust.

Hybrid teams need informal contacts to collaborate and develop trust. Casual talks and socializing help employees bond in conventional offices. Employees working remotely may feel isolated in a hybrid setting due to fewer opportunities (Gratton, 2021). Organisations may provide virtual coffee breaks, team-building exercises, and social gatherings to solve this. Effective cooperation requires informal encounters to foster rapport and camaraderie among team members (Fayard et al., 2021). In addition, organisations should set explicit communication guidelines for frequency, channels, and reaction times. Clear communication procedures reduce misunderstandings and align team members with organisational aims (Wang et al., 2021).

### **2.5.3 Promoting fairness and inclusivity**

Fairness and inclusion are important parts of building trust in hybrid work settings. Employees who believe they are treated fairly and respected are more likely to trust their

company and stay interested in their jobs (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). However, it can be hard to be fair and include everyone in hybrid settings because employees may feel like they are being treated unfairly or with favoritism because they are not physically together.

Making sure that all employees, no matter where they work, have equal access to resources, chances, and praise is one of the most important ways to promote fairness and inclusion (Naqshbandi et al., 2023). This could mean giving employees working remotely the same access to training and development programs as those who work in the office and making sure they are involved in meetings and processes (Gratton, 2021). By levelling the playing field, companies can keep employees from feeling left out and help them all feel like they belong.

Companies should also establish diversity and inclusion policies in hybrid workplaces. This involves giving remote employees the same opportunities to participate in diversity and inclusion initiatives as office employees (Fayard et al., 2021). Businesses should also integrate diverse perspectives and ensure that all employees, regardless of location or background, feel valued and respected (Gratton, 2021).

Recognising and satisfying employee needs is also part of promoting equality in hybrid work environments. Some employees require flexible hours to care for someone, while others choose office work for a better work-life balance (Gonsalves, 2020). All employees should be able to do their best work, regardless of their circumstances. Therefore, companies should be open with their rules and make accommodation for them. Companies can build trust among their employees and get them more involved and effectively by showing they care about fairness and inclusion (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

### **2.5.3.A Fairness and Decision-making**

Another important way to promote fairness in hybrid work settings is to be open about how decisions are made. Leaders who make decisions that affect employees, such as promotions, increases, or work rule modifications, should explain why and base them on ability rather than location (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). By being transparent about their decision-making, leaders may create trust and avoid seeming bias, which is especially problematic in hybrid settings.

Companies should also establish diversity and inclusion policies in hybrid workplaces. This involves giving employees working remotely the same opportunities to participate in diversity and inclusion initiatives as office employees (Fayard et al., 2021). Businesses should also integrate diverse perspectives in decision-making and ensure that all employees, regardless of location or background, feel valued and respected (Gratton, 2021).

#### **2.5.4 Creating a culture of psychological safety.**

Hybrid workplaces need psychological safety to generate trust and participation. Psychological safety is speaking out, expressing ideas, and taking chances without fear of shame, rejection, or punishment (Dinh et al., 2021). Psychological safety is crucial for trust and active involvement in hybrid workplaces where employees may feel alone or disengaged.

Modelling inclusive and supportive leadership is one of the best ways to create a culture of psychological safety. Leaders shape the company culture and affect employees' psychological safety (Kahn, 1990; Dinh et al., 2021). Leaders should foster open communication, solicit team feedback, and cherish and respect varied opinions (Dinh et al., 2021). Leaders may develop trust and psychological safety in the organisation by being accessible and helpful (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

Encourage risk-taking and innovation to promote psychological safety. When they experiment and take chances without fear of failure, employees are more inclined to participate and provide their finest ideas (Dinh et al., 2021). Rewarding innovation, applauding learning from failures, and encouraging people to try new things may help (Fayard et al., 2021). Organisations may foster trust and psychological safety that encourage participation by encouraging innovation and seeing failure as a learning opportunity.

Regular feedback and acknowledgement are what promote psychological safety in hybrid workplaces. Whether employees work remotely or in the office, employees need to feel appreciated and recognised (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). Leaders should recognise and celebrate employee success and provide constructive criticism (Dinh et al., 2021). These

fosters trust and psychological safety, making people confident in their talents and driven to participate.

Creating a psychologically safe work culture requires constructive conflict resolution. Team members may clash owing to misunderstandings, different work styles, or physical separation in hybrid work settings (Dinh et al., 2021). Organisations should teach employees about conflict resolution and establish dispute processes (Gratton, 2021). Through transparent and equitable dispute resolution, organisations can maintain trust and psychological safety.

Organisations should include psychological safety in their policies and procedures. This involves setting clear behavior norms, fostering diversity and inclusion, and providing all employees with the tools and assistance they need (Fayard et al., 2021). Psychological safety may create a workplace where all employees feel comfortable, appreciated, and empowered to do their best (Mortensen & Haas, 2021).

### **2.5.5 Monitoring trust and engagement in hybrid work**

Finally, technology can be used to monitor trust and engagement in hybrid work environments. For example, digital platforms and technologies may measure employee interactions, collaboration, and communication, as most allow recording. This helps businesses understand how employees engage with peers and the job (Gratton, 2021). Trust and engagement in hybrid work environments must be monitored to maintain a positive and productive culture. Polls, feedback tools, performance metrics, pulse surveys, and technology may help firms assess employee trust and engagement and take proactive efforts to promote health and solve problems (Abgeller et al., 2024).

## **2.6 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is the **Social Exchange Theory (SET)**. Sociology and psychology are at the heart of SET, which gives us an effective way to look at and understand how trust is built and how employees are engaged in hybrid work situations. This theory explains how social relationships work on both sides and helps managers and employees trust each other in tough work situations (Ahmad et al., 2023).

### **2.6.1 Origins and Principles of Social Exchange Theory**

George Homans (1958) and Peter Blau (1964) came up with the idea of Social Exchange Theory to use economic ideas to explain how people behave in groups. Homans (1958) says social relations are like transactions; people try to make the most money and spend as little as possible. Blau (1964) added that trust and exchange make social interactions easier, especially in partnerships that are difficult and last a long time. However, Emerson (1976) reported that SET says social behavior comes from a trade process in which people weigh the pros and cons of social encounters. This idea says that people connect with others to get something valuable, like money, social approval, support, or trust. Building trust over time is important for relationships to last, especially in hybrid work environments where people cannot be supervised directly or be involved often. According to Ahmad et al. (2023), employees who think their company is fair, helpful, and honest are more loyal, involved, and productive.

Social Exchange Theory applies to this study for several reasons. Firstly, SET provides a comprehensive foundation for trust-building in hybrid work environments with less monitoring and control. Digital platforms impede trust-building and maintenance in hybrid workplaces when people operate remotely for lengthy periods (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). The SET highlights how reciprocal interactions may create and retain confidence without face-to-face contact. The SET reflects this research's emphasis on employee participation. Values in the company drive employee engagement. Appreciation boosts employee engagement (Kwon & Kim, 2020). Social Exchange Theory states that appreciation, support, and fairness increase trust and employee engagement (Aboramadan et al., 2020).

Social Exchange Theory excels at balancing autonomy and control in hybrid work environments. In the hybrid work paradigm, autonomy and organisational support may impact employee trust and engagement (Abgeller et al., 2024). Trades like autonomy for responsibility may foster trust and engagement, says SET. The concept includes hybrid work leadership. Transformational or servant leadership provides help, counsel, and recognition that employees trust and follow (Dinh et al., 2021). Social Exchange Theory also reveals how framing leadership as a social transaction may increase trust and engagement in heterogeneous work situations. Finally, Social Exchange Theory addresses fairness and inclusion, which are necessary for trust-building in hybrid work environments, supporting its use in this research. SET says fairness in exchanges including work sharing, recognition, and

opportunity access builds trust (Kähkönen et al., 2021). SET may identify and address imbalances between remote and in-office employees in hybrid workplaces, making them more inclusive and trustworthy. This study utilises SET to examine how hybrid work environments might increase trust, employee engagement, and organisational effectiveness.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter investigated employee trust and employee engagement in the hybrid work environment and further continued to highlight the challenges faced by employees working hybrid and the benefits of a hybrid work style. A SET framework was introduced as the framework for the study. The next chapter will be the research question, hypothesis, and the predictive relationship between the three constructs of the study.

## Chapter 3: Research Question

### 3.1 Introduction

This study aims to analyse the impact of hybrid work on employee engagement, the relationship between employee trust and hybrid work, and the relationship between hybrid work and trust. The gap in the literature can be addressed by asking the research questions below and testing related hypotheses.

### 3.2 Research questions and hypothesis.

RQ 1: Is there a relationship between hybrid work and employee trust?

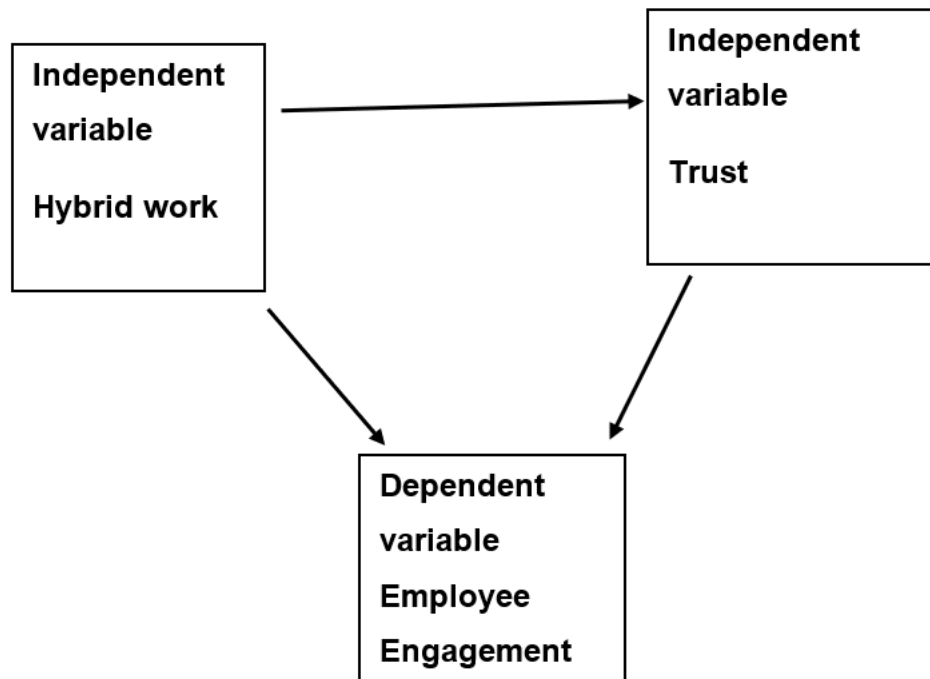
- H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between employee trust and hybrid work environments.
- H<sub>11</sub> There is a significant relationship between employee trust and the hybrid work environment.

RQ 2: Is there a relationship between employee trust and employee engagement?

- H<sub>21</sub> There is no relationship between employee trust and employee engagement.
- H<sub>22</sub> There is a relationship between employee trust and employee engagement.

RQ 3: Is there a relationship between hybrid work and employee engagement?

- H<sub>21</sub> There is no relationship between hybrid and employee engagement.
- H<sub>22</sub> There is a relationship between hybrid and employee engagement.



*Figure 1: Research Model*

### **3.3 Conclusion**

The three questions below address the main research objective of determining the relationship between trust, hybrid work, and employee engagement.

- Is there a significant relationship between hybrid work and employee trust?
- Is there a significant relationship between employee trust and employee engagement?
- Is there a significant relationship between hybrid work and employee engagement?

The independent variables for the study are trust and hybrid work, and employee engagement is the dependent variable. The next chapter will be the methodology used for the study.

## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes hybrid work, employee engagement, and trust research methods. Technology and work culture have generated hybrid workplaces in contemporary companies (Gratton, 2021). Thus, organisations are increasingly interested in how trust influences employee engagement in hybrid work (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). This research investigates the complex interaction between these traits, which is crucial for hybrid work productivity and overall job satisfaction.

The technique applied in this study supports the research aims and ensures data reliability and validity. Quantitative, positivist methods were used to objectively assess and analyse links between hybrid work, employee engagement, and trust. Descriptive analysis was performed on a cross-sectional sample of hybrid employees from various South African companies. The researcher surveyed a sample of 134 hybrid work employees to get quantitative data. For generalisability and contextual relevance, the study's design, data collection, and analysis were carefully planned. This chapter discusses the research process, from sampling and data collection, data analysis, quality control, and study restrictions.

### **4.2 Research Design**

How you gather and look at data to answer research questions depends on the study plan. The descriptive study method was suitable for this study looking at how variables combine and giving a true picture of the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study used a detailed method to investigate the connection between hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement. Yin (2018) reported that social scientists use descriptive methods to look at and describe the actions, opinions, and characteristics of a group without changing any factors.

South African hybrid work employees were being looked at in this study. The main objective determines the relationship between hybrid work, employee engagement and trust. Cross-sectional studies are useful in quantitative research if there are time constraints and data need to be gathered quickly (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Xie et al., 2019). Quantitative research provides precise numbers that can be statistically analysed to uncover correlations (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Quantitative research is ideal for large-scale research that seek

workforce-wide outcomes. A survey was the major data collection instrument used in this study since it can swiftly gather information from many individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey measured hybrid work, employee engagement, and trust using structured questions.

Using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," employees were asked about trust, employee engagement, and hybrid work (Xie et al., 2019). Likert scales are widely employed in quantitative research to assess and analyse subjective data (Mehmood, et al., 2023). Adding control variables including age, gender, education, and length of service helped account for demographic disparities that may affect employee trust or engagement in hybrid work.

A cross-sectional temporal range was used because of a lack of time and resources. Using this method, data from many people were gathered at the same time. This method makes it harder to find changes in behavior over time, but it works well for studies that aimed to look at how variables interact now instead of how they change over time (Bell et al., 2022).

### **4.3 Research Philosophy**

Philosophically, this study is positivism philosophy. Positivism emphasises objective measurement and the study of visible objects (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Positivism, which holds that we can measure and comprehend reality by watching it, works well with quantitative research. The research focused on measurable characteristics and used statistics to derive findings regarding the relationship between hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement.

Positivism requires that the researcher be independent of the subject; thus, their prejudices and views do not affect data collection or analysis (Bell et al., 2022). Quantitative research requires impartiality to provide reliable findings that can be applied to a larger population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey method utilised in this research ensured fair and consistent data collection, supporting the scientific position.

Positivism was chosen because the research tested hypotheses and found cause-and-effect linkages. The aim of this research was to determine whether there is a relationship between hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement. The results of this research improved our understanding of these notions. Bell et al. (2022) recommended positivism for

investigations that wish to generalise findings and make law-like assertions regarding variables.

Positivism emphasizes quantifiable facts, which is ideal for this study. A survey was used to collect data on hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement. This data was objectively evaluated for patterns and relationships. This allowed research to concentrate on objective facts rather than biased perspectives by assessing these components' relationships (Pallant, 2020).

This research needed objective measurement to test ideas and draw conclusions about the relationship between hybrid employment and employee engagement that could be applied elsewhere. This research also employed quantitative techniques to examine the whole population's views on trust in hybrid work contexts. However, a qualitative approach may provide more in-depth information. The positivism theory helped us quantify trust's effect on hybrid work and engagement scientifically. This research followed positivism and produced reliable findings.

#### **4.4 Research Approach**

A logical method was used in this study, which is common in quantitative studies that test ideas based on theories (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). After coming up with a theory, data is gathered and studied to see if it is true or false. When there is significant writing about a subject, a logical method allows the researcher to build on existing theories and determine if they are still valid (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Previous studies have shown that trust in companies is important for keeping employees engaged (Abgeller et al., 2024). Fewer studies have looked at trust in hybrid settings, which makes it a good place to test existing theories.

The study followed a strict step-by-step process and started with clear ideas about hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement. The ideas behind these beliefs come from studies on employee trust and engagement (Soares & Mosquera, 2019). Another study found that trust is important for the hybrid work environment (Teng-Calleja et al., 2024), but this study measured the link only in a South African context.

After making predictions, the study used a survey to get precise data from people who work in a hybrid work environment. This is based on the logical method, which checks ideas

against real proof (Bell et al., 2022). The hypotheses could be tested on solid statistical grounds by looking at uniform data from the survey. The reasoning approach is great for getting numbers. We used correlation and regression analysis to determine the relationship between trust, hybrid work, and employee engagement. This made it clearer how trust and hybrid work influenced employee engagement.

#### **4.5 Research Methodological Choice**

A quantitative approach was used to examine hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement hypotheses. Quantitative approaches are superior at counting components, discovering linkages, and making broad statistical judgments (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The research sought quantitative methods with precise results to establish how trust affected hybrid work and employee engagement.

Mono-methods employ one data-gathering method, such as a survey. Saunders and Lewis (2018) reported the mono-method improves data consistency, bias, and dependability. This technique was chosen owing to time constraints and the requirement to collect trust, employee engagement, and hybrid work data across South African firms.

Since surveys can reach many individuals quickly, it was a suitable method to collect input. Surveys provide organised, statistically easy data for quantitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey's consistent responses gave the researcher information on employee demographics, trust levels, hybrid work arrangements, and employee engagement. The survey made it easy to compare replies, which helped the research uncover patterns and test ideas (Pallant, 2020). Qualtrics platform was used to distribute the survey online. This simplified data collection and analysis. The research survey was sent via email, WhatsApp, Telegram and LinkedIn to many hybrid employees in South Africa.

Because this study was primarily quantitative, statistical tools could examine factor relationship ideas. The quantitative method provides reproducible, dependable findings for testing hypotheses and reaching broad conclusions (Pallant, 2020). Participants rated trust, hybrid work, and employee engagement on a five-point Likert scale. This facilitated systematic emotional response measurement (Xie et al., 2019).

Using a single approach shows the study's commitment to reliability and consistency. Only using one approach may make it tougher to acquire personal insights, however the study's primary purpose was to find statistically significant correlations between constructs. Thus, the quantitative approach allowed data gathering and to achieve its main objective.

#### **4.6 Research Strategy**

A survey was used for the purpose of this study. A survey is good for massive data and diverse interactions. Surveys are often used in quantitative research to get standardised data from diverse participants (Bell et al., 2022). Surveying South African employees on trust, hybrid work, and employee engagement tested the hypothesis.

The survey approach was chosen for its efficiency and scalability to quickly reach hybrid employees. According to Bell et al. (2022) surveys can quickly collect a significant amount of data, which was important for this study due to time constraints. A comprehensive questionnaire included employee demographics, trust, engagement, and hybrid work arrangements for consistency.

The survey was sent by email, WhatsApp, Telegram, and LinkedIn; this approach extends across several businesses and professions. South Africa's workplace was captured by the study's large sample of hybrid employees adopting electronic distribution. Structured, closed-ended questions simplified statistical analysis to assess research hypotheses.

The research gathered complete hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement data consistently. It included participants from different age group, employment levels, tenure, and the number of days they work onsite and offsite to ensure that the survey accurately represented South African hybrid employees.

#### **4.7 Time Horizon**

Cross-sectional time frames are used to collect data at once (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Cross-sectional plans are suitable for examining changeable relationships without long-term monitoring. The cross-sectional method proved beneficial for this study on hybrid work, trust, and employee involvement in South Africa.

Cross-sectional research allows researchers to swiftly collect data from numerous people (Pallant, 2020). The cross-sectional strategy proved optimal for quickly collecting accurate

and reliable data due to the short duration of the time. Cross-sectional studies look at the present, whereas continuous studies collect data across time. They are appropriate for studies like this that evaluate present relationships.

The survey was sent out between August and September 2024 to employees across South Africa. Therefore, the data showed recent data on how employees feel about trust, hybrid work, and employee engagement right now. The study was able to get a good picture of the hybrid work situation in South Africa at this period because it only collected data one time.

## **4.8 Research methodology**

### **4.8.1 Unit of Analysis**

Individuals working in a hybrid environment were studied. The unit of analysis determines what or who is studied (Bell et al., 2022). The research explored employee attitudes about hybrid work, trust, and engagement. The research-controlled variables were sex, age, education level, occupational position, tenure, office days, and remote days. These controlled variables determined whether demographic or professional traits influenced hybrid work environment employee engagement or trust. Controlling hybrid work and trust separated their effects on employee engagement, enabling rigorous and accurate study.

The reason this group was chosen for this study was to find out how trust, employee engagement, and working hybrid are connected in a workforce where some people are working from home and office. There was a significant number of employees with different job levels, from entry-level employees to company executives.

Participants who took part were between the ages of 20 and 60, therefore the group was a good mix of different types of employees. That age range was picked so that younger employees (who might be better at using technology and working from home) and older employees (who might be more used to working in a standard office) could both share their thoughts (Gratton, 2021).

### **4.8.2 Sampling Method and Size**

Probability sampling was used in this study to provide a target population member with an equal chance of being picked (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Probability sampling is considered the best method for quantitative research since it improves group accuracy and reduces sample bias (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A sample of 134 South African participants between

the ages of 20 and 60 participated in this study. The sample size was big enough to assure reliability and validity while still being feasible within the research's time and budget restrictions. To get statistically meaningful findings, Pallant (2020) recommends a sample size that is representative of the population. This research followed these recommendations.

#### **4.8.3 Measurement Instrument**

An online Qualtrics survey was used as a measurement instrument for the study. The self-monitored questionnaires obtained through the Qualtrics survey platform were employed in the research as a measurement tool for quantitative analysis. The survey took 7–10 minutes for the participants. The survey contained seven control variable questions and twenty-eight statements that were used to assess independent and dependent variables. The introduction of the survey, together with its aim, goal, and disclaimer, was part of the survey and captured clearly on the first page. The study survey included a disclaimer, which emphasized that participation was voluntary, and that information was kept private.

The survey covered demographics, hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement. The study used employee demographics as control variables to determine the impact of trust, hybrid work, and employee engagement. The control variables used included the employee's age, sex, education, tenure, level in an organisation, number of days onsite, and number of days offsite.

Hybrid work had one question, and thirteen statements adopted from Xie et al. (2019), with four categories: multitasking, non-work-related interruption, boundarylessness, and demand for constant learning. Interpersonal trust had one question, and seven statements adopted from Lee et al. (2019) were categorised into affective and cognitive trust. Employee engagement had one question, and eight statements adopted from Soares and Mosquera (2019), categorised into physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement. A five-point scale was used for hybrid, employee engagement, and trust. Once the participants completed all questionnaires, they were requested to click submit to send the responses.

#### **4.8.4 Data Gathering Process**

The ethical clearance board authorised data collection. This was necessary to ensure ethical research, privacy, secrecy, and informed consent (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Due to

ethical approval, the study started collecting data privately and anonymously as per the ethical research norms. Participants received the survey link via email, WhatsApp, Telegram and LinkedIn. The research recruited numerous people from different businesses and professional levels using these methods. The group was a representative of South African employees using a hybrid work. Participants were allowed to take the Qualtrics-powered online survey at their convenience. Follow-up messages were sent to improve participants' responses. These messages were delivered regularly to those who had not responded to encourage additional responses.

A pilot survey was done before the final survey using responses from seven participants online. This trial test was crucial for ensuring that questionnaire items were clear, understandable, and relevant to the research aims (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants in the test phase praised the survey's clarity, length, and ease of completion. Based on their feedback, certain questions were reworked to increase clarity and user experience.

According to ethical guidelines, the survey began with a consent form that outlined the study's aim, that participation was voluntary, and that responses would be kept confidential. Participants were informed they may exit the research at any moment without penalty, making data collection even more responsible. To ensure data accuracy and participant safety, confidentiality and privacy were carefully considered during data collection. All replies were anonymous, and Qualtrics was set up to keep and manage data properly; participation information was confidential.

#### **4.8.5 Data Analysis Approach**

Data was exported from Qualtrics to Microsoft Excel for data cleaning. Two extractions were done from the Qualtrics tool, coded and uncoded. Employees who were not working hybrid were first removed, and then missing data for the employees who worked hybrid were also deleted from the results.

The data was then put into IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a powerful quantitative research statistical analysis application, after cleaning (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). SPSS was chosen for its ability to solve research challenges with large datasets and complex statistical tests.

The statistical test started with reliability. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess survey instrument reliability for hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement. Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.7 indicate valid measurement. High Cronbach's alpha values indicated that survey questions assessed the same idea, improving data dependability. Cronbach's alpha scores for all three constructs were considered acceptable as they were above 0.7, indicating that all three constructs can be accepted as part of the model.

The next test was exploratory factor analysis using principal component analysis and varimax rotation. The study validated hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement using exploratory factor analysis. During factor analysis, one of the hybrid work variables was not loading and had a commonality of less than 0.50. The variable was then removed, and another test was done and all variables for hybrid, trust, and employee engagement loaded with a commonality that is above 0.50.

The third test was the descriptive statistical for each characteristic and variable of the three constructs (hybrid, trust, and employee engagement), where the mean, mode, Skewness Standard, and Error of Skewness were calculated. The fourth test was correlations, where the correlation was tested for the three constructs. The correlation was tested for hybrid and trust, hybrid and employee engagement, and employee engagement and trust.

Lastly, a regression test was performed for the three constructs which are hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement. The major research evaluated the relationship between trust, employee engagement and hybrid work. Regression is an important tool that can be used to determine variable correlations while controlling other factors (Pallant, 2020; Xie et al., 2019). The below assumptions were noted for regression testing.

**Assumptions:**

- Sample size: A large enough sample size (i.e., 120) was used for the test (Pallant, 2020).
- Normality Scores: "Scores on each variable should be normally distributed" (Pallant, 2020).
- Outliers. Outliers will be identified, analysed, and removed or recorded. (Pallant, 2020).
- Linearity and homoscedasticity: "The relationship between the independent and dependent variables will be linear" (Pallant, 2020).

- Multicollinearity and singularity: Independent variables will show some relationship with the dependent variable. There will be no perfect linear relationship between two independent variables (Pallant, 2020).

Regression fit was verified by checking data for normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. Evaluate data distribution and ensure linear variable correlations and uniform error variance across independent variable levels.

#### **4.8.6 Quality Controls**

At different stages of the study, quality control checks were done to make sure the data was correct and of high quality. Before the full survey began, there was a pilot where a small group of people could help the researcher make sure the form worked. The test step was very important for finding any parts of the survey that were confusing or broken. It also made sure that the survey questions were good at covering the topics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) of trust, hybrid work, and employee engagement.

Cronbach's alpha was used to see the reliability of the survey questions as a way to check ensure quality. Along with tests to ensure the validity of the data factor analysis. It was used to make sure the survey questions were loading and valid in terms of how they were put together.

There were screening questions in the survey to make sure that the study only included people who worked hybrid. This way, people who were not using hybrid work were removed, which made sure the data gathered was useful. It was very important to keep the study on track and make sure that the research was built on true and useful data through this filtering process (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

An IP address was also used to confirm where the subjects were, making sure that the study only included employees from South Africa. This measure kept out one person who was not in the target group, which might have skewed the results.

People who did not meet these criteria were taken out of the final study. For example, those who lived outside of South Africa or did not do hybrid work were not included. Part of quality control that was also very important was cleaning up the data. Before the statistics were done, the data was carefully checked to make sure that no answers were missing or did not make sense. Missing data was checked and removed.

## **4.9 Conclusion**

Research findings of this study were collected using quantitative methods. Data collection started with ethical clearance approval; once ethical clearance was received, a pilot phase was done to make sure the survey was valid and answered. The research objective of this study was to determine the relationship between hybrid work, trust and employee engagement. Data was collected using a Qualtrics survey platform, and the statistical software that was used for analysing data was Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The study used several statistical methods, such as factor analysis, Cronbach's alpha, and multiple regression analysis, to look at how trust affects the link between hybrid work and employee involvement. The next chapter provides a full overview of the analytical technique and the associated outcomes.

## Chapter 5: Data Analysis

### 5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 analyzes the study of 134 participants' data on trust-building in hybrid work settings and employee engagement. Data was collected from 264 participants, and only 134 were valid data to be analysed as some were invalid and incomplete. The analysis addresses the research objective of examining the influence of trust on employee engagement in a hybrid work environment. This chapter examines trust, hybrid work, and engagement using descriptive and inferential statistics. The data are given in tables that summarize participant demographics, descriptive, and inferential statistics.

### 5.2. Demographic Analysis

The study's sample demographics explain the results on trust and engagement in the hybrid work environment for 134 employees. Age, gender, years of service, and education are major demographic characteristics. These factors reveal hybrid employees' demographics and how they may affect trust-building and engagement.

*Figure 2: Age Distribution*

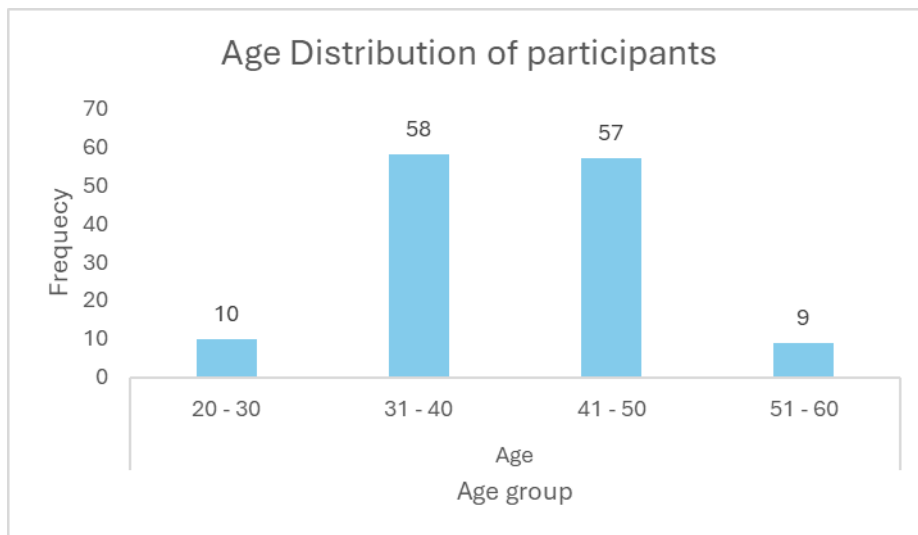


Figure 2 shows the age distribution, and most participants are between the ages of 31 and 40, with fifty-eight people in this group. The next largest age group is 41 to 50, with fifty-seven people in this group. The table above shows how the members' ages were spread out in more detail.

Figure 3: Gender Distribution

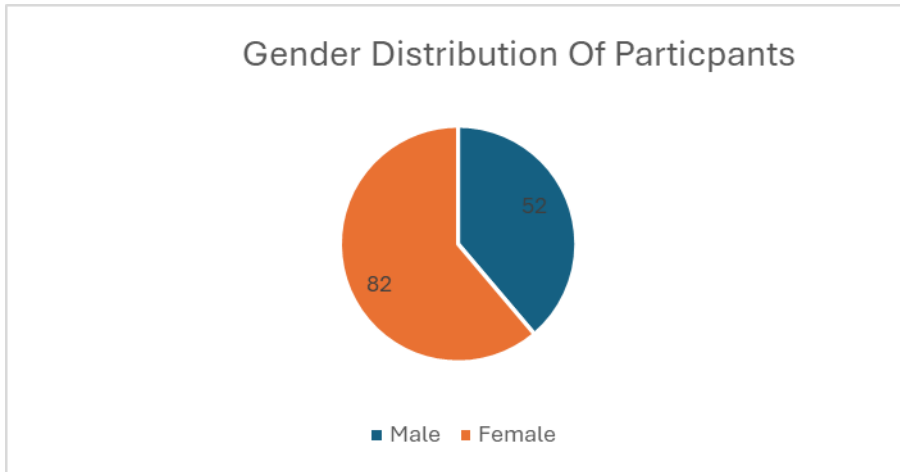


Figure 3 shows the gender distribution. The table above shows that most of the respondents were women (82) than men (52).

Figure 4: Years of Service Distribution

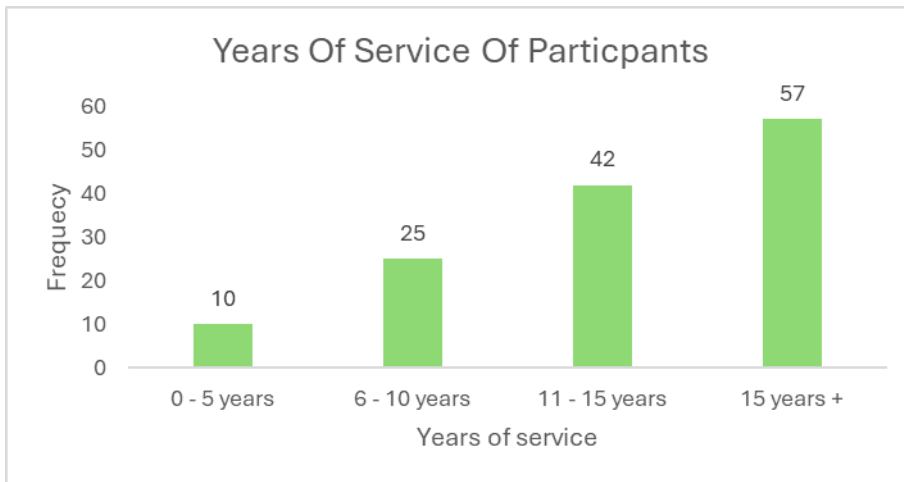


Figure 4 shows years of service. The graph shows that most of the participants (57) have been with their companies for more than 15 years. Those with 11 to 15 years of service came in second (42). The table above shows a full description.

Figure 5: Education Distribution

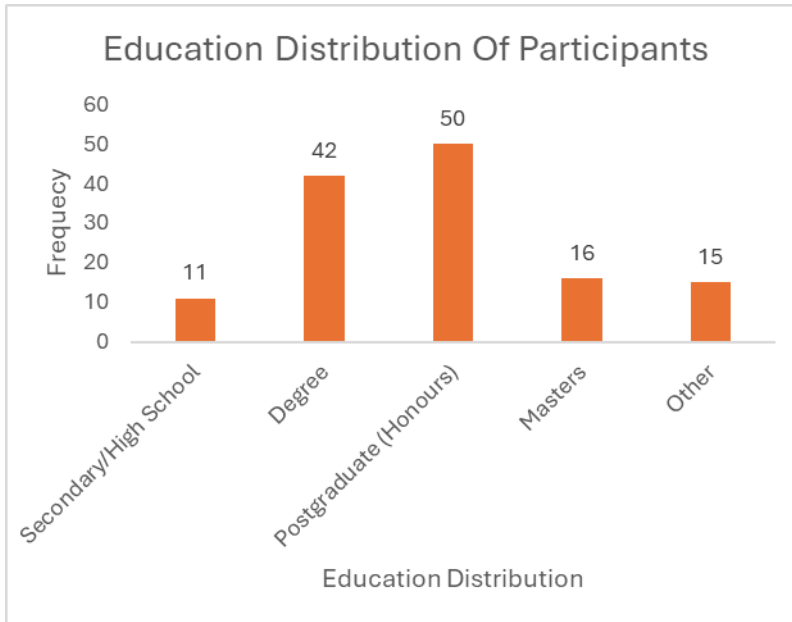


Figure 5 shows the education distribution for employees. Most participants have postgraduate (honors) credentials (50), with a lesser percentage having high school. The table above shows education distribution.

Figure 6: Level in the company.

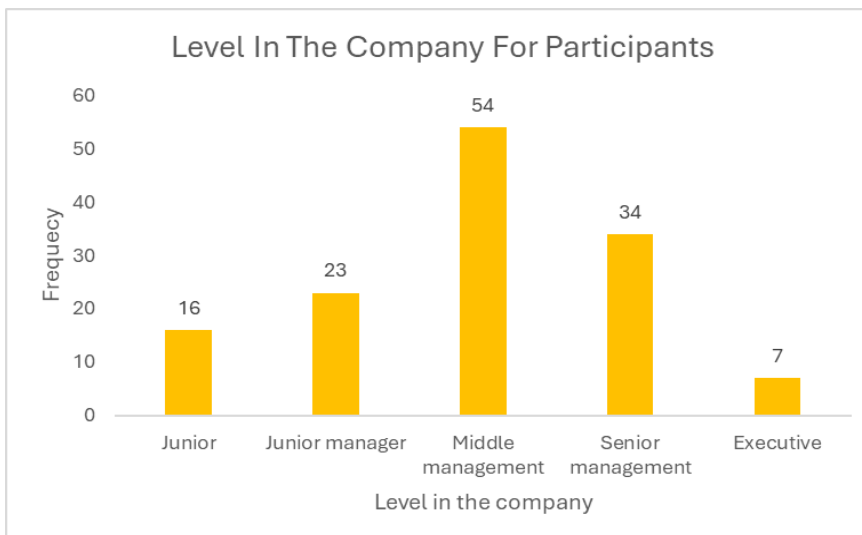


Figure 6 shows the level of participants in a company. Most of the participants are in middle management (54) followed by senior management (34). The fewest participants were executives (7).

Figure 7: Onsite Distribution

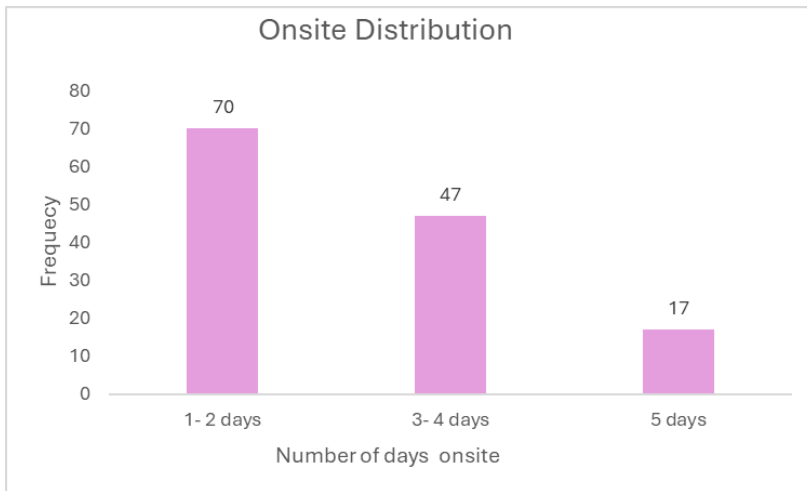


Figure 7 shows the number of days on which participants worked onsite. Most participants work a day of two in the office (70), followed by three to four days (47).

Figure 8: Offsite Distribution

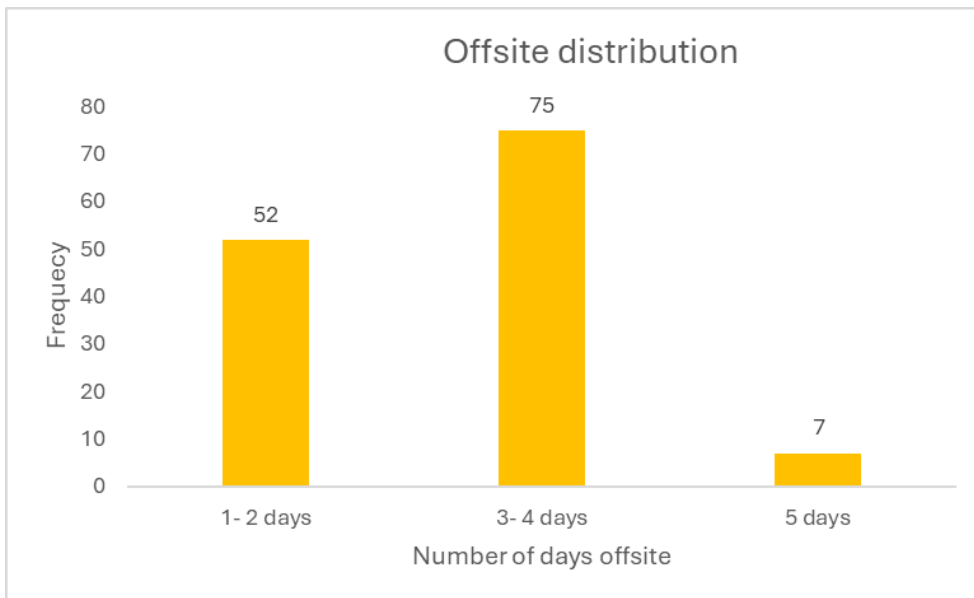


Figure 8 shows the number of days on which participants worked offsite. Most participants spent three to four days (70) offsite, followed by a day of two (47).

### 5.3. Descriptive statistics

A five-point Likert scale adopted from Xie et al. (2019) was used in this study, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Following is the analysis of the key construction of this study.

#### 5.3.1. Hybrid working

In this study, the hybrid working construct was divided into four sub-sections to represent the categories which are boundarylessness, multitasking, demand for constant learning, and non-work-related interruptions.

*Table 1: Boundarylessness*

Statistics		“I take unfinished work home with me at the end of the day regularly.”	“My job requires me to be accessible outside of my normal working hours.”	“My job requires me to work in a type of settings such as in the office, at home, etc.”	“My job is not limited to my place of work”.
N	Valid	134	134	134	134
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.66	3.32	3.97	3.81
Mode		4	4	4	4
Skewness		-.743	-.406	-1.145	-.863
Std. Error of Skewness		.209	.209	.209	.209

The boundarylessness sub-construct consisted of four (4) questions. The results are evident that data was not normally distributed in all variables analysed. For all variables analysed, negative skew values were found, indicating that participants' responses or frequency of scores were leaning more towards agreeing and strongly agreeing. All variables have a mode value of 4 which conclude that most of the participants agree that they do take unfinished work home with them at the end of the day regularly, their job requires them to be accessible outside of their normal working hours; and their job requires them to work in

a type of setting such as in the office, at home, etc. Last but not least, the participants also agree that their job is not limited to their place of work.

Table 2: Multi-tasking

Statistics				
		“My job involves several tasks that compete for my attention.”	“I often have to take care of several tasks or decisions concurrently in my job”	” My job requires me to do more than one task at a time.”
N	Valid	134	134	134
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		4.18	4.18	4.29
Mode		4	4	4
Skewness		-1.433	-1.433	-1.707
Std. Error of Skewness		.209	.209	.209

The multitasking sub-construct consisted of three (3) questions. The results evident that data was not normally distributed in all variables analysed. For all variables analysed, negative skew values were noted, which indicates that participants' responses or frequency of scores were leaning more towards agree and strongly agree. All variables have a mode value of 4 which conclude that the participants agree that their job involves several tasks that compete for their attention, they often have to take care of several tasks or decisions concurrently in their job, and their job requires them to do more than one task at a time.

Table 3: Demand for constant learning

Statistics				
		My job requires me to attend seminars, take courses, or independently gather new information regularly.	My job allows me opportunities for learning and growth in competence and proficiency	My job requires me to continually learn new technology, techniques, and ideas.
N	Valid	133	134	134
	Missing	1	0	0
Mean		3.80	4.10	4.20
Mode		4	4	4
Skewness		-.694	-1.502	-1.205
Std. Error of Skewness		.210	.209	.209

The demand for constant learning sub-construct consisted of three (3) questions. The results evident that data was not normally distributed in all variables analysed. For all variables analysed, negative skew values were noted, which indicates that participants' responses or frequency of scores were leaning more towards agree and strongly agree. All variables have a mode value of 4 which conclude that most of the participants agree that their job requires them to attend seminars, take courses, or independently gather new information regularly; their job allows them opportunities for learning and growth in competence and proficiency; and their job requires them to learn new technology, techniques, and ideas continually.

*Table 4: Non-work-related interruptions*

<b>Statistics</b>				
		“In my job, I often stop tasks I am working on to respond to non-work-related like questions from other colleagues or interrupted by others to discuss non-related work.”	“While at work, I am frequently interrupted by phone calls, e-mail messages, or colleagues seeking information or help with non-work-related issues”	“During my workday, I rarely have large chunks of time that I can devote to my work without being interrupted by others to discuss non-work-related things.”
N	Valid	134	134	134
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		3.37	3.13	3.04
Mode		4	2	2
Skewness		-.271	.059	.045
Std. Error of Skewness		.209	.209	.209

The non-work related three (3) questions. The findings revealed that data was not normally distributed across all variables examined. For one variable, a negative skew value was noted, indicating that participants' responses or frequency of scores were leaning more towards agree or strongly agree; that is, participants agreed that in their job, they frequently stop tasks they are working on to respond to non-work-related questions from other colleagues or are interrupted by others to discuss non-related work.

However, positive skew values were found on two of the variables examined, indicating that participants' replies or frequency of scores were more inclined toward disagree and strongly disagree. It can be concluded that most of the participants disagree that while at work, they are frequently interrupted by phone calls, e-mail messages, or colleagues seeking

information or help with non-work-related issues. They also disagree that during their workday, they rarely have large chunks of time that they can devote to their work without being interrupted by others to discuss non-work-related things.

### 5.3.2. Interpersonal Trust

In this study, the interpersonal trust construct was divided into two sub-sections, that is, affective trust and cognitive trust.

Table 5: Affective Trust

Statistics					
		“My manager and I, we have a sharing relationship. We can both freely share our ideas, feelings, and hopes.”	“I can talk freely to my manager about difficulties I am having at work and know that (s) he will want to listen.”	“I can rely on my leader.”	“My manager encourages open communication”
N	Valid	134	134	134	134
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.88	3.89	3.75	4.00
Mode		4	4	4	4
Skewness		-1.012	-1.096	-.942	-1.230
Std. Error of Skewness		.209	.209	.209	.209

The effective trust sub-construct consisted of four (4) questions. The results evident that data was not normally distributed in all variables analysed. For all variables analysed, negative skew values were noted, which indicates that participants' responses or frequency of scores were leaning more towards agree and strongly agree. All variables have a mode value of 4 which concludes that most of the participants agree that their manager and themselves have a shared relationship; they can both freely share their ideas, feelings, and hopes. The participants further agree that they can talk freely to their managers about the difficulties they are having at work and know that they will want to listen. The participants also agree that their managers encourage open communication.

Table 6: Cognitive Trust

Statistics				
		My manager approaches his/her job with professionalism and dedication.	Most people, even those who working with my manager, trust and respect him/her as a co-worker	I can rely on my manager to not make my job more difficult.
N	Valid	134	134	134
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		4.08	3.90	3.76
Mode		4	4	4
Skewness		-1.426	-1.189	-.815
Std. Error of Skewness		.209	.209	.209

The cognitive trust sub-construct consisted of three (3) questions. The results evident that data was not normally distributed in all variables analysed. For all variables analysed, negative skew values were noted, which indicates that participants' responses or frequency of scores were leaning more towards agreeing and strongly agreeing. With the mode values of four across all the analysed variables, it can be concluded that most of the participants agree that their manager approaches their job with professionalism and dedication. They also agree that most people, even those who work with their manager, trust and respect him/her as co-worker. The participants further agree that they can rely on their manager to not make their job more difficult.

### 5.3.3. Employee Engagement

In this study, the employee engagement construct was divided into three sub-sections, that is, physical engagement, cognitive, and emotional.

Table 7: Physical engagement

Statistics				
		My job inspires me.	I am enthusiastic about my job.	I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.
N	Valid	134	134	134
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		3.94	3.93	3.95
Mode		4	4	4
Skewness		-.983	-.996	-1.126
Std. Error of Skewness		.209	.209	.209

The physical engagement sub-construct consisted of three (3) questions. The results evident that data was not normally distributed in all variables analysed. For all variables analysed, negative skew values were noted, which indicates that participants' responses or frequency of scores were leaning more towards agree and strongly agree. With the mode values of four across all the analysed variables, it can be concluded that most of the participants agree their job inspires them, they are enthusiastic about their job, and they find the work that they do full of meaning and purpose.

### 5.3.3.A. Cognitive

The cognitive sub-construct consisted of one (1) question 1, that is, at my work, I am full of energy. The data showed that most of the participants did agree that they are full of energy at their work.

*Table 8: Cognitive*

At my work, I am full of energy.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	7	5.2	5.2	5.2
	Disagree	17	12.7	12.7	17.9
	Neither Disagree nor Agree	37	27.6	27.6	45.5
	Agree	48	35.8	35.8	81.3
	Strongly Agree	25	18.7	18.7	100.0
	Total	134	100.0	100.0	

The results indicate that approximately 35.8% of the respondents agree that they are full- of energy at their work. 18.7% strongly agree. 27.6% neither disagree nor agree. 12.7% disagree, while 5.2 % strongly disagree.

Table 9: Emotional

Statistics		At work, I focus a great deal of attention on my job.	At work, I am absorbed by my job.	At work, I concentrate on my job.
N	Valid	133	134	134
	Missing	1	0	0
Mean		4.00	3.73	3.90
Mode		4	4	4
Skewness		-.998	-.749	-.931
Std. Error of Skewness		.210	.209	.209

The emotional sub-construct consisted of three (3) questions. The results evident that data was not normally distributed in all variables analysed. For all variables analysed, negative skew values were noted, which indicates that participants' responses or frequency of scores were leaning more towards agree and strongly agree. With the mode values of four across all the analysed variables, it can be concluded that most of the participants agree that at work, they focus more and pay attention to their job, they are absorbed by their work, and they concentrate on their job.

#### 5.4. Reliability

The three-model construct was therefore tested for reliability. Cronbach's alpha analysis was therefore used to establish the reliability of the model construct. Reliability is considered acceptable if Cronbach's alpha equals 0.7 and above. Following is the reliability test for this study's three constructs.

Table 10: Reliability

Reliability Statistics			
Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
Hybrid working	.730	.747	13
Interpersonal Trust	.945	.945	7
Employee Engagement	.908	.908	7

From the reliability testing, it can be noted that the Cronbach's alpha scores for all three constructs were considered acceptable as they were above 0.7, that is, hybrid work ( $\alpha =$

0.730), interpersonal trust ( $\alpha = 0.945$ ), and employee engagement ( $\alpha = 0.908$ ). The results imply that all three constructs can be accepted as part of the model.

### 5.5. Correlation

The correlation test was also conducted to identify if there is any statistically significant correlation between the three constructs. To evaluate the relationship of the constructs, the results were therefore analysed by using the Bivariate Pearson Correlation. The constructs correlation was tested at 0.01 and 0.05 confidence levels.

Table 11: Correlations

Correlations		Hybrid Working	Interpersonal Trust	Employee Engagement
Hybrid Working	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	133		
Interpersonal Trust	Pearson Correlation	.094	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.280		
	N	133	134	
Employee Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.347**	.436**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	132	133	133

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results show a positive correlation between hybrid working and employee engagement, as well as a positive correlation between trust and employee engagement ( $p=0.000$ ). The results show no significant correlation between hybrid working and trust, as the *p-value* was above 0.01 and 0.05.

### 5.6. Regression analysis

Regression analysis is a statistical tool used to establish the statistical relationship between dependent and independent variables. Regression analysis identifies the precise significance level of each independent variable in relation to the dependent variable. Regression analysis is used to understand and predict the behavior of variables (Pallant,

2020; Pulido-Martos et al., 2021). The significant level of 0.05 was used to test the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables. All three variables were entered.

*Table 12: Variables Entered/Removed*

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Interpersonal Trust, Hybrid Working <sup>b</sup>		Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement

b. All requested variables entered.

The model summary tests how well the regression model can fit the dataset. The result indicates that the predictors' variables (independent variables—employee engagement) in the model improve the model fit. From the results, it can be concluded that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that their regression model fits the data better. From the table below, it can be noted that the p-value (Sig.) is less than the significance level ( $p = 0.000$ ). This indicates that the regression model is statistically significant. See ANOVA below.

*Table 13: ANOVA*

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1072.347	2	536.174	26.099	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	2650.168	129	20.544		
	Total	3722.515	131			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement

b. Predictors: (Constant), Interpersonal Trust, Hybrid Working

The table below shows the coefficient estimates and p-values for each variable (predictors) in the regression model. From these results, we will be able to identify the extent to which each variable is statistically significant in employee engagement. A predictor that has a low p-value ( $p < 0.05$ ) is likely to be a meaningful addition to your model because changes in the predictor's value are related to changes in the response variable.

Table 14: Coefficients

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	4.546	3.414		1.332	.185
Hybrid Working	.265	.063	.315	4.223	.000
Interpersonal Trust	.345	.063	.411	5.512	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement

The results show that both variables, that is, Hybrid working, and Interpersonal trust are statistically significant in influencing employee engagement at  $p=0.000$ .

### 5.7. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

An EFA was carried out utilising a principal component analysis and varimax rotation. The minimal factor loading criteria was set at 0.50. The commonality of scale, which reveals the degree of variance in each dimension, was also evaluated to ensure acceptable levels of explanation. The results show two commonalities less than 0.50, that is, "I take unfinished work home with me at the end of the day regularly" (0.455) and "my job requires me to work in a type of setting such as in the office, at home, etc." (0.233). All other commonalities were above 0.50. As there was no correlation among some of the components, the correlation matrix was not positively defined. The factor solution resulting from this research yielded six scale factors, accounting for 69.651 percent of the data variation.

However, in this initial EFA, one item "My job requires me to work in a type of setting such as in the office, at home, etc." failed to load on any dimension significantly. Therefore, this item was removed from further analysis. The EFA was therefore repeated without including this item. The factor solution derived from the new analysis yielded six dimensions, which explained a total of 71.833 percent of the variance among the loaded items. The six factors identified as part of this EFA aligned with the theoretical proposition in this research. The hybrid working was measured through boundarylessness, multitasking, demand for constant learning, and non-work-related interruptions. These factors were therefore loaded as follows:

- Factor 6 gathers items measuring the boundarylessness.
- Factor 4 gathers items measuring the multitasking.
- Factor 2 gathers items measuring the demand for constant learning.
- Factor 5 gathers items measuring non-work-related interruptions.

Interpersonal trust was measured through affective trust and cognitive trust; the items measuring these two sub-constructs were gathered at Factor 1. The last construct of this study was employee engagement, which was measured through physical engagement, cognitive, and emotional. All items measuring physical engagement were also gathered at Factor 2. While items measuring both cognitive and emotional were gathered at Factor 3. Factor loading is presented in the table below.

Table 15: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Rotated Component Matrix <sup>a</sup>						
Items	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Hybrid Working</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Boundarylessness</b></li> </ul>						
I take unfinished work home with me at the end of the day regularly.						.597
My job requires me to be accessible outside of my normal working hours.						.751
My job is not limited to my place of work.						.732
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Multitasking</b></li> </ul>						
My job involves several tasks that compete for my attention.				.942		
I often have to take care of several tasks or decisions concurrently in my job				.942		
My job requires me to do more than one task at a time.				.688		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Demand for constant learning</b></li> </ul>						
My job requires me to attend seminars, take courses, or independently gather new information regularly.		.518				
My job allows me opportunities for learning and growth in competence and proficiency		.707				
My job requires me to continually learn new technology, techniques, and ideas.		.699				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Non-working related interruptions</b></li> </ul>						
In my job, I often stop tasks I am working on to respond to non-work-related like questions from other colleagues or interrupted by others to discuss non-related work.					.735	

Rotated Component Matrix <sup>a</sup>						
Items	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
While at work, I am frequently interrupted by phone calls, e-mail messages, or colleagues seeking information or help with non-work-related issues During my workday, I rarely have large chunks of time that I can devote to my work without being interrupted by others to discuss non-work-related things.					.838	
					.774	
<b>Interpersonal Trust</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Affective Trust</b></li> </ul>						
My manager and I have a sharing relationship. We can both freely share our ideas, feelings, and hopes.	.837					
I can talk freely to my manager about difficulties I am having at work and know that (s) he will want to listen.	.883					
I can rely on my leader.	.864					
My manager encourages open communication	.891					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Cognitive</b></li> </ul>						
My manager approaches his/her job with professionalism and dedication.	.853					
Most people, even those who working with my manager, trust and respect him/her as a co-worker	.816					
I can rely on my manager to not make my job more difficult.	.780					
<b>Employee Engagement</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Physical engagement</b></li> </ul>						
My job inspires me.		.770				
I am enthusiastic about my job.		.740				
I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.		.754				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Cognitive</b></li> </ul>						
At my work, I am full of energy.			.543			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Emotional</b></li> </ul>						
At work, I focus a great deal of attention on my job.			.768			
At work, I am absorbed by my job.			.792			
At work, I concentrate on my job.			.826			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.  
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

## **5.8. Conclusion**

This chapter describes the methodology for the study. The study employed a quantitative approach to test the relationship of hybrid work, trust and employee engagement. A survey was used to gather data for South African employees working in a hybrid workplace. The tool that was used to gather data was IBM SPSS. The tool was used to assess descriptive statistics, validity, reliability, and the link among the three contrasts (hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement). The next chapter will discuss the findings of the above results in detail.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter covers the discussion of results, the findings covered in Chapter 5 and the literature in Chapter 2. The first section will be the demographic variable, followed by the constructs. The construct will cover the reliability and the descriptive statistics. Lastly, it will be the hypothesis finding to answer the research questions, which were.

- RQ 1: Is there a relationship between hybrid work and employee trust?
- RQ 2: Is there a relationship between employee trust and employee engagement?
- RQ 3: Is there a relationship between hybrid work and employee engagement?

### 6.2. Demographic variables

As discussed in Chapter 4, a sample of 264 participants was collected using a survey, and only 134 respondents were valid and used for the findings and analysis of this study. As it was noted in Chapter 5, the demographic variables cover the age, gender, level or position in a company, number of years in a company, and number of days employees work in an office set up and offsite. These demographics were used as the control variables for the study of determining the relationship between trust, hybrid work, and employee engagement.

Age was the first demographic variable to be collected and analysed. The age distribution suggests that mid-career professionals, notably those between 31 and 50, dominate the hybrid workplace. Younger employees (20–30) and older employees (51 – 60) are less prevalent, indicating that hybrid employment is more popular among experienced middle-aged professionals.

The second variable was gender; the distribution reflects the female-dominant workforce trends in the hybrid work environment. While female-dominated, a study by Teng-Calleja et al. (2024) highlighted that hybrid work might challenge gender stereotypes, especially in managing caring and professional commitments.

The third variable was tenure; the distribution reflected a higher number of employees who worked for 15 years or more. Based on the number of years of service, most of the

participants have been with their companies for more than 15 years. Those with 11 to 15 years of service came in second. Most employees with longer tenures are likely to have built deeper connections with their superiors and colleagues, suggesting that trust-building may be easier in hybrid work contexts. Short-term employees may struggle to build trust via years of constant communication and teamwork. This was supported by a study conducted by Fayard et al. (2021) and Schilke et al. (2021), the authors reported that organisational tenure is important for trust-building because longer-serving personnel have more solid manager-employee relationships and are more integrated into the culture.

The fourth variable was level or position in the company; middle management employees had the highest participants, the younger generation between the ages of 20 and 30, and older employees between the ages of 51 and 60 had the least participants. This is in agreement with (Mortensen & Haas, 2021), who reported that mid-career professionals are more likely to pursue hybrid work due to their skills and job security.

The fifth variable was the level of education. The distribution reflected most employees with postgraduate degree (honors) credentials. Participants' high educational attainment suggests that most hybrid work environment employees are educated. This education may affect their management practices and trust-building communication expectations. This is in alignment with Abgeller et al.'s (2024) the authors reported that highly educated employees experience autonomy with less monitoring and trust from their manager in remote work.

The last two variants were working from the office and working outside. The results show that most participants worked in the office for a day or two, and the rest of the week, they worked outside. However, a few employees worked for five days in the office and the next five days outside the offices.

### **6.3. Construct Overview**

As discussed in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 there are three constructs for this study which are hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement. Hybrid work as discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, refers to work that lets people work flexibly from home and in an office, characterised by four variables which are boundaryless, multi-tasking, non-work-related, and continuous learning (Fayard et al., 2021; Grzegorzczak et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2019).

Interpersonal trust discussed in Chapters 2 and 5 is the ability to take risks, to expose oneself to the vulnerability of another person and the belief that other people will contribute to their well-being without any harm (Schilke et al., 2021; Weiss et al., 2021; Mehmood, et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2022), characterised trust as affective and cognitive Ding et al., (2021).

Employee engagement as discussed in Chapters 2 and 5 "harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles" (Kahn,1990), involves people expressing themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally while performing their roles (Soares & Mosquera, 2019). It is characterised by three variables which are physical engagement, cognitive, and emotional. The findings from each construct are discussed below.

### **6.3.1. Hybrid work**

From hybrid work statistics, it was found that multi-tasking was the highest of the four characteristics with a mean of 4.29. This suggests that most of the participants are multi-tasking, and it is more important to the hybrid construct. According to Xie. et al., (2019) and Paruzel et al., (2022) multi-tasking is done better by employees in the middle career, which aligns to this study as most participants were middle managers and senior managers. A reliability test was done for the hybrid work construct, and the results showed Cronbach's alpha 0.730, which implies that the variables are reliably measuring the construct.

### **6.3.2. Interpersonal trust**

From the Interpersonal trust finding and analysis it was found that cognitive trust was the highest of the two trusts with a mean of 4.08. This suggests that most of the participants trust their managers and get the help they need, which is vital in hybrid work environments with less direct supervision. Managerial assistance is crucial in hybrid organisations since employees are typically isolated and get little feedback (Mortensen & Haas, 2021), while manager is accessible and dependable; employees feel more safe, motivated, and involved in their job, especially while working remotely (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2023). Mortensen and Haas (2021) recommend frequent, open communication to develop trust and connect employees to their organization and management.

A reliability test was done for the interpersonal trust construct, and the results showed Cronbach's alpha 0.908, which implies that the variables are reliably measuring the trust construct.

### **6.3.3. Employee engagement**

From the employee engagement finding and analysis in Chapter 5, the results found that emotional was the highest of the three with a mean of 4.0. This suggests that most of the participants are being absorbed by their work; they are focusing, paying attention, and concentrating on their jobs, which is important in hybrid work environments with less direct supervision. However, Wang et al. (2021) and Pulido-Martos et al. (2021) mentioned that it can be hard to unplug, resulting in longer hours and more stress causing physical and mental fatigue, which hinders effort and commitment. A reliability test was done for the employee engagement construct, and the results showed Cronbach's alpha of 0.945, which implies that the variables are reliably measuring the trust construct.

### **6.4. Factor analysis for the constructs.**

An exploratory factor analysis was completed in Chapter 5 for the three constructs using principal component analysis and varimax rotation. The minimum factor loading criteria was set to 0.50. The results were as follows:

The results showed two commonalities less than 0.50, which were, I take unfinished work home with me at the end of the day regularly with 0.455, and My job requires me to work in a type of setting such as in the office, at home, etc. with 0.233 both from hybrid construct. My job requires me to work in a type of setting such as in the office, at home, etc. failed to load on any dimension significant, and it was removed from further analysis. The EFA was rerun, and all the other variants loaded successfully hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement.

### **6.5. Research questions and hypothesis.**

The research hypothesis findings for the study determine the relationship between trust, hybrid work, and employee engagement as follows:

#### **6.5.1. Research question 1 and hypothesis**

RQ 1: Is there a relationship between hybrid work and employee trust?

- H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between employee trust and a hybrid work environment.
- H<sub>11</sub> There is a significant relationship between employee trust and a hybrid work environment.

### **6.5.1. Results discussion**

The results showed a *P value* of 0.28, which is above 0.01 and 0.05, and this indicates that there is no significant correlation between hybrid working and interpersonal trust. These results indicate that employee trust and hybrid are independent of each other, and it proves the first hypothesis, which says there is no significant relationship between employee trust and a hybrid work environment. This contradicts the study of Teng-Calleja et al. (2024) and Grzegorzczak et al, (2021), which had indicated that hybrid work depends on trust, which may engage or disengage employees. These findings contribute to the trust debate hybrid.

### **6.5.2. Research question 2 and hypothesis**

RQ 2: Is there a relationship between trust and employee engagement?

- H<sub>21</sub> There is no significant relationship between trust and employee engagement.
- H<sub>22</sub> There is a significant relationship between trust and employee engagement.

#### **6.5.2.A. Results discussion**

The results showed a *P value* of 0.00, which is less than 0.01 and 0.05, and this indicates that there is a significant correlation between trust and employee engagement. These results indicate that when trust increases, employee engagement increases. This indicates that when employees trust each other, they engage more. It proves the second (H<sub>22</sub>) hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between trust and employee engagement. This confirms the research from Mortensen and Haas (2021) and Teng-Calleja et al. (2024). which found that trust is critical to sustaining high engagement in hybrid work contexts, and the positive association between trust and engagement shows that as trust develops, employee engagement improves. Also, previous studies from Abgeller et al. (2024) have shown that trust in companies is very important for keeping employees engaged.

### **6.5.3. Research question 3 and hypothesis**

RQ 3: Is there a relationship between hybrid work and employee engagement?

- H<sub>31</sub> There is no relationship between hybrid work and employee engagement.
- H<sub>32</sub> There is a relationship between hybrid work and employee engagement.

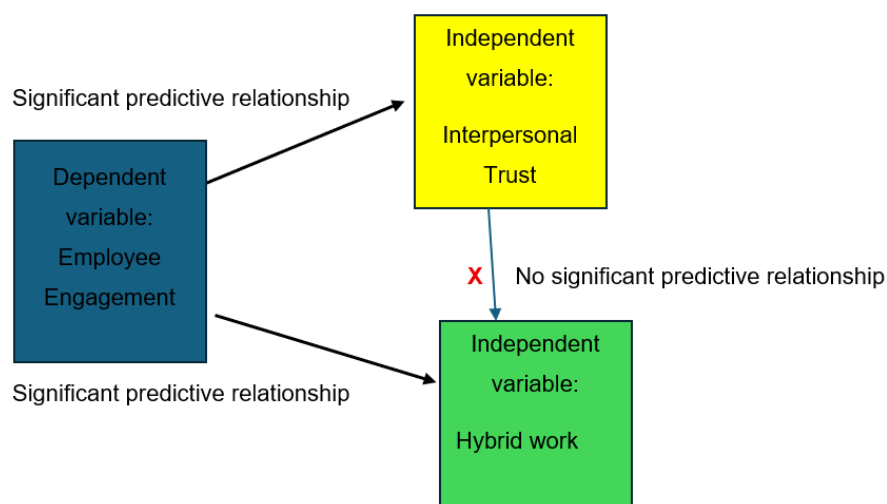
#### **6.5.3.A. Results discussion**

The results indicate that there is a significant correlation between hybrid work and employee engagement which proves the second hypothesis (H<sub>32</sub>). The results showed a *P value* of 0.00, which is less than 0.01 and 0.05 and this indicates that there is a significant correlation between hybrid work and employee engagement. These results indicate that when hybrid work increases, employee engagement increases. This indicates that when employees have a high level of engagement, meaning when they work in a hybrid work environment, they are likely to be more engaged. It proves the second hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between hybrid work and a hybrid work environment. This study confirms the research from Teng-Calleja et al. (2024) that says hybrid work can influence employee engagement. Additionally, Fayard et al. (2021) stated that hybrid work and engagement rely on being able to balance collaboration, communication, and being flexible.

## 6.6. Conclusion

This study supports the hypothesis that both independent constructs, which are trust and hybrid work, have a significant relationship with the dependent variable (employee engagement). On the other hand, the study proved that even though both independent variables have a significant relationship with employee engagement, they have no significant relationship between themselves (trust and hybrid work). The below figure sums up the findings from the study of determining the relationship between trust, hybrid work, and employee engagement.

### 6.6.1. Summary of the findings



## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The results from this study and suggestions on the impact of trust on employee engagement in a hybrid work environment are presented in Chapters 5 and 6. The chapters synthesised the literature study and empirical data analysis to show the relationship between hybrid work's impact on employee engagement and trust. The study examined the characteristics of hybrid work, trust, and employee engagement.

The study's objectives were to:

- To determine the relationship between trust and hybrid work.
- To determine the relationship between employee engagement and trust.
- To determine the relationship between hybrid work and employee engagement.

The literature review and empirical investigation will be summarized in this chapter, followed by research conclusions. The study's findings will provide suggestions to help businesses create and maintain trust and increase hybrid work model involvement. The chapter's conclusion will advise further study on hybrid work contexts, which are becoming more important post-pandemic.

### **7.2 Summary of the Findings**

#### **7.2.1 Findings from the Literature Review**

The literature evaluation presented a theoretical framework for understanding trust, employee engagement, and hybrid work environments. Many research issues informed the empirical study. According to Grzegorzczuk et al, (2021) and Teng-Calleja et al, (2024), hybrid work employees need trust. Gratton (2021) and Mortensen & Haas, (2021) found that trust is crucial to overcoming distant work obstacles such as lack of direct supervision, isolation, and communication barriers. Trusted leaders and co-workers make employees feel safe in their jobs and confidence in their team's support, making them more engaged even while working remotely (Abgeller et al., 2024).

Hybrid work arrangements can greatly impact employee engagement by providing flexibility and chances for cooperation, but they also introduce issues that must be handled.

Hybrid work can break workflow and momentum, requiring strong organisational support to retain engagement (Teng-Calleja et al., 2024). Trust is a key factor in getting employees to engage, especially in hybrid workplaces where people are physically separated, which makes it harder to build and keep trust in the usual ways (Teng-Calleja et al., 2024; Abgeller et al., 2024).

The lack of face-to-face meetings in hybrid work could make people less likely to trust each other. Less contact between employees and managers can make it harder for people to engage together, communicate, and get along in remote work (De Souza Santos & Ralph, 2022; Gillet et al., 2024). Furthermore, Lee et al. (2019) found that managers who are trusted motivate, join, and connect their workers with the company's goals. The study also talked about how trust-building leadership is important for keeping employees engaged even when they do not see each other very often.

### **7.2.2 Findings from the Study**

Some themes found in the literature review were supported by the study's results and some contradicted the study results. The results showed several important facts about how to build trust in hybrid work and how that affects employee involvement.

The first objective of the study was to determine the relationship between hybrid work and trust. Using correlation, it was found that there is no relationship between hybrid work and trust, which contradicts the study by Grzegorzczuk et al, (2021) and Teng-Calleja et al, (2024), which reported that hybrid work influences trust.

The second objective of the study was to determine the relationship between employee engagement and trust. It was found that there is a relationship between hybrid work and employee engagement, which agrees with that study by Teng-Calleja et al, (2024) and Grzegorzczuk et al, (2021) which reported hybrid work arrangements can greatly impact employee engagement by providing flexibility and chances for cooperation.

The third objective of the study was to determine the relationship between employee engagement and trust. Using correlation, it was found that there is no a relationship between employee engagement and trust, which is aligned with the study by Teng-Calleja et al,

(2024) and Abgeller et al. (2024) which reported trust is a key factor in getting employees to engage especially in hybrid workplaces where people are physically separated, which makes it harder to build and keep trust in the usual ways.

### **7.3 Conclusions of the Study**

The research on determining the relationship between trust, employee engagement and hybrid work environments contains numerous noteworthy findings for firms looking to improve employee engagement in increasingly flexible and remote work environments. These conclusions are based on relevant literature evaluation and empirical research results.

Engagement is essential to hybrid work environments' effectiveness. The empirical data showed that management dependability, and honest communication influence engagement and trust. Remote workers who trust their manager are more likely to stay engaged because they feel safe in their positions and certain that their managers are dependable and helpful. The research highlights the need for engagement in overcoming the obstacles of limited face-to-face encounters in hybrid work situations.

Second, trust-building strategies may maintain engagement without face-to-face contact. If managers communicated and were reliable, workers would stay motivated and find purpose in their work even when actual encounters were infrequent. If leadership stresses clear communication and supportive management practices, hybrid work models may be implemented without compromising trust or engagement.

Thirdly, leadership is crucial to hybrid workplace trust. The results demonstrated that transparent leadership techniques including frequent check-ins, goal setting, and feedback methods sustain trust and encourage and engage employees. The findings from this research support this conclusion by emphasizing the importance of leadership in developing a trust-based corporate culture that fosters cooperation and involvement.

Using multiple regression analysis, the research found that trust and hybrid have independent relationships with employee engagement. The favorable relationships between trust and employee engagement and employee engagement and hybrid work emphasize the significance of engagement in hybrid work and the significance of trust in engagement.

## **7.4 Limitations**

Different issues with this study could have changed the range and depth of the results. First, the study only included 134 employees from different South African groups, which means that the results may not apply to everyone. Some of the sample's demographics, like the range of ages and years of service, may not fully reflect the wide range of workers who work in hybrid in different areas and businesses.

The study's second limitation is that it only collects data at one point in time (between August and September 2024) because it is a cross-sectional study. With this method, it is harder to see how levels of trust and engagement change over time. Longitudinal research might give us more information about how employee engagement changes in hybrid work settings, especially when leadership styles or company rules are always changing.

It is also possible for bias to show up in survey results because people are asked to fill them out themselves. The people who took part may not have based their answers on what they thought was expected of them or what was socially desirable. Also, because the study is mainly quantitative, it doesn't look at the subtleties of human situations that qualitative methods, like conversations, might show.

Finally, the study looked at how leadership can help build trust, but it did not investigate how different types of leadership might affect trust in the hybrid work environment. In the future, it might be useful to investigate whether different types of leadership, like creative versus transactional leadership, have different effects on creating trust.

## **7.5 Suggestions for Future Studies**

As hybrid work becomes more popular, more research should be done on the factors that affect keeping employees engaged in online work settings. One suggestion is to do a continuous study that looks at hybrid work over a long length of time. As hybrid work becomes more common in organisations, this type of study would help us understand how employee engagement is maintained or lost.

In the future, researchers might also investigate how hybrid work styles are affected by different types of work or company norms. Sector-specific factors, which may be very different between fields like technology, healthcare, and education, were not looked at in

this study. By looking at these situations, we can get a better idea of how problems unique to the field affect hybrids and engagement.

Leadership styles in hybrid work are another area that needs more study. The study proved that leadership is important for building trust, but it did not indicate anything about the different types of leadership. Studies in the future should investigate different types of leadership, like servant, transformational, and transactional, especially in situations where employees work from home most of the days in a week.

Future studies could also investigate the role of team relationships in hybrid work, especially when it comes to trust between peers. This study was mostly about trust between managers and employees, but ties between peers are also very important for creating a work environment where people want to work together and be engaged. Knowing how trust is built through teamwork and peer support would give companies a better idea of how to keep high-performing hybrid teams going.

Finally future study could explore a qualitative study and explore the contradiction of this quantitative study that says trust has no relationship with hybrid work and provides more in-depth information.

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## Appendix Consistency Matrix

Proposition question /Hypothesis	Literature review	Data collection tool	Analysis
a. Is there a significant relationship between hybrid work and employee trust?	(Dinh et al., 2021) (Fayard, et al.,2023) (Gratton, 2021) (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021) (Kähkönen et al., 2021) (Mortensen & Haas, 2021) (Parker et al., 2020) (Teng-Calleja et al., 2024) (Schilke et al.,2021) (Siegrist, 2021) (Wang, et al., 2021) (Weiss et al.,2021)	Online Survey	IBM SPSS
b. Is there a significant relationship between employee trust and employee engagement?	(Dinh et al., 2021) (Gratton, 2021) (Grzegorzczuk et al, 2021) (Kwon & Kim, 2020) (Kahn, 1990)	Online Survey	IBM SPSS

	<p>(Lee et al., 2022)</p> <p>(Mehmood et al., 2023)</p> <p>(Mortensen &amp; Haas, 2021)</p> <p>(Parker et al., 2020)</p> <p>(Soares &amp; Mosquera, 2019)</p> <p>(Teng-Calleja et al., 2024)</p>		
<p>c. Is there a significant relationship between hybrid work and employee engagement?</p>	<p>(Gratton, 2021)</p> <p>(Mortensen &amp; Haas, 2021)</p> <p>(Naqshbandi et al., 2023)</p> <p>(Parker et al., 2020)</p> <p>(Pulido-Martos et al., 2021)</p> <p>(Wang, et al., 2021)</p>	<p>Survey</p>	<p>IBM SPSS</p>

## **Appendix Participants' consent and Employee survey question**

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.

I am conducting research on the impact of hybrid work on employee engagement and how trust influences employee engagement. To that end, you are asked to complete a survey, this will help us better understand the impact of employee engagement on employees who are using hybrid work. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes of your time. Your participation is voluntary and anonymous. By completing the survey, you indicate that you voluntarily participate in this research. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name    Boitumelo Maketa    Research Supervisor Anel Meintjes

Email : [20793962@mygibs.co.za](mailto:20793962@mygibs.co.za)

Email [Anelrdsa@gmail.com](mailto:Anelrdsa@gmail.com)

Phone: 0795102865

Phone

### **Section A Demographics**

#### **Age**

- 20 – 30
- 31 – 40
- 41 – 50
- 51– 60

#### **Gender**

- Male
- Female

- Other

#### **Years of service**

- 0– 5 years
- 6 – 10 years
- 11 – 15 years
- Longer than 15 years

#### **Level in a company**

- Junior
- Junior manager
- Middle management
- Senior management
- Executive

#### **Education**

- Secondary/High school
- Degree
- Postgraduate (honours)
- Masters
- Doctorate
- Other

#### **How many days a week do I work onsite (office)?**

- 1 -2
- 3 - 4

- 5
- None

**How many days do I work offside (home, etc)?**

- 1 -2
- 3- 4
- 5
- None

**Section B: Hybrid work**

Hybrid working is a flexible way of working, it allows employees to have multiple ways of working that suit their tasks and needs. The characteristics of hybrid work are boundarylessness, multitasking, non-work related, and demand for constant learning (Gratton, 2021; Mortensen, et al., 2021; Xie et al.,2019).

A 5-point Likert-type scale Xie et al. (2019).

<b>Boundarylessness</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither Disagree nor Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
I take unfinished work home with me at the end of the day regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
My job requires me to be accessible outside of my normal working hours. That is, I am required to respond to work-related emails, telephone calls, or pages when I am not at work	1	2	3	4	5
My job requires me to work in a type of settings such as in the office, at home, etc.	1	2	3	4	5

My job is not limited to my place of work. Rather, I am “on call” no matter where I am since I stay connected via the cell phone or internet.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Multitasking</b>					
My job involves several tasks that compete for my attention.	1	2	3	4	5
I often have to take care of several tasks or decisions concurrently in my job.	1	2	3	4	5
My job requires me to do more than one task at a time.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Demand for constant learning:</b>					
My job requires me to attend seminars, take courses, or independently gather new information regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
My job allows me opportunities for learning and growth in competence and proficiency.	1	2	3	4	5
My job requires me to continually learn new technology, techniques, and ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Non-work-related interruptions:</b>					
In my job, I often stop tasks I am working on to respond to non-work-related like questions from other colleagues or interrupted by others to discuss non-related work.	1	2	3	4	5

While at work, I am frequently interrupted by phone calls, e-mail messages, or colleagues seeking information not related to work.	1	2	3	4	5
During my workday, I rarely have large chunks of time that I can devote to my work without being interrupted by others to discuss non-work-related things.	1	2	3	4	5

### Section C: Trust

Trust is a fundamental axis that connects the trustee's social view, a relationship established in daily life, and a work environment (Schilke et al.,2021; Weiss et al.,2021; Lee et al., 2022).

A 5-point Likert-type scale Lee et al. (2019).

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither Disagree nor Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
<b>Affective</b>					
My manager and I, have a sharing relationship. We can both freely share our ideas, feelings, and hopes.	1	2	3	4	5
I can talk freely to my manager about difficulties I am having at work and know that (s)he will want to listen.	1	2	3	4	5
I can rely on my leader.	1	2	3	4	5
My manager encourages open communication	1	2	3	4	5

<b>Cognitive</b>					
My manager approaches his/her job with professionalism and dedication.	1	2	3	4	5
Most people, even those who work with my manager, trust, and respect him/her as a coworker	1	2	3	4	5
I can rely on my manager to not make my job more difficult.	1	2	3	4	5

**Section D: Employee engagement**

Employee engagement involves people expressing themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally while performing their roles (Soares & Mosquera, 2019).

A 5-point Likert-type scale Soares and Mosquera (2019).

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither Disagree nor Agree</b>	<b>Agre</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
<b>Physical engagement</b>					
My job inspires me.	1	2	3	4	5
I am enthusiastic about my job.	1	2	3	4	5
I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Cognitive</b>					
At my work, I am full of energy.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Emotional</b>					

At work, I focus a great deal of attention on my job.	1	2	3	4	5
At work, I am absorbed by my job.	1	2	3	4	5
At work, I concentrate on my job.	1		3	4	5

## Appendix Ethical Clearance

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

**Ethical Clearance  
Approved**

Dear Mabel Boitumelo Maketa,

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.

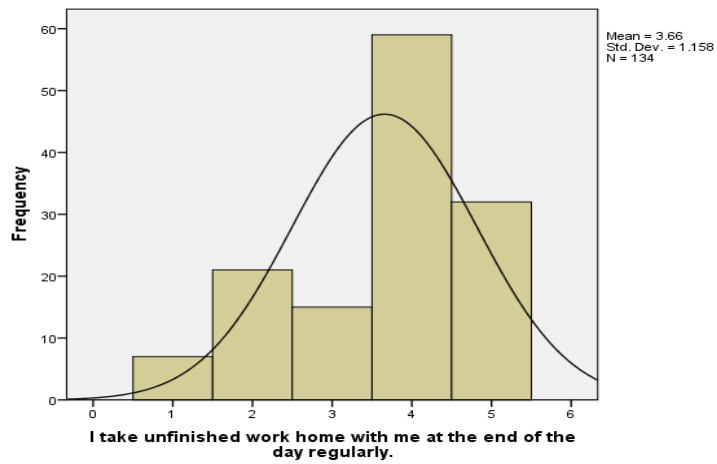
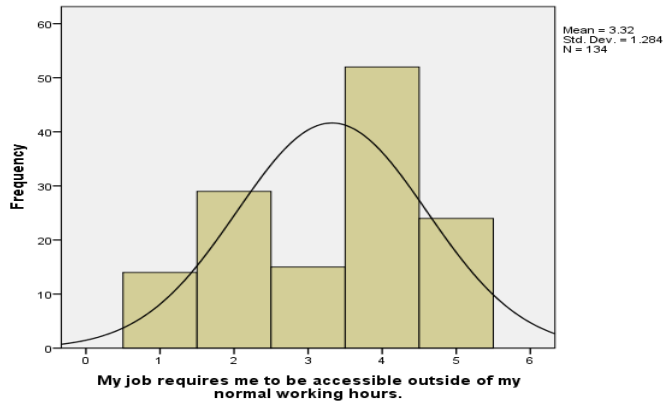
[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

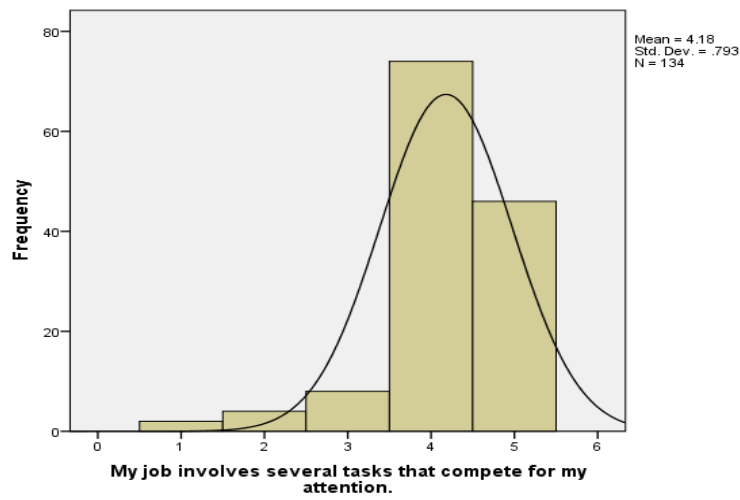
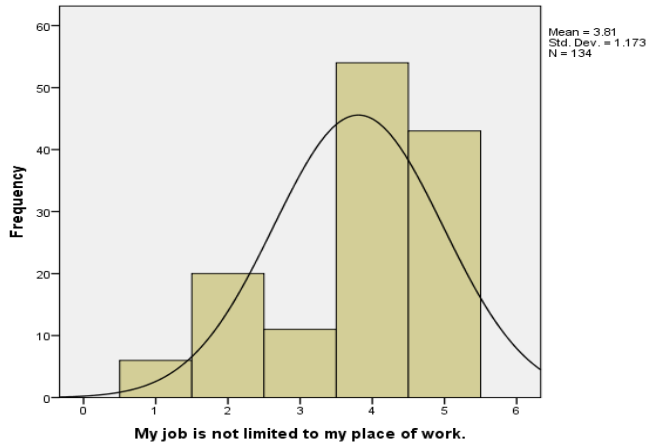
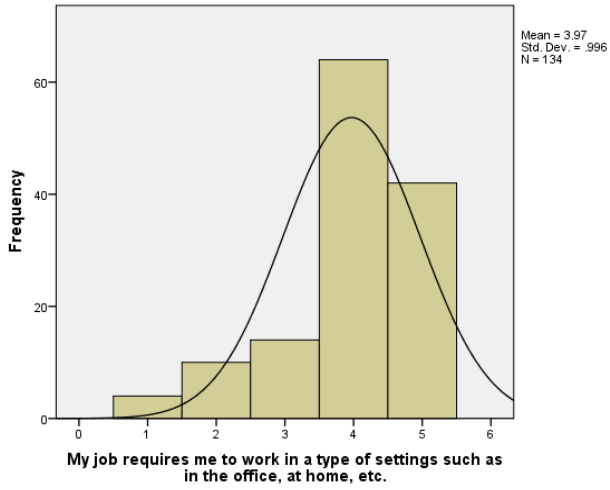
Kind Regards

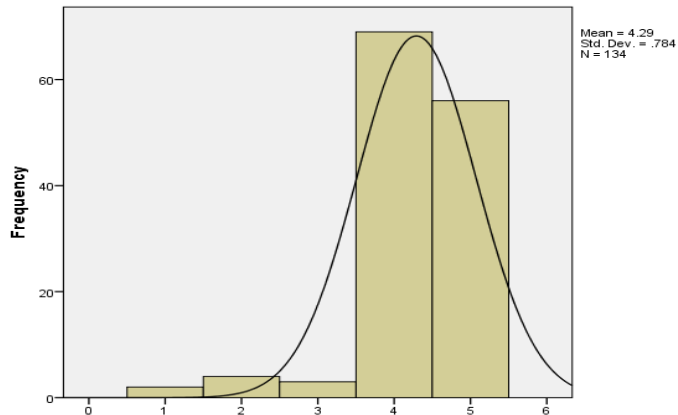
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## Appendix Output of The Analysis

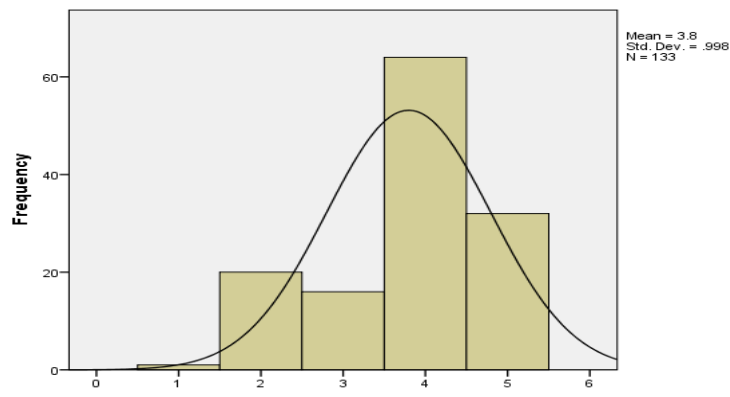
### Hybrid



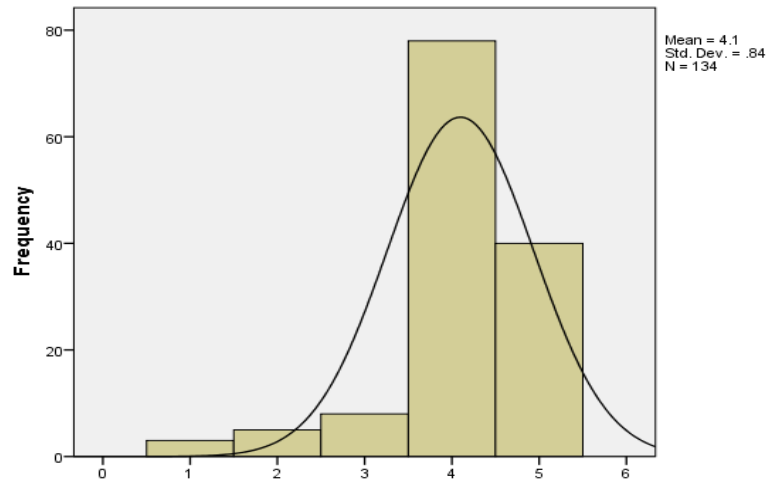




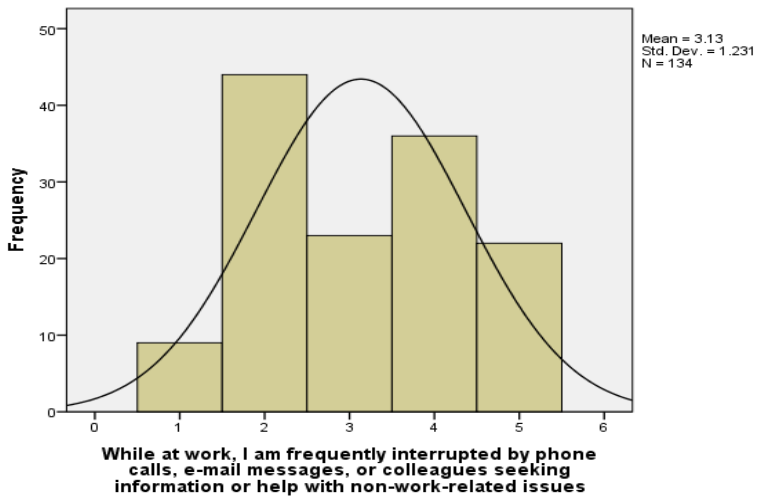
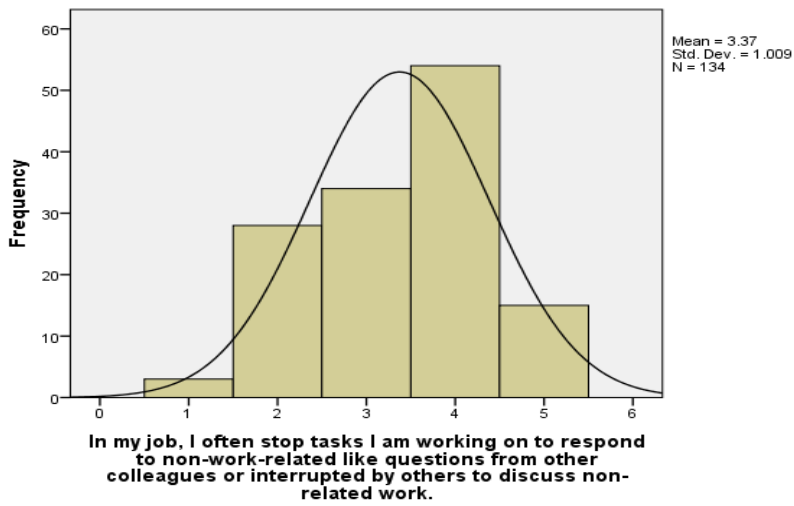
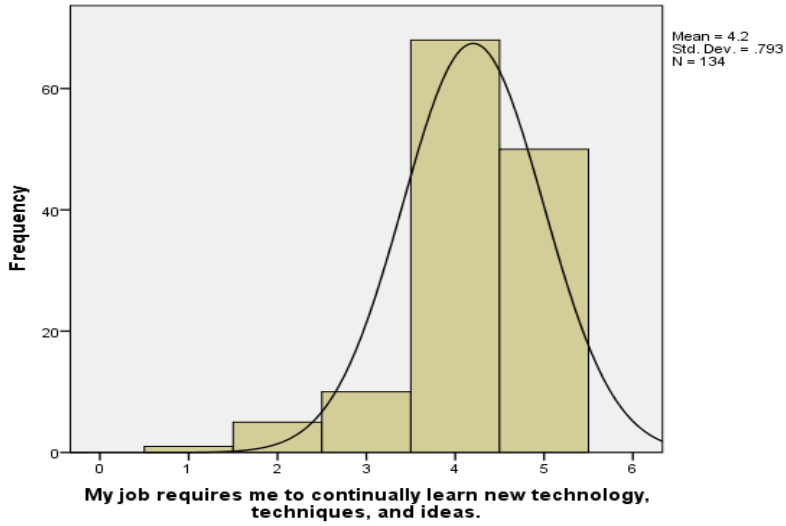
**My job requires me to do more than one task at a time.**

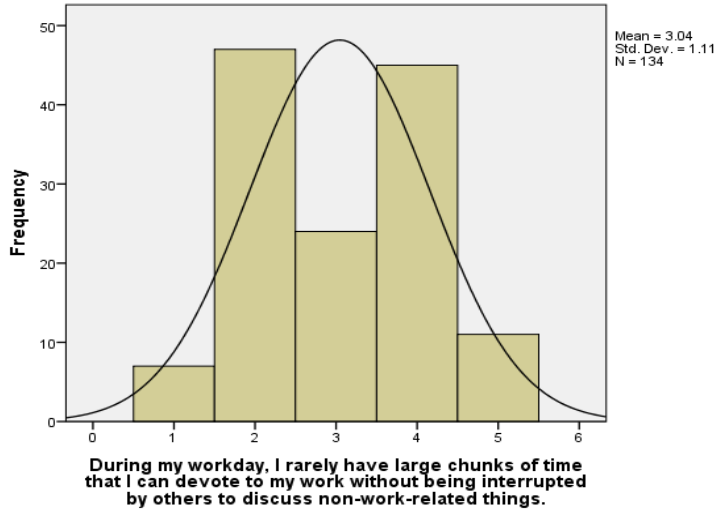


**My job requires me to attend seminars, take courses, or independently gather new information regularly.**

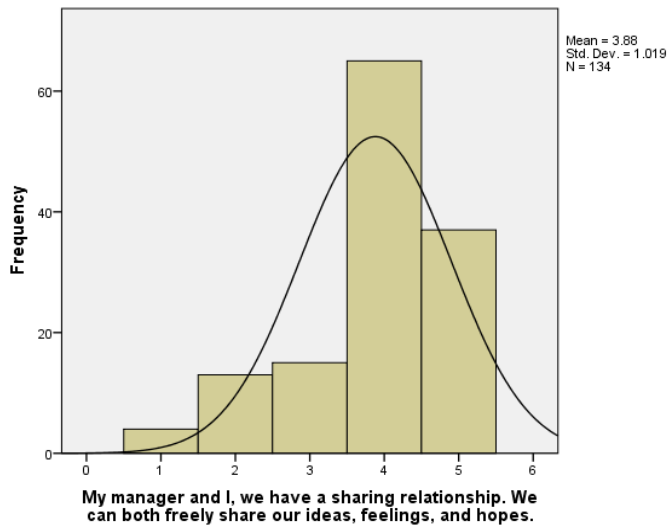


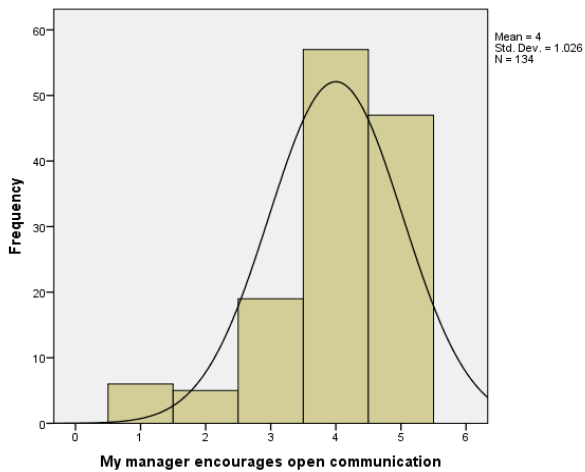
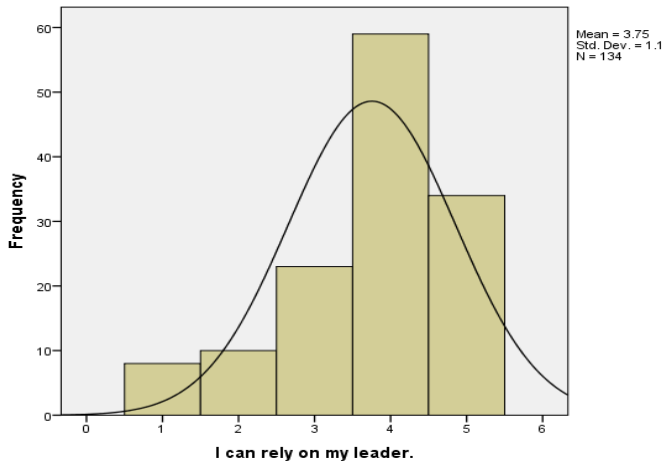
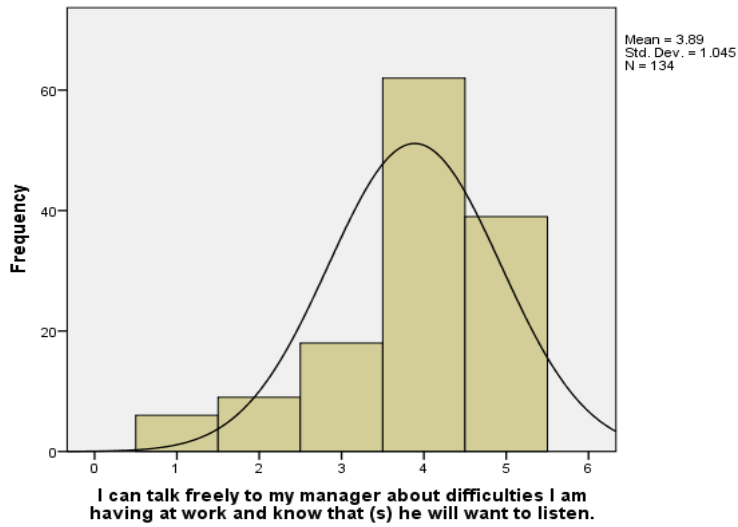
**My job allows me opportunities for learning and growth in competence and proficiency**

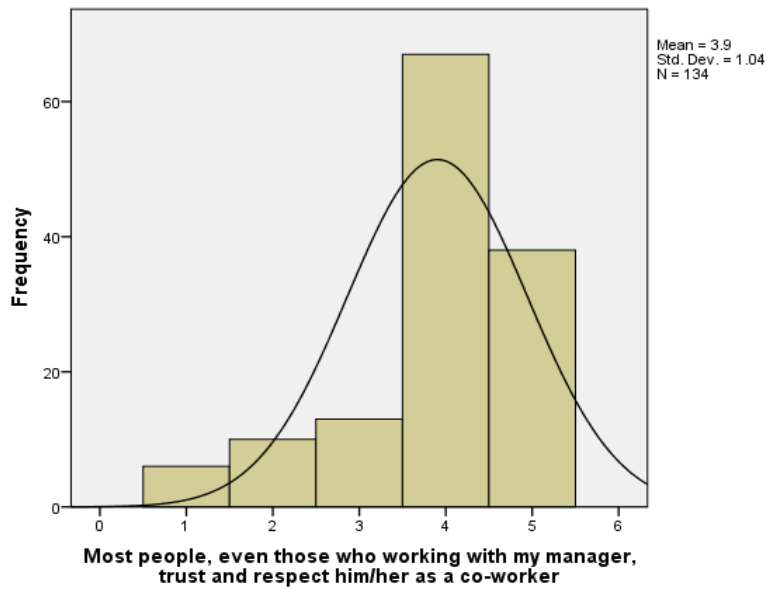
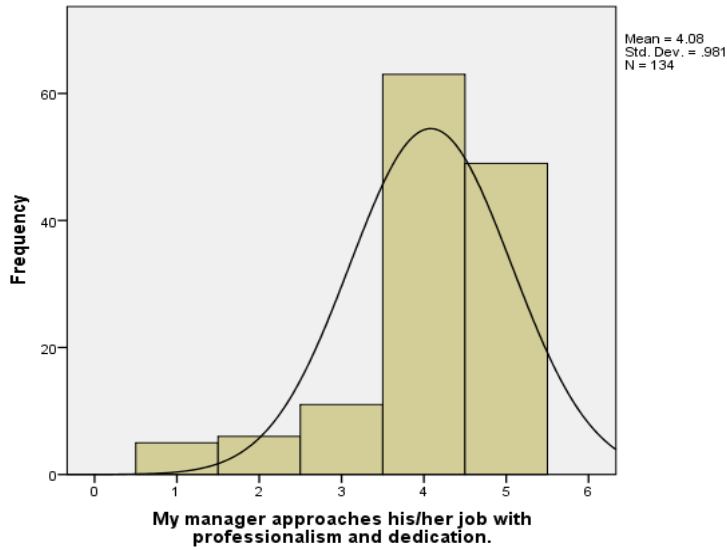




## Trust







## Employee engagement

