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# THE IMPACT OF HYBRID WORKING ON EMPLOYEE WAY OF LIFE AND THE NEED TO RESHAPE THE EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION

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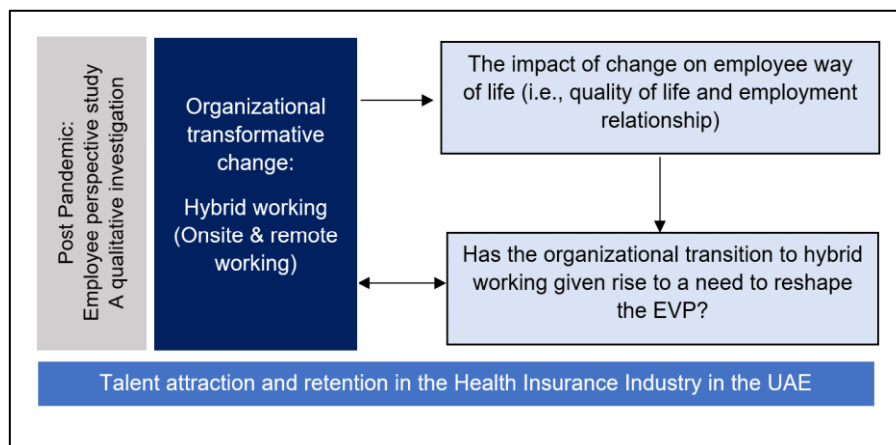


DOCTORATE DISSERTATION NO. 2024: 1

College of Business and Economics

**THE IMPACT OF HYBRID WORKING ON  
EMPLOYEE WAY OF LIFE AND THE NEED TO  
RESHAPE THE EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION**

*Kanishka Chandanamali Athalage*



United Arab Emirates University

College of Business and Economics

THE IMPACT OF HYBRID WORKING ON EMPLOYEE WAY OF  
LIFE AND THE NEED TO RESHAPE THE EMPLOYEE VALUE  
PROPOSITION

Kanishka Chandanamali Athalage

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctorate of Business Administration

January 2024

**United Arab Emirates University Doctorate Dissertation**  
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Cover: Talent attraction and retention in the health insurance industry in the UAE  
(Photo: By Kanishka Chandanamali Athalage)

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## **Declaration of Original Work**

I, Kanishka Chandanamali Athalage, the undersigned, a graduate student at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), and author of this dissertation entitled “*The Impact of Hybrid Working on Employee Way of Life and the Need to Reshape the Employee Value Proposition*” hereby, solemnly declare that this dissertation is my own original research work that has been done and prepared by me under the supervision of Professor Hanan Saber Mohammed Saeed Almazrouei, in the College of Business and Economics at UAEU. This work has not previously formed the basis for the award of any academic degree, diploma or a similar title at this or any other university. Any materials borrowed from other sources (whether published or unpublished) and relied upon or included in my dissertation have been properly cited and acknowledged in accordance with appropriate academic conventions. I further declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, data collection, authorship, presentation, and/or publication of this dissertation.

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation details a post-pandemic qualitative investigation conducted to understand the impact of hybrid working solutions on reshaping the employee value proposition (EVP) in the health insurance industry of the UAE. The research aims to evaluate how the introduction of modern hybrid working solutions impacts employees in a post-pandemic environment and, in turn, whether this creates a demand for human resources to refocus drivers of the EVP. Traditionally, EVP is referred to as the overall give-and-get in an employment deal; however, the pandemic was an eye-opener for organizations to redefine what it entails. Since hybrid working has become the new norm across the corporate world, this research can be viewed as shedding light on a topical social issue. The consequences of a pandemic are cyclical; therefore, examining those at the receiving end of impacts is warranted. The study follows an interpretive research approach to investigate employee perception, awareness, and assumptions on the transformative organizational shift toward hybrid working and its impact on the employees and the EVP. Although several empirical studies have been conducted concerning remote work and work from home [WFH] in a post-pandemic environment, the author identifies a void in academic qualitative research in investigating the impact hybrid working arrangement has made on the employee way of life (i.e., quality of life and employment relationship) and organizational EVP that is essential for envisioning future talent strategies. Furthermore, the lack of theoretical frameworks to design or reshape the EVP is a crucial limitation identified in the existing literature. Existing academic research does not justify whether hybrid working is a driver or enabler of EVP. As part of the investigation, the research strategy and results of the study are sieved through the theoretical framework developed by the author based on Kurt Lewin's (1951) Force Field Analysis theory to identify possibilities of triggering negative and positive effects of change. The need to reshape EVP is determined based on the negative impacts of change. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups are utilized to provide qualitative evidence; specifically, data collected from 26 respondents are thematically analyzed using NVivo, and the impact of hybrid working on the EVP is discussed in detail. Finally, the conceptual framework crafted for the EVP gap analysis is aimed at bridging a gap in academic literature and providing guidance for the application of theory in practice.

**Keywords:** Employee Value Proposition (EVP), Hybrid Working Solutions, Post-Pandemic Study, Employee Perspective, Financial and Nonfinancial Factors.

## Title and Abstract (in Arabic)

تأثير العمل المختلط على نمط حياة الموظف والحاجة إلى إعادة تشكيل مقترح قيمة الموظف

### الملخص

تعرض هذه الأطروحة تفاصيل بحث نوعي بعد جائحة الكورونا تم إجراؤه لفهم تأثير حلول العمل المختلطة على إعادة تشكيل عرض قيمة الموظف (EVP) في صناعة التأمين الصحي في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة. الغرض من البحث هو تقييم كيفية تأثير إدخال حلول العمل المختلطة الحديثة على الموظفين في بيئة ما بعد الجائحة، وبالتالي، ما إذا كان هذا يخلق طلبًا على الموارد البشرية لإعادة تركيز محركات EVP. تقليديًا، يُشار إلى EVP على أنه الأخذ والعطاء الشامل في صفقة التوظيف، ولكن الجائحة كانت بمثابة مفاجأة للمؤسسات تقضي بتعريف الـEVP. وبما أن العمل المختلط أصبح هو المعيار الجديد في جميع أنحاء عالم الشركات، يمكن النظر إلى هذا البحث على أنه يسلط الضوء على قضية اجتماعية ذات أهمية موضوعية. إن عواقب الوباء دورية ولذلك هناك ما يبرر فحص أولئك الذين هم في الطرف المتلقي للتأثيرات. تتبع الدراسة منهجًا بحثيًا تفسيريًا للتحقيق في إدراك الموظفين ووعيهم وافترضااتهم حول التحول التنظيمي التحويلي نحو العمل المختلط وتأثيره على الموظفين والـEVP. على الرغم من إجراء العديد من الدراسات التجريبية فيما يتعلق بالعمل عن بعد والعمل من المنزل في بيئة ما بعد الجائحة، إلا أن الباحث يحدد الفراغ في البحث الأكاديمي في التحقيق في تأثير ترتيبات العمل الهجين على أسلوب حياة الموظف (أي جودة الحياة والتوظيف) وEVP التنظيمي الذي يعد ضروريًا لتصور استراتيجيات المواهب المستقبلية. وعلاوة على ذلك، فإن الافتقار إلى الأطر النظرية لتصميم أو إعادة تشكيل EVP هو أحد القيود الرئيسية المحددة في الأدبيات الموجودة. لا تبرز الأبحاث الأكاديمية الحالية ما إذا كان العمل المختلط هو المحرك أو التمكين لـEVP. وكجزء من البحث، تم غرلة استراتيجية البحث ونتائج الدراسة من خلال الإطار النظري الذي وضعه الباحث بناءً على نظرية تحليل مجال القوة لكورت لوين لتحديد احتمالات إحداث تأثيرات سلبية وإيجابية للتغيير. يتم تحديد الحاجة إلى إعادة تشكيل EVP بناءً على التأثيرات السلبية للتغيير. يتم استخدام المقابلات شبه المنظمة ومجموعات التركيز لتقديم أدلة نوعية؛ على وجه التحديد، يتم تحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها من 26 مشاركًا بشكل موضوعي باستخدام NVivo، وتتم مناقشة تأثير العمل المختلط على EVP بالتفصيل. وأخيرًا، فإن الإطار الفهمي الذي تم إعداده لتحليل فجوة الـEVP يقوم بسد الفجوة في الأدبيات الأكاديمية والتطبيق النظري في الممارسة العملية.

**مفاهيم البحث الرئيسية:** عرض قيمة الموظف (EVP)، حلول العمل الهجين، دراسة ما بعد الوباء، منظور الموظف، العوامل المالية وغير المالية.

## **Author's Contribution**

The contribution of Kanishka Chandanamali Athalage to the dissertation was as follows:

- I. Research a timely, relevant topic that will add value to the field of research in human resource management; evaluate existing literature; scrutinize theoretical frameworks in relation to the topic under discussion; and rationalize the relevance and validity of the research study in front of the DBA proposal evaluation committee.
- II. Post-approval, strategize and plan the scope of work; detail the depth and breadth of the qualitative investigation; identify the research logic, methods, and potential respondents for data collection; and determine relevant data analysis methods for processing and evaluation of results.
- III. Take sole responsibility for planning the research and conducting the experiments.

## Author Profile



Kanishka Chandanamali Athalage is currently a senior human resources (HR) business advisor responsible for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa regions of a global wellness organization. She has 14 years of HR and Finance experience, having worked in the banking, financial services, and insurance industries covering Europe, Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East regions. Kanishka specializes in HR transformational projects, such as new-business set-ups, mergers and acquisitions, and driving organizational development and change-management initiatives. In her past employment, she was awarded global secondment opportunities to work in cities such as Luxembourg, Munich, and Singapore.

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## Dedication

*To my hard work and perseverance!  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by  
And today, I let the readers of this thesis decide if that has made a difference.*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EVP	Employee Value Proposition
FFA	Force Field Analysis
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
RBV	Resource-Based View
RQ	Research Question
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAEU	United Arab Emirates University
WHO	World Health Organization
WFH	Work From Home





## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Globally, all industries underwent a tremendous change due to the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) in March 2020, and the healthcare industry has been at the frontline to combat this global crisis. Across regions, working modalities synchronized onto digital platforms in a matter of hours. Job roles that were mandated to be onsite were forced to find virtual solutions. Stabilizing businesses in a post-pandemic economy became a possibility with the introduction of remote and onsite working arrangements. This blend of traditional in-office work and remote work is referred to as “hybrid working”.

Returning to work post-pandemic has created new perspectives and challenges for organizations to review and adjust. As the economic downturn continued, organizational leaders were compelled to act prudently to protect profit margins as well as retain talent in the remote workspace. Within the healthcare industry, the pandemic has been viewed as a key accelerator for all facets of digital interventions. Considering that the medical service industry has embraced remote and onsite working as a long-term solution to manage service levels and employee expectations, there is a need to explore the effect of such hybrid arrangements on the employee way of life inclusive of employment relationship from the viewpoint of employees who are at the receiving end of the value chain.

It is a well-worn adage that change is the only constant; in addition, any changes triggered in the external environment are bound to impact the internal environment of an industry or an entity. Similarly, changes occurring to an employee’s way of life contribute to the activation of new perceptions, viewpoints, and demands. Therefore, this study investigates the impact of hybrid working (i.e., remote and onsite working) on employee way of life and inquire whether the changes experienced by employees are triggering a need to reshape organizations’ employee value proposition (EVP) within health insurance industry.

Employee Value Proposition (EVP) is a concept used in human resources and talent management to describe the unique set of benefits and rewards that an organization offers to its employees in exchange for their skills, expertise, and commitment to the company.

Having a unique EVP is a point of distinction for employers; therefore, the EVP sets the organizational foundation for talent-attraction and -retention strategies. The EVP details components of an employment deal, which is then communicated via the employer brand. Thus, the present research centers around the concept of the EVP and not employer branding. The researcher’s aim is to investigate how hybrid working in a post pandemic environment can cause changes to employee needs, wants, perceptions, and feelings—the overall employee way of life and whether these changes need to be incorporated when defining future EVP drivers of the health insurance industry in the UAE. A theoretical investigation into employee feelings and perceptions forms the basis for an interpretivist inductive study. The characteristics of qualitative research and fundamentals of interpretivist paradigm are being discussed in the later part of this chapter.

A recent study conducted by KPMG (Mehrotra & Stolz, 2020, pp. 14–15) on the workforce of the UAE healthcare industry cautioned that the World Health Organization (WHO) has predicted a global shortfall of 18 million health workers by the year 2030. In addition, since the UAE is an expatriate-dominant labor market, with Emiratis making up 12% of the country’s population (Mehrotra & Stolz, 2020, pp. 14–15), there is a need to lay a solid foundation for future talent attraction and retention within the industry while minimizing possibilities for “brain drain”—that is, losing locally accumulated knowledge and developed talent to foreign countries.

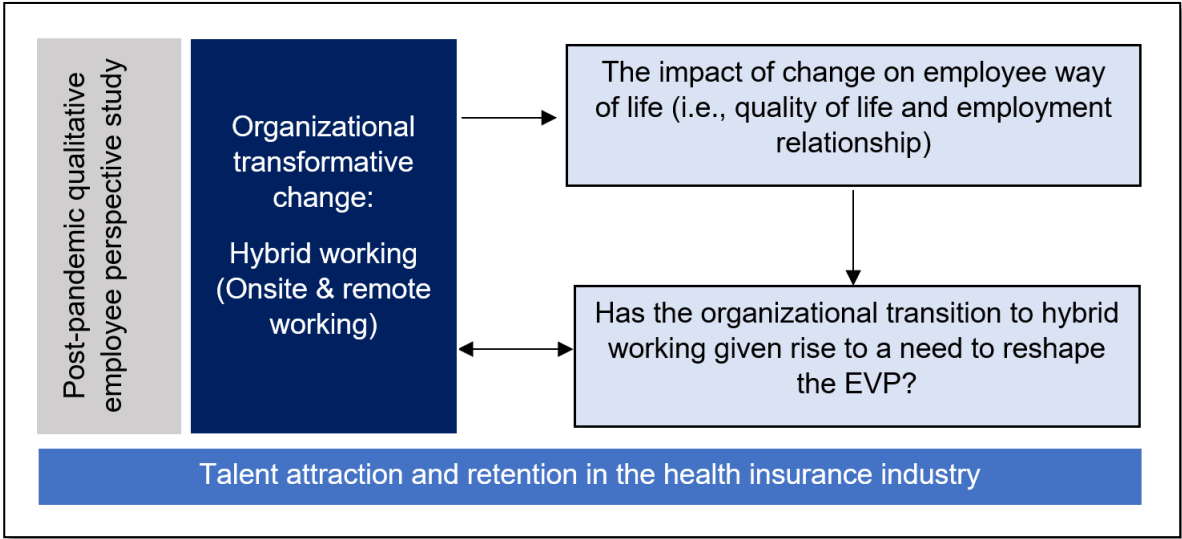


Figure 1: Summary of the Research Topic

As illustrated in Figure 2, the UAE’s health insurance industry primarily consists of reinsurers, insurers, third-party administrators, and brokers. Therefore, this qualitative investigation focuses on employees involved in providing primary health insurance services. Health insurers are the key drivers of the healthcare industry, and digitization in the healthcare ecosystem is impacting all facets of healthcare delivery.

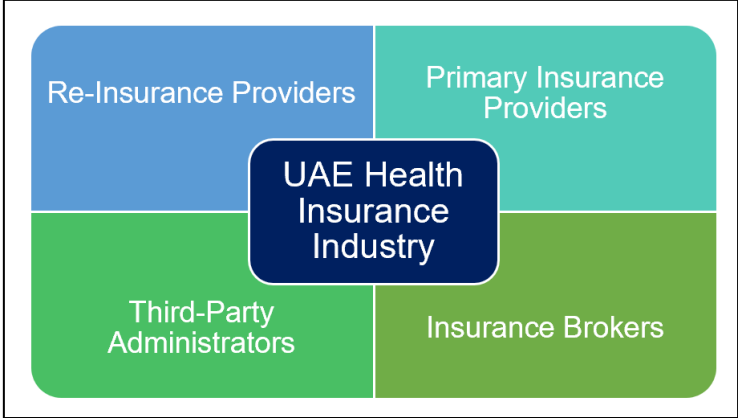


Figure 2: Segmentation of the UAE’s Health Insurance Industry

**1.1 Overview of the EVP and Hybrid Working**

In the human resources (HR) discipline, the EVP is viewed as a key contributor to talent-attraction and -retention strategies. A differentiated EVP that aligns with internal and external market changes can create a competitive advantage for firms, and a compelling employer brand.

Global HR research organization Gartner (2021) defined the EVP as a combination of attributes that the labor market and employees recognize as the value gained by being employed by an organization. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2022) has referred to the EVP as part of the employer’s branding strategy, stating that represents what the employer has to offer and pay, including aspects related to benefits and career development. According to Armstrong (2014), obtaining insights into EVP perceptions held by prospective and existing employees serves as a means of diagnosing the strength of the organization’s EVP. Naturally, individual perceptions can be influenced by multiple factors in various dimensions; therefore, in an organizational context, it is

important to analyze how uncontrollable interventions can disrupt or build a firm's EVP capabilities.

In the next chapter, a literature review will be conducted to provide an in-depth representation of theoretical views of the EVP. This will include definitions and attributes of the EVP, conceptual models developed by HR scholars, and detailed discussion on the relevance of the EVP to the current context. One of the most discussed themes in EVP literature has been whether employer branding is an outcome of the EVP or is part of the EVP itself. In the business world, the success of theoretical frameworks depends upon their practical applicability; thus, discovering drivers of the EVP within an industry massively transforming and adopting hybrid working modalities will enable future talent growth.

Hybrid working models became quintessential as industries began to recover from the global Covid-19 pandemic. Theoretical definitions related to hybrid or flexible working solutions are still taking shape in the field of HR, yet there is no doubt that organizations have been compelled to reimagine the office and work life in the wake of Covid-19. Nisa et al. (2022, p.2), highlight that hybrid working emerged as a solution to social distancing, "a blessing in disguise" and Katsande et al. (2022), support this idea by citing that pandemic accelerated wide spread of hybrid work across industries and countries. The recent studies on hybrid working focus on understanding different hybrid models, identifying relationship between hybrid working and productivity, factors contributing to support hybrid working. The relationship between hybrid working and EVP in a post covid environment is an area that appears to be an untapped territory in the field of human resource management. Smite et al. (2023), deconstructed terminology related to future workplace and described boundaries of hybrid work pertaining to remote and telework. While characterizing the spectrum of hybrid working the author has attempted to discuss different types of hybrid arrangements. Kurniasari and Ibrahim (2022), focus on the dependency and inter-relationship between age, work tenure, attitude, and productivity. The research results clearly indicate that age and attitude towards hybrid can impact employee productivity. This leads to the question of what perceptions; awareness levels or attitudes employees hold towards hybrid working to influence productivity within an organization. Interestingly, Hopkins and Bardoel (2023) latest study

reveal that hybrid is the most adopted working arrangement among knowledge workers and the transition claim to have offered better work life balance and greater job satisfaction. It is reassuring that organizations need to think beyond how to make hybrid solutions sustainable and what changes need to be made in retaining and attracting future talent. Barrero et al. (2020) assessed productivity impact of working from home in a call center environment. The research provides supporting evidence that WFH positively influences productivity. Based on emerging research studies, the author argues that transitioning of hybrid working has impacted employee experience, attitude, perception and feelings. It is worthy to understand the depth and nature of impact that hybrid arrangements can create at an employee level. Changes embraced and welcomed by employees will translate into organizational reality. This further clarifies the author’s intention to investigate whether the impact on the employee’s way of life has given rise to a need to reshape the EVP.

From a statistical lens, post-Covid, 52% of the global workforce prefer to blend working in the office with working remotely (McKinsey & Company, 2021), as depicted in Figure 3. From the Middle East perspective, Sharma (2021) reported that 38% of professionals in the region prefer to work permanently from home while 32% opt for a hybrid working model.

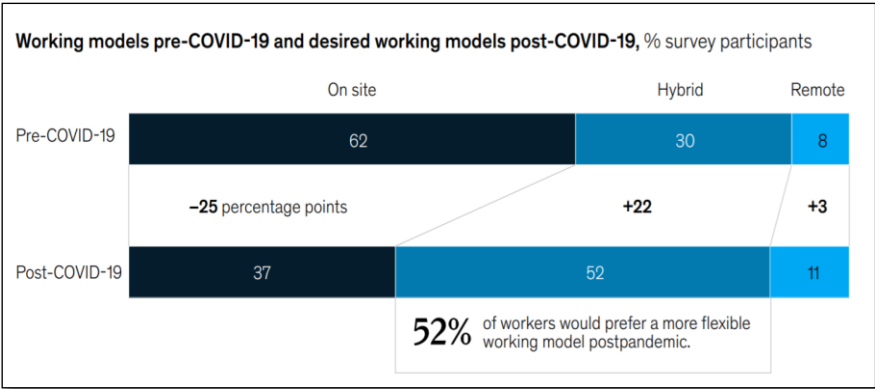


Figure 3: Hybrid working in the Middle East

Therefore, the present study investigates the impact of hybrid working on employee way of life and seeks to identify any gaps in existing EVP drivers within the health

insurance sector of the UAE. To do so, there is a need to understand the contextual meaning and differences in the concepts of remote, hybrid, and flexible working solutions (this will be detailed in Section 1.4.8).

As the study concentrates on the health insurance sector, the following sections provide an overview of global-, regional-, and country-specific healthcare market trends covering the pre- and post-pandemic eras.

### *1.1.1 The Healthcare Market Trends: Global, Regional and Local*

A study on investment options and private healthcare growth opportunities for the GCC region conducted by Deloitte (Gohari & Alabdulrazzak, 2012, pp. 26–31) highlighted that predominant factors impacting health services are demographic and macroeconomic. Interestingly even in the pre-pandemic era (i.e., in 2012, when Gohari and Alabdulrazzak conducted their study), a shortage of healthcare professionals was emphasized as an impeding factor for growth opportunities due to the limited availability of medical education institutes to attract and retain highly qualified healthcare professionals.

A study on the national transformation agenda in the Middle East region conducted by Deloitte (Durou & Nazir, 2017, pp. 15–23) demonstrated that digital transformation has been highly prominent across all GCC governments, and that the healthcare industry has been an important part of this transformation journey. The study revealed demand for advanced medical equipment and digital solutions to monitor health diseases as key emerging trends in the GCC. Cost and budget pressures, citizen demands, and federal government directives were indicated as the top three drivers of digital transformation (Durou & Nazir, 2017, pp. 5–6). The future vision for GCC digital transformation trends includes six high-impact themes among the UAE, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait: smart cities, smart tourism, next-generation care, classrooms of the future, smart government, and the future of mobility. Next-generation care, which relates to the healthcare industry, was explained as “pervasive, preventative, efficient and personalized care through information and communications technology (ICT) usage leading to higher quality and improved patient experience” (Durou & Nazir, 2017, pp. 5–6).

The above reiterates the fact that, prior to the pandemic, the GCC healthcare industry was gearing up for digital transformation, while recruiting and retaining skilled healthcare workers was a prevailing challenge.

Prior to the emergence of Covid-19, global healthcare market expenditure was valued at USD 8.3 trillion, which is 10% of global gross domestic product (WHO, 2020, pp 2–3). The Global Health Expenditure Database (GHED, 2023) has indicated that overall healthcare expenditure increased to USD 9 trillion by the end of 2020. The World Economic Forum updates for December 2020, reported in Khaleej Times (Abbas, 2020) has stated that the UAE proved itself to be highly resilient to the Covid-19 pandemic due to the country's political and policy stability, strong financial system, and adaptation of technology. A survey by Willis Towers Watson (2020) reported that 90% of insurers in the Middle East and Africa markets expected an increase in medical expenses for the three years from 2020–2023, and that there are early signs that the region is geared toward adopting more telehealth solutions at the time of healthcare policy renewals. This raises the questions of whether the rise in telehealth creates new jobs, and whether healthcare employers have the resources to cater to the rising demand in the healthcare industry.

Mehrotra and Stolz (2020, p. 5) examined post-pandemic outcomes in the GCC's healthcare industry and indicated that key market players are pivoting toward mergers and acquisitions within the region. Such trends in the healthcare market are triggering new challenges for HR professionals, but healthcare employees are benefiting from new and expanded career opportunities.

### *1.1.2 UAE Healthcare Landscape: Pre- and Post-Pandemic*

According to U.S.-U.A.E. Business Council (2019), the UAE's healthcare market stood at USD 15.3 billion in 2018 and was expected to reach USD 20.3 billion by 2020 prior to the breakout of the pandemic. Chaudshary (2018), reported in GulfNews that UAE takes the lead in digital healthcare investments in the Middle East region. Mehrotra and Stolz (2020) have reported that the UAE represents 26% of total medical spending in the GCC and is listed among the top 20 countries in healthcare spending per capita, at USD 1,200. Mehrotra and Stolz (2020, pp. 10–13) stated that country is at the forefront of

implementing digital healthcare solutions, in line with the country’s Vision 2021 national agenda.

The Ministry of Health and Prevention (2021) innovation strategy is aiming to make the UAE a leading international destination for future smart healthcare through the renovation of healthcare services and the achievement of a world-class healthcare system to tackle and prevent lifestyle illnesses, such as heart disease and diabetes, that are prevalent in the region. According to Global Competitiveness Report issued by World Economic Forum (Schwab & Zahidi, 2020, pp. 17–18), the UAE was ranked second in ICT adoption and fourth in digital legal framework in the year 2020. These rankings further indicate the UAE’s ability to successfully combat global crises. As shown in Figure 4, two areas where the UAE does not rank highly are flexible work arrangements and digital skills. This strengthens the argument that there is a need to investigate the impact of hybrid working arrangements in the region.

Top ten countries on ICT adoption, flexible work arrangements, digital skills and digital legal framework

	ICT adoption		Flexible work arrangements		Digital skills		Digital legal framework	
1	Korea, Rep.	93.7	Netherlands	82.7	Finland	84.3	United States	78.0
2	United Arab Emirates	92.3	New Zealand	77.7	Sweden	79.5	Luxembourg	77.4
3	Hong Kong SAR	90.2	Switzerland	75.8	Estonia	77.9	Singapore	76.5
4	Sweden	89.7	Estonia	75.0	Iceland	77.6	United Arab Emirates	72.5
5	Japan	88.3	United States	74.2	Netherlands	77.3	Malaysia	70.0
6	Singapore	88.1	Luxembourg	73.6	Singapore	77.3	Estonia	69.3
7	Iceland	87.8	China	73.6	Israel	76.5	Sweden	67.9
8	Norway	84.7	Australia	72.9	Denmark	74.7	Finland	67.7
9	Qatar	83.9	Finland	72.5	Saudi Arabia	74.1	Germany	67.3
10	Lithuania	83.8	Denmark	72.4	Korea, Rep.	73.0	Netherlands	65.5

Figure 4: UAE Rankings (Source: Schwab & Zahidi, 2020)

Regarding post-pandemic market trends, the UAE’s health regulators are keen to roll out artificial intelligence-enabled and digitized solutions across the healthcare industry (Mehrotra & Stolz, 2020). Private healthcare investment is expected to grow by 9.5% annually (Ndichu, 2020). According to the Global Medical Tourism Index 2021



(Medical Tourism, 2020), Dubai and Abu Dhabi ranked sixth and ninth as the most recommended destinations for medical tourism (Mehrotra & Stolz, 2020, pp. 15). Omnia Health (Das, 2020) has estimated that the telehealth market in the UAE will expand at a compound annual growth rate of 25% in 2020–2025. The report further emphasized that the remote patient monitoring market in the UAE is an unexplored area due to the high percentage of young people residing in the country. Meanwhile, a KPMG report stated that 82% of physicians and 96% of nurses in the UAE’s healthcare industry are expats (Mehrotra & Stolz, 2020); hence, there is a need to have robust talent strategies in place. Thus, the present qualitative investigation focuses on the UAE’s health insurance industry given the anticipated changes in the external environment. Organizations need to be well-prepared to upskill their talent to meet healthcare trends, manage people challenges that surface due to the adoption of flexible working arrangements, and, most importantly, stay competitive to attract and retain the best talent in the market.

## **1.2 Problem Statement and Research Questions**

Returning to work or bringing employees back into an organizational environment following the Covid-19 pandemic became a social dilemma in 2021, and adaptation of hybrid working solutions helped in resolving many challenges. While working both onsite and virtually has become a long-term solution embedded into corporate DNA, this has triggered a shift in employee needs and expectations. It is important to understand employee feelings, attitudes, perceptions, experiences resulting from transitioning to hybrid working, as these constitute the “pulse” of organizations. In light of related changes, the traditional benefits architecture and other drivers of an organization’s EVP may no longer fit the remote–onsite hybrid working environment.

As mentioned above, the UAE’s healthcare sector is projected to grow and digitally transform to cater to evolving consumer demands, thereby taking on greater importance in attracting and retaining talent. Hybrid working is a form of flexible working that can support global or local healthcare market demands and emerging new job roles in the industry. However, the magnitude of positive and negative changes hybrid working can bring to employees’ way of life, and whether employers need to reevaluate the

organizational EVP, is unclear. To be future-workforce ready, it is vital for employers to understand what drives and inhibits employees from embracing hybrid working solutions.

Based on preliminary findings (emerging industry trends and UAE healthcare market challenges) mentioned in earlier sections of this chapter, it can be argued that the healthcare industry was revolutionized through the outbreak of the pandemic. Further, the introduction of hybrid working modalities has created new employee-level expectations, challenges, and opportunities that have yet to be fully explored.

The research problem considered in this work is based on the following statement:

A lack of awareness of the impact of hybrid working on employees' way of life (i.e., quality of life and employment relationship) may have caused EVP drivers to become outdated and unattractive for future talent attraction and retention.

Therefore, this study focuses on the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: How has the organizational transition to hybrid working impacted employees' way of life?

RQ2: Has the organizational transition to hybrid working given rise to a need to reshape the EVP?

The answers to the above two questions will help to ensure talent retention among existing employees and talent attraction among prospective employees in the health insurance industry of the UAE. Therefore, the two research questions are interrelated and complementary to each other.

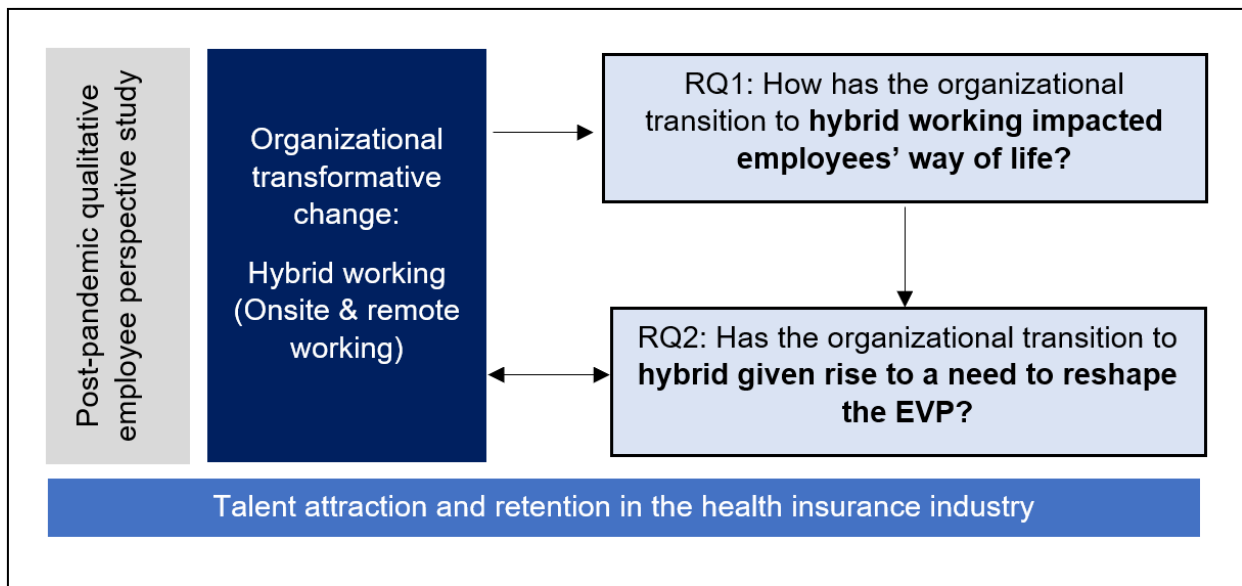


Figure 5: Research Questions of the Study

### 1.2.1 Defining the Research Questions and Key Concepts:

In RQ1, employee way of life is defined as the extent to which employee quality of life and the employment relationship have been impacted due to the introduction of hybrid working. Answering this question will enhance understanding of the research problem regarding awareness and perception pertaining to the overall concept of hybrid arrangements, which, to date, have been unexamined.

Linked to RQ1, RQ2 seeks to determine whether the organizational transition to hybrid working has given rise to a need to reevaluate the EVP. For the purpose of this research study, “the need to reshape the EVP” is defined and measured according to employees’ lived experiences on hybrid working against EVP drivers. The elements of EVP drivers are defined as a combination of three elements (financial rewards, nonfinancial rewards, and employment experience). Answering RQ2 will contribute to identifying and theorizing the relationship between the hybrid working experience and EVP drivers in the context of the post-pandemic era.

In this thesis, several phrases are used interchangeably in constructing the work and clarifying research questions (see Figure 5). These are (a) “triggering a need” and “giving rise to a need”; (b) “organizational change” and “organizational transition”; and (c) “transitioning to hybrid working” and “the impact of hybrid working”.

In qualitative research, the magnitude of change or the real impact is measured based on employee viewpoints, perceptions, attitudes, and feelings. The extant research referenced in this section has pointed out that the evolution of hybrid working will continue to be shaped by ongoing developments in technology, changes in work culture, and the preferences and needs of employees and organizations. Therefore, the findings of the study will enable firms within the UAE health insurance sector to strengthen their EVP and talent-attraction and retention strategies.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The study aims to achieve the following key research objectives:

- Objective 1: Understand overall perceptions and awareness on the concept of hybrid work among health insurance workers in the UAE.
- Objective 2: Investigate the (positive or negative) impact of change on employees' way of life (i.e., quality of life and employment relationship) due to transitioning to hybrid working.
- Objective 3: Identify any gaps between the employee experience of hybrid working and EVP drivers to determine the need to reshape the EVP.
- Objective 4: Make suitable recommendations to enhance the employee hybrid experience and to reshape the EVP to ensure talent attraction and retention in the UAE health insurance sector.

### **1.4 Literature Review**

The section is dedicated towards defining key concepts pertaining to the research study. It entails definitions of EVP, enablers of the EVP, the characteristics and architecture of the EVP, theoretical arguments and findings on the EVP, the role of HR and line managers in the EVP, and finally hybrid working in the context of the post-pandemic era. The findings of this section will set the baseline for crafting a research strategy for this study.

#### *1.4.1 Characteristics of Qualitative Research*

Qualitative research involves finding out what people think, and how they feel—or, at least, what they say they think and how they say they feel. This kind of information

is subjective; it involves feelings and impressions, rather than numbers (Bellenger et al., 1976). On the other hand, a key characteristic of quantitative research is its emphasis on objectivity, wherein researchers seek to minimize subjectivity via use of statistical evaluation methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Data for quantitative research are collected through surveys and experiments (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated that a primary difference between qualitative and quantitative research is that findings of qualitative research are not derived as a result of any statistical procedures or other means of quantification. According to Lewis (2015), qualitative research involves the collection and analysis of nonnumerical data to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is open-ended and flexible, allowing researchers to explore more complex social phenomena (Lekan et al., 2021). Qualitative research methods differ based on the nature of the research questions. Common methods include interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis (Lekan et al., 2021). Ahren and Champan (2006) defined five aspects that are central to qualitative research: methodology, method, theory, hypothesis, and domain. The features are intertwined and contribute to defining the qualitative research process. First, the methodology specifies the approach toward the research study and is connected to the research question. Second, the method must fit the theory, methodology, and hypothesis, and therefore the selected research technique must bring all these aspects together. Third, the theory is a set of explanatory concepts useful to justify a research question. Fourth, the hypothesis validates the research question, and is a testable proposition. Ahren and Champan (2006) stated that hypotheses are not mentioned in qualitative research but are explicitly posited in quantitative research: “The key point of distinction is not the presence or absence of hypotheses, but the intent of a study to shed light on certain aspects that are held to be objectively real or part of social reality (Ahren & Champan, 2006, p. 824)”. Finally, domain is another supporting factor to address the research questions (Ahren & Champan, 2006), as it defines the space in which data are collected. The combination of these five features supports the researcher in achieving their research objectives.

The goal of qualitative research is to identify patterns, themes, and relationships with data, and to discover deeper meaning behind the social phenomena under study

(McMullin, 2021). The researcher is a significant element of qualitative research, and plays an active role in data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Sperling, 2022). Aspers and Corte (2021) highlighted that once qualitative observations become commensurate with a ratio scale the research can no longer be considered qualitative. Coughlan et al. (2007) delineated the features of qualitative research as follows:

- a) Truth: There are multiple truths to qualitative research, and generalization is not sought.
- b) Purpose: the research purpose is concerned with discovery and provides a description of the research study.
- c) Emphasis: Researcher aims to understand the social world from the point of view of the participants.
- d) Approach: Research approach is primarily inductive.
- e) Relationship between researcher and participant: There is integration between researcher and participant, and interaction is valued.
- f) Sample: Usually small in number and consists of those who are willing and able to describe their experience.
- g) Data: Elicits soft data (i.e., words).
- h) Data collection: Includes methods such as interviewing, observations, and examination of personal documents and other printed materials.
- i) Analysis: The results analysis is a descriptive comparison rather than numerical presentation. However, certain numerical expressions are not precluded from qualitative research.
- j) Rigor (integrity of the research study): Refers to the study's credibility, transferability (fittingness), dependability, confirmability, and goodness. Credibility relates to maintaining the faithfulness of the research description (Koch & Harrington, 1998). Transferability is possible when the findings can be fit to other contexts and readers can relate it to their own experiences (Coughlan et al., 2007). Dependability means that the reader has sufficient information to audit the study's reliability (Coughlan et al., 2007). Confirmability is established when the researcher is able to demonstrate that findings were derived through qualitative data (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Goodness refers to the robustness of the research

philosophy, study design, data collection, and interpretation of the findings (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

Table 1 summarizes the differences between quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Mehrad et al., 2019, p. 4)

Table 1: The Differences between Quantitative and Qualitative Research

<b>Quantitative Research</b>	<b>Qualitative Research</b>
Researcher defines the truth	Reality is defined by contributors
Researcher is self-determining	Researcher is an investigator and communicates as an observer
Ideas are reduced to statistics	Holistic viewpoint is used
Purpose is hypothesis confirmation	Purpose is hypothesis generation
Deductive reasoning	Inductive reasoning
Fixed research design	Flexible research design
Statistical manipulation required	Statistical testing not obligatory

As shown in Table 1, inductive and deductive reasoning are widely used theoretical terminologies to explain quantitative and qualitative research. Bryman (2012, p. 711) defined deductive reasoning as “an approach to the relationship between theory and research in which the latter is conducted with reference to hypotheses and ideas inferred from the former”. Inductive reasoning is described as “an approach to the relationship between theory and research in which the former is generated out of the latter” (Bryman, 2012, p. 712). Hayes and Heit (2007), cited inductive reasoning as the use of existing knowledge and observations to reach novel ideas. Delaney et al. (2016) emphasized that validity creation is a key criterion of deductive reasoning that is not applicable under inductive logic. An inductive logic is associated with strength of the argument and evidence that substantiate the conclusion. Rotello and Heit (2009), stated that inductive reasoning can complement findings that emerge from deductive research.

Based on the theoretical explanations, research problem, and objectives outlined in previous sections, this research adopts dynamics of qualitative research with a view to identifying and developing new theories. In Chapter 2, Section 2.2, the author explains in detail the relevance and applicability of the abovementioned characteristics pertaining to

the research study titled “post pandemic employee perspective study: A qualitative investigation on the impact of hybrid working on employee way of life and the need to reshape the employee value proposition in the health insurance industry of the UAE”.

#### *1.4.2 Applicable Research Philosophy and Research Paradigm*

Research philosophy comprises the underlying beliefs and assumptions that guide the researcher’s approach to conducting research (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Waiter and Hawker (2009, p. 685) defined “philosophy” as “a set or system of beliefs stemming from the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence”. The research paradigm has been explained as “a framework that guides how research should be conducted, based on people’s philosophies and their assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge” (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 43). According to Bryman (2012), ontological and epistemological research philosophies contribute to building a research paradigm. Ontology is the theory of the nature of social entities (Bryman, 2012, p. 714) whereas epistemology is theory of knowledge (Bryman, 2012, p. 713). Harrits (2013) explained that ontological assumptions refer to the nature of reality, whereas epistemological assumptions focus on the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is acquired. Rutherford (2011) defined epistemological research as theories of knowledge that specify how we come to know what we know, while Malabed (2018) stated that epistemological research problems raise questions about the nature and certainty of knowledge. Bleiker et al. (2019) suggested that ontology refers to objective reality, the nature of social constructs, and the relationship between the researcher and what is being researched. Kamal (2019) highlighted the difference between ontology and epistemology, emphasizing that an epistemological position queries the source of knowledge, the role of the researcher, and the criteria for determining the validity and reality of knowledge acquired. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) drew attention to components of a paradigm that are a combination of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods. Similarly, Crotty (1998) highlighted basic elements of the research process stemming from epistemology that provide theoretical perspectives leading to determining the research methodology and governing methods. In essence, extant work has suggested that the choice of ontology and epistemology in research shapes the research design, methods, and interpretation of findings.



According to scholars of social science, positivism, interpretivism, and realism are three of the dominant research paradigms. Saunders et al. (2009) stated that there are four research philosophies: positivism, interpretivism, realism, and pragmatism. Collis and Hussey (2014) classified research paradigms into positivism and interpretivism. Bryman (2012, p. 714) defined positivism as “an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond”, whereas interpretivism is “an epistemological position that requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action (p.712). Bryman’s (2012, p. 715) definition of realism suggests that it is “an epistemological position that acknowledges a reality independent of the senses that is accessible to the researcher’s tools and theoretical speculations”. Collis and Hussey (2014) further described positivism as a paradigm that positions social reality are objective and stated that research execution involves a deductive process to understand social phenomena. The authors also drew attention to the fact that positivism has its roots in philosophy of realism, and that researchers follow quantitative methods to measure outcomes. An alternative to positivism is interpretivism (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Cohen and Manion (1994, p. 36) stated that interpretivism focuses on understanding the “world of human experience”. Creswell (2008, p. 8) highlighted that an interpretivist approach to research “[relies] on the participant view of the situation being studied”. In principle, interpretivism often employs qualitative research methods to gather rich, detailed data, and seeks to uncover the meanings and nuances behind social phenomena.

Table 2 summarizes the key differences between positivism and interpretivism (Hudson & Ozanne, 1998).

Table 2: The Differences between Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches to Research

<b>Assumptions</b>	<b>Positivism (Positivist Approach to Research)</b>	<b>Interpretivism (Interpretivist Approach to Research)</b>
<b>Epistemological</b>		
Knowledge generated	Time-free Context-independent	Time-bound Context-dependent
View of causality	The existence of real causes	Multiple simultaneous shaping events
Research relationship	Separation between researcher and subject	Interactive and cooperative, with researcher being part of the phenomena under study
<b>Ontological</b>		
Nature of reality	Objective, tangible Single	Socially constructed Multiple
Goal	Prediction	Understanding
<b>Methodology</b>		
Techniques used by the researcher	Formalized statistical and mathematical method	Primarily qualitative

Table 3 compares positivism and interpretivism according to Collis and Hussey (2014, p. 50).

Table 3: Comparison on Features of Positivism and Interpretivism

Positivism tends to...	Interpretivism tends to...
Use large samples	Use small samples
Have an artificial location	Have a natural location
Be concerned with hypothesis testing	Be concerned with generating theories
Produce precise, objective, quantitative data	Produce rich, subjective, qualitative data
Produce data with high reliability yet low validity	Produce data with high validity yet low reliability
Allows results to be generalized from the sample to the population	Allows findings to be generalized from one setting to another, similar, setting

As shown in Table 3, positivism and interpretivism occupy opposite ends of a continuum of paradigms. Reliability in the positivism paradigm tends to be higher than in the interpretivism paradigm. This is mainly due the fact that quantitative-positivist research has the ability to generate similar results should the research be replicated, whereas qualitative-interpretivist research produces results that are context-dependent, with greater emphasis on transferability (Coughlan et al., 2007), and can thus offer valuable insights to similar research problems.

According to Collis and Hussey (2014), the starting point for selecting a research design is identifying the relevant research paradigm. Based on the reviewed literature, the present study utilizes an epistemological research philosophy and adopts an interpretivist research paradigm. Based on the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, Section 1.2, the research study follows an inductive research logic as opposed to a deductive approach. The inductive, interpretivist research approach aims at theory-building, whereas the deductive, positivist reach approach deals with hypothesis-testing. Chapter 2 provides further discussion of the research design and methodology.

#### *1.4.3 Understanding the Key Concepts of EVP*

*A Dictionary for Human Resource Management* (Heery & Noon, 2017) defined the EVP as fundamental elements that distinguish working for a particular organization in the minds of prospective and current employees. The EVP comprises unique features that contribute to the overall employment experience. As it involves managing perceptions and expectations, the EVP contributes to the creation of a psychological bond between

employers and employees. The EVP is conveyed through employer branding activities such as recruitment information; the corporate website and social media; the selection process; induction training and onboarding; and the organization's symbols, artifacts, narratives, and ways of working that constitute its culture. Therefore, the EVP is a key element of employer branding. Firms must consider whether to adopt one single EVP or apply a segmented EVP approach to address the diverse needs of the workforce.

Ariyanto and Kustini (2021) describes EVP as a positive contributor for employer attractiveness. Employer attractiveness is explained as the assumption which prospective employees hold of an organization (Bruen, 2012). Therefore, Ariyanto and Kustini (2021, p.115) highlight that it is important for organizations to take into consideration “capabilities of the organization, wishes or expectations of the prospective employees”. Parreira and Honours (2007), indicate that employer attractiveness enables employers to attract talent from both active and passive labor markets. The estimate is that “active candidates are 40% of the labour market and those employers with inefficient, unmanaged attraction strategy miss out on 60% of inactive pool of talent” (Parreira and Honours, 2007, p.23). This establishes the understanding that EVP and talent attraction strategies are positively correlated. Greening and Turban (2000), confirm that EVP plays a pivotal role in differentiating an organization among competitors in the field and in attracting high-quality candidates. Evidence based research signifies that a strong EVP promotes employer engagement, job satisfaction, commitment, leading to increased productivity and reduction in turnover rates (Liyan,2023) even in a post pandemic environment.

Pawar and Charak (2014, p.2), define EVP as “a mix of characteristics, benefits and ways of working in an organization”. The authors highlight that “EVP facilitates an organization to stand out and at the same time ensure that the “packing” reflects the contents” (Pawar and Charak, 2014, p.2). The statement referenced here is explained as EVP is a confirmation of how employees view their organization and true employee satisfaction is delivered through a strong EVP. The authors highlight not having a strong EVP as a costly mistake.

CIPD (2020a, pp. 5–6) defined the EVP as “what an organization stands for, requires and offers as an employer”. Reference is made to the notion of “psychological

contract”—that is, expectations, beliefs, ambitions, obligations, and assumptions perceived by the employer and employee. Defining the organization’s EVP is considered key to developing the employer’s brand. Rosethorn (2009, p. 23) delineated the EVP as the ratified definition of an employment deal—in other words, it defines the employee experience that employers promise to provide, and how that promise will be delivered.

SHRM (2011) compartmentalized the concept of the EVP into sub-elements, stating that it comprises what is offered by an employer in exchange for the productivity and performance of an employee. It encompasses the entire employee experience, from rewards and benefits to the opportunity for career development and intrinsic elements of management style, work environment, and culture. Branding the EVP signifies how all sub-elements are interpreted into an identity that links the employment brand to the corporate brand.

Rounak and Misra (2020) suggested that the EVP covers the entire end-to-end relationship between employer and employee, extending beyond monetary benefits and rewards.

According to Digest (2020), the EVP can be described as an employee’s experience of belonging to an organization combined with financial and nonfinancial benefits received in exchange for the effort-led value offered to the organization. Similarly, SHRM (2015) highlighted that a tailored EVP is the most effective, as it lasts and becomes part of the organizational fabric. Arasanmi and Krishna (2019) rationalized EVP as a diagnostic tool for organizational retention and engagement strategies.

According to Armstrong (2011), the EVP provides a compelling reason for talented employees to work for an organization. The difference between the EVP and employer branding is delineated as follows:

[The] EVP [persuades] employees to join or remain with the business, it includes factors such as remuneration—which is important but can be overemphasized compared with nonfinancial factors. In comparison, employer brand is the image presented by an organization as an employer of choice. (Armstrong, 2014, p. 211)

Salau et al. (2018) drew attention to determinants of the EVP, again looking beyond remuneration and analyzing factors such as work culture, career growth, work–life balance, training, and development as value generators for the employee. The study also pointed out that the EVP has become a key discussion point among emerging markets.

In sum, a reciprocal arrangement between employer and employee provides for an effective EVP for talent attraction and retention. Knowing what employees want and value builds a strong foundation for successful EVP; at the same time, incorrect assumptions can result in a weak EVP. Factors that contribute to the EVP differ from one organization to another yet remain within the HR framework of financial and nonfinancial benefits offered to employees. Moreover, keeping the EVP current and fresh, in line with internal and external market conditions, is essential. Finding the right balance between EVP and employee segments can generate a competitive advantage for an organization.

One limitation of the prevailing literature is that the EVP has not been compartmentalized and explained from both employer and employee perspectives. These perspectives are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: EVP from Employee versus Employer Perspectives

<b>Employee Perspective</b>	<b>Employer Perspective</b>
The EVP is what an organization offers in exchange for the employee’s efforts to make the company’s mission and vision a reality.	The EVP is a strategic tool for talent attraction, retention, engagement, and motivation to achieve business goals.

The above theoretical definitions and frameworks were introduced with respect to pre-pandemic environments when working patterns were considered normal. As the pandemic broke out across regions, organizations were forced to adopt remote-working models in the interest of individual well-being. Many then adopted hybrid models as the pandemic waned. This leads to the question of whether the above definitions of the EVP hold today, and whether elements of the EVP are relevant in the context of hybrid working models. These issues are the focus of the present study.

Panneerselvam & Balaraman (2022, p.201-207) conducted a research study on EVP in a post-Covid environment and suggests that employee experience is the new value proposition. The authors suggest that positive employment experience determines employee engagement and creates a “positive spiral” effect in the organization. The five critical elements that can enhance the employee experience in a post pandemic era are: considering employee experience is the function of work, engaging work culture, empowering technological platforms, flexible HR policies/ procedures and inclusive leadership behavior. Panneerselvam & Balaraman (2022), further confirm that it is extremely important for the EVP to be authentic, transparent and well aligned with organizations vision, mission and culture especially in the context of post pandemic environment. Laiyan (2023), investigated the effect of EVP and positive well-being on employee intention to stay within an organization. The results indicated that both EVP and well-being create a significant impact on the employee decision and furthermore in a post pandemic society, the psychological contract between the employer and employee and social identity (i.e. contribution to the community, corporate social responsibility and employer reputation as an ethical and empathic employer) can positively affect the relationship between EVP and employee intention to stay. Greening & Turban (2000) applied social identity theory to gauge the response of prospective applicants over socially responsible employers and the research results indicate that job applicants have a high self-image when working for employers who prioritize corporate social responsibility. Since Greening & Turban (2000) study was conducted in a pre-Covid era, in future research it would be worthy to explore post-Covid relationship between EVP and perceptions on employer behavior in corporate social responsibility.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives are often considered as a reflection of good employer behavior (Laiyan, 2023). CSR is referred to as the organization’s commitment to the community in which it operates. Demonstrations of ethical behavior and transparent stakeholder management can enhance organizational trust and social standing (Surroca et al., 2009) among potential and existing employees. Therefore, during organizational transition, any risks that can generate reputational damage need to be identified and addressed as a priority (Kotter, 2004). Greening and Turban (2000) suggested that employees have a high social identity when they are employed by an

organization that is socially responsible, while Panneerselvam and Balaraman (2022) posited that a transparent and authentic EVP can reflect positively on organizational reputation. Hoppe (2018) explored the relationship between the EVP and CSR, finding that perceived employer brand image can influence employee brand attitudes and behaviors. A strong EVP that includes CSR aspects can thus attract employees who are seeking employment opportunities beyond competitive compensation or career growth and value working for an employer that creates positive impacts in society. The power dynamics within an organization can influence the CSR strategies, policies, and initiatives of an organization, while the nature of power and control within an organization influences the decision-making process, resource allocation, organizational values, and culture. Accordingly, power and social dynamics can affect CSR initiatives. An imbalance in power within an organization can lead to CSR initiatives lacking authenticity and purpose, and to disengaged employees (Phiri et al., 2018). On the other hand, ethical and transparent communication on CSR initiatives can positively influence the EVP and shape the experience of employees and other key stakeholders. In essence, CSR and the EVP are interrelated and interwoven aspects of an organization's overall strategy.

The present study seeks to understand employee perceptions and experiences within an organization transitioning to hybrid working arrangements, and whether this has had a positive or a negative impact on employer identity or reputation. Areas that have a negative impact on organizational reputation indicate a need to reshape the EVP.

#### *1.4.4 Defining Employees' Way of Life and the EVP*

Employees' way of life refers to the overall lifestyle, values, and experiences of individuals within the context of the work environment. It encapsulates various aspects of employees' personal and professional life influenced by the nature of their work, the working environment, and the organizational culture. As outlined in the RQs (Section 1.2.1), in this study employee way of life is viewed and measured in relation to two aspects: the impact of hybrid working on employee quality of life and the employment relationship. Considering these two aspects in combination can facilitate obtaining an holistic view of the (positive or negative) impacts experienced by employees in their personal and professional lives due to transitioning to hybrid arrangements.



#### *1.4.5 Quality of Life, Quality of Work Life and the EVP*

Quality of life differs from one individual to another based on that individual's priorities in life. It encompasses the individual's overall well-being; mental, physical, and economic health; social relationships; and the environment they live in. Farquhar (1995) stated that quality of life is a multidimensional construct that includes both subjective and objective aspects of well-being. Yuan (2001) highlighted factors within this concept such as employment, social connections, income, physical and mental status. According to Ventegodt et al. (2003), assessing quality of life entails the subjective evaluation of an individual's happiness, fulfillment, and satisfaction in life, as well as their access to objective indicators such as employment opportunities, healthcare, education, and infrastructure. In addition, Ventegodt et al. (2003) reveals that differences in social, cultural, and regional aspects can influence an individual's perception of their quality of life.

The Economist Intelligence Unit (The Economist, n.d.) developed a quality-of-life index that can measure and compare overall life satisfaction levels of a local population within and between countries. The index includes determinants such as mental well-being, health, family life, political freedom, job security, climate and geography, political stability and security, gender equality, and community life. The United Nations (n.d.) created a quality-of-life index or standard-of-living index known as the Human Development Index that is calculated every year. This index measures having a decent standard of living. Mercer (n.d.) measured quality of life for expatriate employees and their families based in 241 cities with respect to practicalities of daily life. The methodology for each measurement index was developed by an internal team of experts in respective organizations. Mercer's index is extremely useful for multinational companies and government organizations to determine compensation strategies for long-term talent mobility and cross-border secondment assignments.

Based on the above, the concept of quality of life varies based on individual, cultural, and regional differences, and there is no unified index that can be applied across social assessments.

There are several similarities and differences between quality of life and quality of work life. Pelsma et al. (1989, p.165) defined quality of work life as “as the sum of perceived stress, or lack of stress, and perceived satisfactions, or dissatisfactions”. Li and Yeo (2011) and Bhende et al. (2020) highlighted that quality of work life focuses on the well-being of employees within the workplace with respect to their job satisfaction, career development, work–life balance, working relationships, and overall work environment. According to Zhao et al. (2012), quality of work life has a significant influence on employee intention to stay, job embeddedness, employee commitment, and service quality. Ishak et al. (2018) emphasized that quality of work life pertains to the relationship between the employee and the overall working environment, which includes reward and recognition, organizational commitment, participative management, work–life balance, employee welfare, grievance handling, overall job satisfaction, and other factors. Wahlberg et al. (2017) stated that employee performance can be enhanced by analyzing employee quality of work life with respect to job satisfaction and performance. Chanana and Gupta (2016) suggested that a high-quality work life enhances employee performance and stated that factors that matter the most to employees are quality of rewards and recognition, direct superior and leadership support, career progression opportunities, and challenging and motivating work environment. Pramudena and Hilda (2019) indicated that analyzing quality of work life, organizational commitment, and employee job satisfaction demonstrates employee perceptions of organizational welfare, work atmosphere, and employee experience gained. Collectively, these studies illustrate the importance of improving employee quality of work life, which in turn contributes to shaping the attitudes, behavior, and performance of employees.

Based on the above discussion, quality of life can be seen as a comprehensive measure that is impacted by factors both within and outside of an organization and encompasses several aspects pertaining to the very existence of the individual. Quality of work life is a narrower concept that relates specifically to aspects of an employee’s life at work. While factors outside of work, such as family relationships and personal interests, can directly or indirectly impact quality of life, it is apparent that the quality of an individual’s work life contributes to their overall quality of life. Thus, a positive change

in employees' work–life balance and well-being at work will lead to an improvement in their quality of life overall, and vice versa.

The *Cambridge Dictionary* (2023) has defined work–life balance—that is, the equilibrium between work and personal life—as “the amount of time spent doing a job compared with the amount of time spent with family and doing things the individual values and enjoys”. The American Psychological Association’s *Dictionary of Psychology* (2023) has defined work–life balance as the level of involvement between the multiple roles in a person’s life, particularly as they pertain to employment and family or leisure activities, and has stated that achieving a good balance is thought to increase life satisfaction. Ricardianto et al. (2020) categorized work–life balance into five aspects: time balance, involvement balance, satisfaction balance, work safety balance, and balance between work and family. According to the WHO (n.d.), well-being is a multidimensional concept that addresses individuals’ mental, physical, and social health. The WHO has defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity“, while “mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”. The CIPD (2022, p. 1) Good Work Index suggests six parameters to assess employers. Specifically, firms should:

- Ensure employees are fairly rewarded and have the means to securely make a living.
- Allow for a work–life balance.
- Give employees opportunities to develop, and ideally a sense of fulfilment.
- Provide a supportive environment with constructive relationships.
- Give employees the voice and choice they need to shape their working lives.
- Ensure employees’ physical and mental health.

All parameters mentioned above pertain to different aspects of well-being, and therefore are of varying importance in the context of firms becoming an employer of

choice. In addition, well-being is subjective. In summary, CIPD (2022, pp.1–21) suggested that an effective quality of work-life index should measure a person’s overall quality of life and their ability to flourish and thrive.

Perceptions and awareness levels regarding quality of life can differ from one employee to another. Within an employment relationship, factors that indicate quality of work life encompass the work–life balance (mental health, physical health, and overall well-being), social interactions (team and direct manager relationships), economic health (e.g., benefit entitlements), and work environment (recognition, culture, ergonomics) experienced by an employee. In principle, the concept of quality of work life is intricately connected and overlaps with the broader notion of quality of life. The present research study investigates how hybrid working has (positively or negatively) impacted employee quality of life, but recognizes that employees’ work and personal life are interconnected and improvements in one area influence the other.

While the EVP and quality of life are two distinct concepts, in the context of the workplace they are interconnected. Prior research has indicated that quality of work life influences employee retention, employee behaviors, and commitment to the employer brand (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019). Within an employment relationship the EVP lays the foundation for assessing overall employment experience and defining financial (tangible) and nonfinancial (intangible) rewards attached to the employment (the “give” and the “get” in an employment relationship). A more detailed discussion of total rewards and the EVP is provided in the following sections, since understanding elements of the EVP will help to further elucidate how employees’ quality of life has been enhanced or hindered as a result of transitioning to hybrid working.

#### *1.4.6 Employment Relationship, Power Dynamics, and the EVP*

The above discussion on quality of work life highlights the importance of understanding the dynamics between employers and employees, and the influence that each has on the other. The employment relationship is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon that defines employer and employee interactions, expectations, and experiences. Robinson and Rousseau (1994) described the employment relationship as a combination of rights, obligations, and expectations between employer and employee. The

establishment of a contractual agreement between the two parties enforces employment terms and conditions (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Latornell, 2007). Benach et al. (2014) explained that the employment relationship encompasses a continuum of employment conditions, such as rights, responsibilities, and expectations between employer and employee, within the framework of an employment agreement. Mallette (2011) suggested that the employment relationship is a platform that describes employee rights and entitled benefits.

Employment relationships can be influenced by several internal and external factors, such as power dynamics, regulatory requirements, HR policies and procedures, and social norms (Tsui & Wu, 2005). Equally, employment relationships are dynamic and must be evaluated in view of technological changes, labor market conditions, and societal and cultural shifts (Robinson, 1995). A positive and mutually beneficial employment relationship can enhance employee productivity, overall engagement, and talent retention (Ackers, 1994). The nature of the employment relationship has a direct impact on job security, job satisfaction, employee engagement, career development, work–life balance, and overall employee well-being (Robinson, 1995). Gaertner and Nollen (1989) pointed out that the quality of the employment relationship is correlated with factors such as organizational commitment, workplace culture, and psychological commitment toward the employer. Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that employer power and control influences employee attitudes and behaviors.

Power and social relations within an organization determine the authority and control in the decision-making process, the hierarchy in roles and responsibilities, the degree to which ethical behavior is enacted, and each party's ability to influence the other. Raven and French (1958) identified five types of power that can influence social dynamics, leadership behavior, and the overall employment relationship within an organization: coercion power, reward power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power. Raven (2015) later added a sixth type: information power. Coercion power is derived from the authority to hold an employee responsible for poor or unacceptable performance or behavior. Reward power relates to supervisors and managers having the power to recognize individuals for desired behaviors. Legitimate power refers to the extent to which the individual's position or job role in the organization (e.g., seniority in position)

increases their level of control in the decision-making process. Referent power relates to leadership qualities of a manager or supervisor in motivating peers to meet their goals. Expert power relates to employees having unique, specialized knowledge and skills that enable them to influence others. Finally, information power pertains to who controls access to information within the organization. Managers' understanding of these power dynamics can lead to increased employee motivation, greater transparency, and higher productivity.

An effective employment relationship must entail a balance in power and control that respects the rights and well-being of both parties. Open lines of communication, effective leadership behavior (tone at the top), reasonable organizational policies, fair and transparent performance management, and appropriate reward practices can promote healthy work dynamics that make employees feel valued, heard, and empowered. The aforementioned factors impact the evolving EVP of an organization (Gaertner & Nollen, 1989); therefore, understanding how hybrid arrangements have impacted power and social relations within an employment relationship.

The components of the EVP describe the total value an employee receives in the formal employment relationship. In addition, the employer's power and control intersect with organizational EVP across various stages of the employee's employment journey, such as talent attraction, retention, and engagement. A well-articulated EVP can demonstrate the value that is generated through an effective employment relationship. Similarly, alignment with actual employee experiences can foster positive and mutually beneficial employment relationships. Notably, unevenly distributed power and control within an organization can negatively impact employee perceptions of the EVP. An imbalance of power in decision-making, an unfair recognition process, disparities in compensation, or unequal access to information and career development opportunities result in disengaged employees, increased turnover, and challenges in attracting top talent. Therefore, bridging power and control gaps in the organization is crucial to build and sustain a fair, inclusive and supportive EVP.

#### 1.4.7 Dimensions of Corporate Brand, Employer Brand, and EVP

There has been a debate in the HR literature around the question of whether the employer brand and the corporate brand are the same thing. Therefore, from a theoretical standpoint, it is important to understand the determinants of corporate brand, employer brand, and the EVP.

Historically the concept of *branding* stemmed from the marketing discipline, and has been recognized as “the art of creating and maintaining a brand” (Alizadeh et al., 2020, p. 15) The American Marketing Association (2021) has defined a brand as a name, term, sign, symbol, or feature, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller and to differentiate from those of competitors. From a marketing-management perspective to the seller the brand is essentially intended to consistently deliver a specific set of featured benefits and services to the buyer. This involves a process of establishing an identification system for a product image in the consumer’s mind.

The corporate brand has been described as an organization’s identity, which is created via the planned management of behavior, communication, and symbolism (Foster et al., 2010). The behavior aspect is linked to employees’ demonstration of the overall brand promise of the organization.

A similar philosophy has been adopted in HR management in terms of making efforts to draw the attention of employees and remain attractive in a competitive labor market. For example, SHRM (2011) has explained the employer brand as a method to present the organization to prospective employees. This pertains to the firm’s retention strategy and the need for it to be aligned with the EVP as well as the corporate brand. While it is normal for corporate brands to be aspirational, SHRM (2011) pointed out that employer branding needs to be grounded in authenticity and organizations must make use of corporate communication strategy to translate aspirational goals into reality.

Rosethorn (2009) presented the employer brand as a subdivision of the corporate brand rather than as a standalone element and emphasized that the employer brand consists of perceptions of multiple stakeholders that are distinct yet connected to the organization. One group of key stakeholders is employees, and their past, present, and future perceptions mold the employer brand. Rosethorn (2009) elaborated the employer brand phenomenon

as a two-way deal between an organization and its people; that is, the reasons employees choose to join and the reasons they elect to stay must reach an equilibrium. Thus, employer branding is the art of communicating the delivery of this deal to employees.

Therefore, the difference between corporate brand and employer brand is that the former represents how the organization is viewed and perceived by customers, and involves practical and emotional elements, while the latter is the perception and reputation among existing and potential employees. Any misalignment between the corporate brand and the EVP can result in employee cynicism, which has a negative impact on productivity.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) posited the resource-based view (RBV) as a foundation for employer branding. The RBV suggests that resources that are rare, valuable, nonsubstitutable, and inimitable can generate competitive advantage for an organization. Barney (1991) argued that sustained competitive advantage is achieved through resources and capabilities an organization has control over. Therefore, employer branding is embodied in talent-attraction and -retention strategies. Taking this one step further, it is important to identify factors that influence employee brand loyalty.

CIPD (2007) suggested that the employer brand creates an opportunity to develop a bond with people who feel an affinity with the organization. According to Elegbe (2018), the employer brand is a component of the corporate brand, and the two ideologies cater to different audiences. While the employer brand focuses on existing and potential employees, the corporate brand accommodates external stakeholder groups, as demonstrated in Figure 5.

Ambler and Barrow (1996, pp. 185–186) stated that the employer brand “is the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company”. Xie et al. (2015) emphasized that employer brand attractiveness has a positive relationship with company reputation, identity congruence, and evaluation of job attributes.

Barrow and Mosley (2005) introduced the “employer branding wheel“, which consists of key factors influencing employee experiences, such as vision and leadership, policies and values, fairness and cooperation, corporate personality, external reputation,



communication, recruitment and induction, development, performance management, working environment, reward system, and post-employment. The authors introduced these 12 dimensions as the “employer brand mix”, or “touchpoints for the employer brand”, to assess the employer brand reality. As illustrated in Figure 7, the internal and external employer branding efforts and the employer brand mix share relatable attributes. Therefore, the employer brand mix reflects propositions and values that contribute to achieving the desired employer brand experience. From a macro view, touchpoints for the employer brand resonate with prerequisites or components of the EVP.

As discussed previously, a strong employer brand contributes to employer reputation. Similarly, the employer brand is influenced by strategic internal and external branding efforts (Lievens, 2007). According to John and Raj (2020), internal employer branding disseminated among existing employees is crucial for shaping the employer brand identity. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) stated that organizational EVP forms the basis of internal and external employer branding strategies. In this vein, Macalik and Sulich (2019) delineated the difference between internal and external employer branding, stating that internal branding focuses on improving the work environment and increases awareness of development opportunities within the organization, whereas external branding pertains to creating awareness among stakeholders outside the organization, such as prospective employees, investors, and shareholders. However, once a potential employee has been recruited, externally focused employer branding pivots toward internal employer branding, and the employer is expected to deliver on the brand promises made during the recruitment stage (Wolfswinkel & Enslin, 2022). This is achieved via the organization’s EVP (Alshathry et al., 2017). Furthermore, the influence of the employer brand extends from talent attraction to talent retention, and positive employee experiences improve organizational reputation. In turn, a positive organizational reputation attracts industry top talent and increases employees’ intention to stay. Conversely, negative employee experiences can severely damage organizational reputation. Therefore, a well-defined, timely, and relevant EVP can pave the way for positive employee experiences and augment the employer brand. In addition, the employer brand, encompassing both internal and external dimensions, contributes to shaping organizational reputation. In summary, these three concepts—the EVP, the employer brand, and employee

experiences—are significantly interconnected, and an overall positive relationship between them helps to attract and retain employees, and increase employee engagement.

Erickson and Gratton (2007) described the “employee signature experience” as an organization providing unique and compelling working environment, culture, and development opportunities throughout the employment journey. The emphasis is placed upon creating meaningful employment experiences that foster a committed and engaged workforce (Jena & Pradhan, 2018). According to Hutchings et al. (2011) and Jena and Pradhan (2018), employers need to deliver employee experiences beyond conventional standards; these experiences must resonate and align with individual values for the organization to build a competitive talent landscape. The unique and compelling factors that contribute to employee signature experience include organizational spirituality, employee retention, organizational citizenship behavior, and various aspects of the organizational environment (Jena & Pradhan, 2018). Laumer and Eckhardt (2009) highlighted that creating the employee signature experience entails a need to establish a structured approach toward employer branding. The EVP sets the baseline to curate an employer’s branding strategy. Jena and Pradhan (2018) stated that an employer’s brand identity and image become more appealing to potential and existing employees when it goes beyond day-to-day employment issues and provides individuals with a meaningful and fulfilling career. In addition, the employee experience contributes to the employer brand, such that the two concepts are interconnected. Positive experiences of existing and potential employees become part of the organizational narrative and strengthen organizational reputation, while negative experiences carry reputational risks.

As illustrated in Figure 7, organizations can use various internal and external employee communication channels to build a positive image of the workplace. These channels include careers websites, internal recruitment and employee benefits materials, social media, sponsorship of various events, etc. (Deepa & Baral, 2021; Sarabdeen et al., 2022). However, it is important to ensure consistency between the actual employee experience and what is communicated internally and externally. The day-to-day work experiences of employees must reflect the organizational culture, shared values, flexible working policies, and other benefits that are emphasized through the employer branding efforts. The alignment between employer branding approaches and internal employee

experiences facilitates building a powerful and authentic employer brand (Rosethorn, 2009). Therefore, employer branding should not be viewed as an external communication strategy to attract potential employees; often, the internal employer brand conveyed to existing employees can enhance the external employer brand.

Theurer et al. (2018) analyzed elements of the employer brand value chain (Figure 8) and described four stages that articulate the process: (a) defining the internal and external EVP (b) developing employer branding activities to align with the applicant mindset (c) measuring employer brand value, and (d) translating employer branding activities into financial terms. The four stages exemplify how components of the EVP and employer branding activities align.

Based on the literature, it can be concluded that employer branding integrates HR, marketing, and psychology disciplines. Although employer branding entails elements of marketing, it has more to do with how well employee perception levels are managed and the extent to which a satisfying employment experience is delivered.

A limitation of the existing literature is that it has not satisfactorily defined the difference between employer branding and employee branding. Taylor (2019, pp. 169–177) shed some light on this by explaining that both concepts are not the same. Employee branding is a process by which employees internalize the desired brand image and are motivated to project this image to customers and other organizational constituents. The emphasis is thus on aligning the behavior of employees with the requirements of the consumer brand to influence consumer buying power and organizational reputation. Figure 9 shows that employer brand strength can only be sustained with the combination of two key factors: developing a unique EVP and delivering a compelling employee experience. It is worth highlighting that both these branding strategies (employer and employee branding) are aimed at making the firm the “employer of choice”.

Becoming the employer of choice depends on the extent to which the HR strategy is vertically aligned with the business strategy, and horizontally aligned with individual elements of the EVP. Strategic flexibility is a vital driver when firms are faced with a rapidly changing external environment.

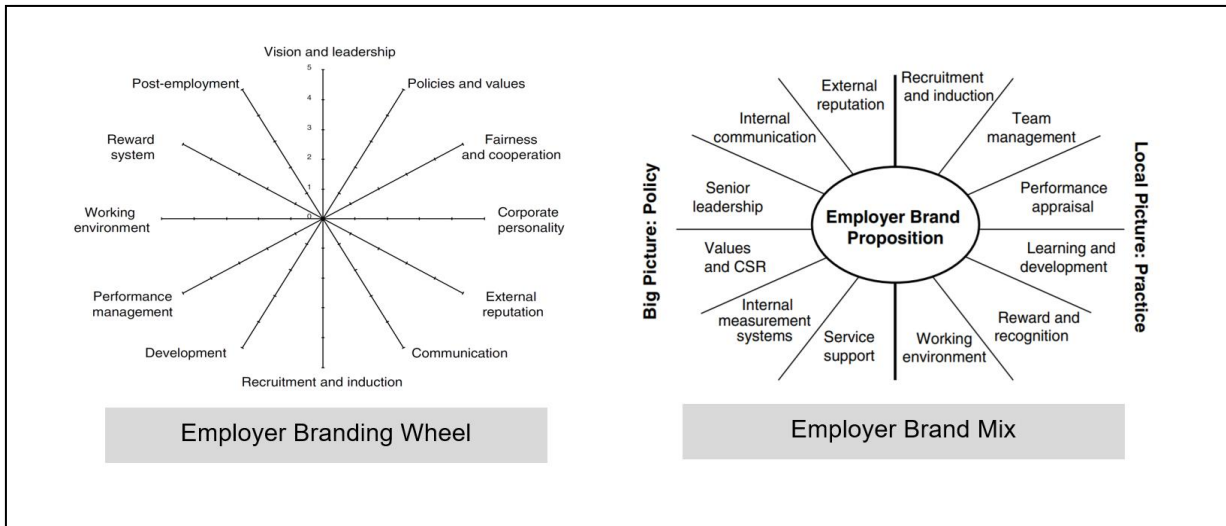


Figure 6: Elements of Employer Brand Wheel and Employer Brand Mix

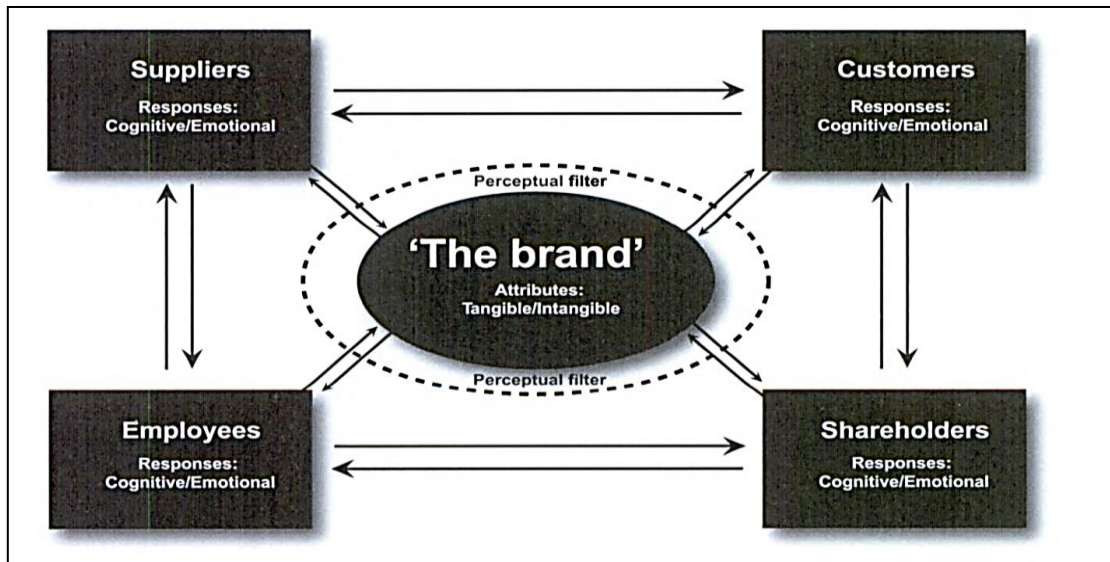


Figure 7: Employer Branding and Stakeholders

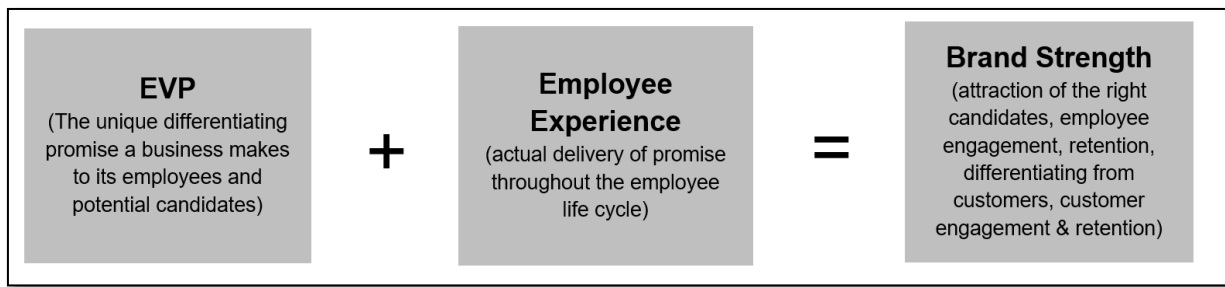


Figure 8: Employer Brand Strength

The key advantages of a strong EVP highlighted in empirical studies are as follows:

- Sharpened resourcing strategy through means of differentiation, and thus reduced recruitment costs.
- Improved perceptions of existing employees, and increased retention rates.
- Reassurance to employees that they have made the right employment decision.
- Enhanced reputation of the organization and HR function.
- Increased employee engagement and new psychological contract development.

While the EVP elaborates the employment deal, employer branding is the way in which this deal is communicated. There appears to be a misconception that the EVP and employer branding are similar concepts; however, this is not the case. During the Covid-19 pandemic many organizations were compelled to make business decisions to ensure their survival in a competitive labor market. It can be argued that employer branding is more important in the post-pandemic environment. Thus, there is value in exploring how changes pertaining to the EVP elements are being communicated to existing and potential employees. What is currently unclear is whether hybrid working has positively or negatively influenced the perceptions of employees—a gap that is addressed in this research. For the purposes of this study, the EVP is the key area of focus and is not considered as the way in which the employer brand is communicated.

#### 1.4.8 Psychological Contracts and the EVP

Based on the available HR literature, psychological contracts are an unwritten set of expectations, perceptions, and beliefs that exist in an ongoing employment relationship. Guest (2007, p. 133) elaborated this concept more specifically as “the perceptions of both

parties to the employment relationship of the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in that relationship”.

Raj (2020, pp. 203) classified psychological contracts in the context of the EVP as “mutual expectations and [the] symbiotic relationship between employer and employee”. Elegbe (2018) stated that psychological contracts implicitly hold the employer accountable for its promises to existing and potential employees. Ruchika and Prasad (2017, p. 3) emphasized that an “anticipatory psychological contract” unfolds starting from the pre-employment stage. Raj (2020) indicated that psychological contracts positively strengthen the EVP, which influences employees’ intention to stay.

Internal and external employer branding efforts deployed by an organization will feed into the perceptions held by existing and prospective employees. The degree of employer attractiveness differs from one individual to another, yet the formation of a psychological bond in the early stages of the employment cycle can strengthen a firm’s market positioning as the employer of choice.

Zhang et al. (2019) pointed out that empirical studies have placed significant emphasis on the “promise side” of the psychological contract, while the “fulfillment side” of employer brand promises is often ignored. Thus, when investigating the reasons for and consequences of psychological contracts, it is important to take both of these aspects into consideration. Breaches of psychological contracts can lead to underperformance, absenteeism, lack of trust, and high turnover. Hence, the EVP of an organization can positively or negatively impact the psychological contract between employer and employee.

One implication of remote working is the lack of opportunities to interact on a personal level. However, Sturges et al. (2005) suggested that this lack can be overcome through effective fulfillment of the psychological contract.

It should be noted that the psychological contract is more of an abstract concept based on unwritten expectations between employer and employee, whereas the EVP is a formal construct that can be articulated in a physical document. The EVP and the psychological contract differ in terms of their purpose, tangibility, and the degree to which they are explicitly communicated within organizations. Therefore, in theory the EVP

encompasses tangible and intangible offerings and benefits provided by the employer to employees, while the psychological contract mediates the relationship between parties. Thus, although there is a significant correlation between the two concepts, they are distinct. The psychological contract is not a component or driver of the EVP, but can help to strengthen the EVP, resulting in talent retention and attraction within the organization.

Wraikat et al. (2017) stated that the psychological contract is particularly open to violation during an organizational change process. This highlights the importance of managing organizational transformations via careful planning, taking into consideration the effect such changes can have on employees (Kanter, 1985; Kotter, 2004). Bunderson (2001) considered psychological contracts and factors that shape related ideologies; through hypothesis testing, the author suggested that psychological breaches related to professional role obligations differ from psychological breaches related to administration. Perceptual breaches of professional role obligations are positively correlated with employee responses such as low productivity and lower commitment to the job. On the other hand, psychological breaches that are administrative in nature are significantly associated with employee responses such as thoughts of quitting, turnover, and job dissatisfaction. Therefore, professional and work obligations influence the nature of the degree of impact on psychological contract breaches. Organizational transitions often trigger psychological breaches (Wraikat et al., 2017), making it necessary to provide role clarity (i.e., details on changes in tasks and duties through revised job descriptions) and to outline professional commitments such as ethical, moral, and competency-related obligations.

Street (2009) related Hofstede's (1980) individualism and collectivism dimensions in the formation of the psychological contract, and considered their effect on employee commitment. Street's (2009) empirical study revealed that individualism and collectivism can give rise to two types of psychological contracts: transactional and relational, respectively. Individualism and collectivism are measured based on how an individual conducts themselves in relation to their social group (Thomas & Au, 2000). Individualism represents autonomy, personal freedom, and self-focused behaviors, whereas collectivism represents togetherness and group-focused or community-focused behaviors (Thomas & Au, 2000; Triandis, 1995). Street (2009) substantiated a positive relationship with

individualist traits and transactional psychological contracts, while collectivist traits and relational psychological contracts share a significantly positive relationship. Rousseau (1990) explained that a transactional psychological contract involves perceptions and expectations regarding monetary components in an employment relationship, where duration is defined and there is no employee commitment to long-term employment. A relational psychological contract takes monetary elements of employment into consideration, but training, career development, and long-term commitment to the employer are equally important perceptions and expectations (Robinson et al., 1994). Interestingly, the concepts of transactional and relational perceptions resonates with the financial and nonfinancial reward components of the EVP (Rosethorn, 2009). Therefore, based on theoretical similarities, it is argued in this study that the financial component of the EVP influences the transactional psychological contract, whereas nonfinancial rewards influence the relational psychological contract. In addition, organizational changes experienced by employees have a direct influence on the psychological contract, which can drive collectivist or individualist cultures within an organization (Street, 2009). In the present study, transitioning to hybrid working is seen as an organizational change that can impact the psychological contract such that individualism or collectivism (Hosftede, 1980) can emerge in the organizational culture. While the psychological contract is not a component of the EVP, it can significantly strengthen the EVP of an organization (Raj, 2020).

#### *1.4.9 The Components of Total Rewards and the EVP*

To be identified as a reputable employer, and to increase employee loyalty in a competitive labor market, organizations must offer employment conditions that are attractive and satisfying to existing and potential employees.

While total rewards models or approaches provide a fair representation of the EVP offered by an organization, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic triggered job-security and well-being-related concerns. The relevance of traditional total rewards models appears outdated in the context of post-pandemic employee needs and wants. The nature of job roles, responsibilities, working relationships, and the environment has shifted markedly. As CIPD (2021) survey conveys, nonfinancial rewards seem to have become the key



differentiator for employers. The vertical strategic fit between business strategy and HR strategy, and the horizontal fit between HR strategy and total rewards (or the EVP), must be adapted, considering new environmental factors and working patterns. This begs the question of whether organizations are flexible and agile enough to make the necessary strategic changes.

*Strategic reward* involves designing and implementing reward policies and practices to achieve organizational goals and meet employee expectations, whereas *total reward* is referred to as “all aspects of work valued by employees” (CIPD, 2020b, pp. 1). The total rewards approach blends financial and nonfinancial elements of employee rewards. The concept was introduced in the 1990s and described as “a perspective on reward management rather than reward management itself” (Armstrong, 2011, pp. 41). Thompson (2002) stated that the total rewards approach encompasses traditional, quantifiable elements such as salary, variable pay and benefits and intangible non-cash elements such as autonomy to accomplish and exercise responsibility, career opportunities, learning and development, the intrinsic motivation provided through the job role itself and the quality of working life provided by the organization.

Gartner (2020) glossary provided a more concise description, indicating that total rewards comprise a blend between intrinsic and extrinsic values as perceived by the employee.

WorldatWork (2015), which develops total rewards solutions for organizations, reshaped their model in view of changing economic, labor market, and cultural trends. The model suggests six elements as suitable value propositions to attract, motivate, retain, and engage employees. The elements include compensation, work–life effectiveness, workplace flexibility, benefits, recognition, and talent development. Bremen & Levanat (2019), discussed the need to modernize total rewards in unprecedented times, especially in the context of workforces being represented by all four generations (Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z) and the evolving nature of job roles. Rai et al. (2019) found a positive correlation between total rewards and employee engagement, stating that, consequently, effective total rewards support employees’ intention stay with an organization.

Kuczarski and Kuczarski (2019) explored how financial and nonfinancial rewards can nurture or hinder innovation within an organization. The researchers highlighted the need for organizations to be mindful of the powerful impact of rewards on employees, and how this can improve the organization’s outcomes.

Transactional (tangible) rewards are straightforward to implement and can be imitated by competitors, whereas relational (intangible) rewards require conscious effort bundled with a rewarding culture and HR practices (Rosethorn, 2009). As recognized by Rosethorn (2009), the strength of an employer brand is dependent on the types of benefits offered to employees.

Latham and Locke (1979) noted that financial rewards can be a short-lived motivational factor. Thus, an important theoretical assumption drawn from previous research is that nonfinancial rewards take precedence over financial rewards and are a more powerful instrument to keep employees engaged and create a long-lasting impact.

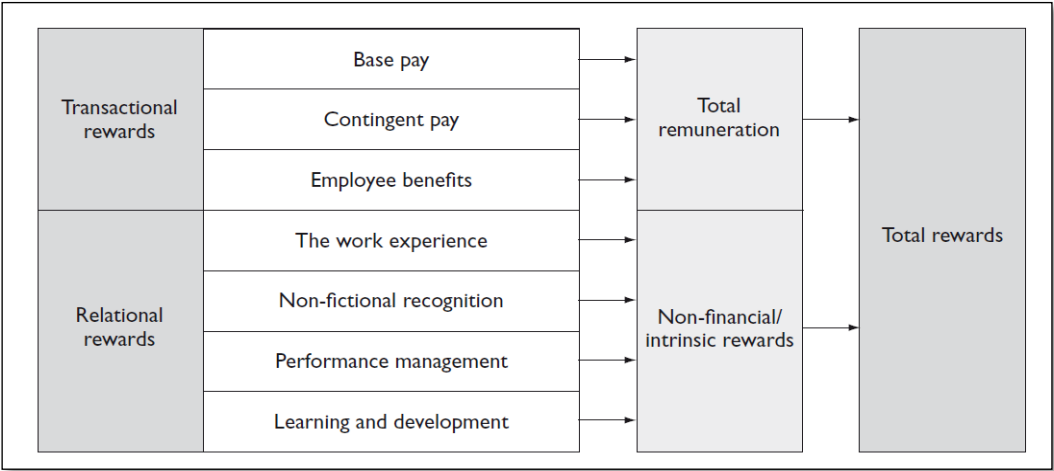


Figure 9: Elements of Total Rewards (Source: Armstrong, 2011)

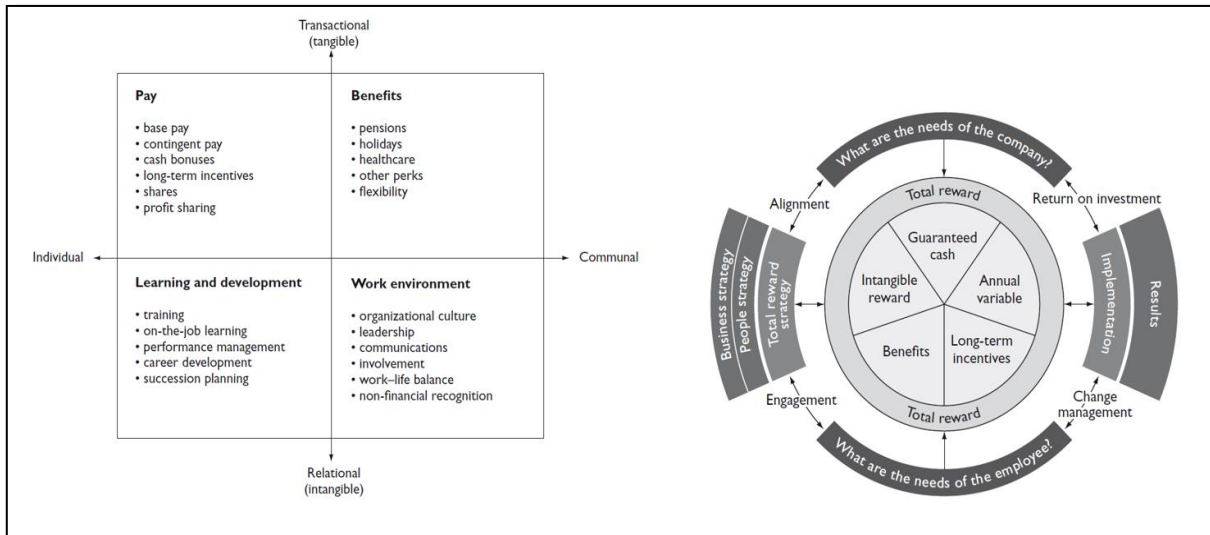


Figure 10: Towers Perrin & Hay Group Total Rewards Models (Source: Armstrong, 2011)

Consequently, “total rewards” as presented in Figure 10 can be seen as reflection of the EVP offered to existing and potential employees. However, Figure 11 represents a total rewards model unique to Towers Perrin & Hay Group (Armstrong, 2011), indicating that total rewards models and frameworks vary from one organization to another.

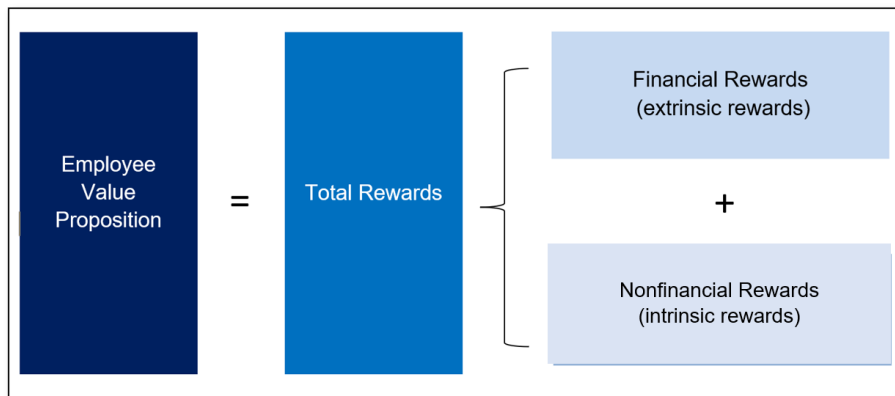


Figure 11: Linking EVP with Total Rewards

Figure 12 depicts the theoretical link between the EVP and the combination of financial and nonfinancial rewards. It is the author’s observation that employment journey experience or employee experience while being employed in an organization is not explicitly defined as a component of EVP within existing literature.

Therefore, in view of all literature reviewed on elements of EVP, the author has developed the below summary in Figure 13 to define drivers of EVP that will be examined within the scope of this study. In essence, the three components of EVP to be investigated are financial rewards (tangible), nonfinancial rewards (intangible), and employment experience with hybrid working arrangements.

Definitions of key nonfinancial rewards that are part of the EVP and total rewards frameworks are as follows.

**Work environment:** Kristensen et al. (2005) defined the work environment as the physical, social, and cultural setting in which employees conduct their job responsibilities. In the post-Covid era, where hybrid working is the new norm, there is a need to include opportunities for remote working in definitions of the workplace environment. Multiple factors influence the onsite workplace environment, such as office ergonomics; the availability of necessary tools and equipment; layout, cleanliness, lighting, and noise levels; and the overall atmosphere (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2011). Social aspects of the onsite work environment involve social interactions between senior leaders, managers, coworkers, and employees. Teamwork and effective communication are facilitated by a healthy physical work environment (Horr et al., 2016), and behaviors shape the organizational culture. Employee health and safety, well-being, and job satisfaction; diversity and inclusion; and effective company policies and procedures also contribute toward a positive work environment (Billett, 2004; Horr et al., 2016). Notably, CIPD (2020c) revealed that employee well-being and mental health have taken a back seat in the wake of digital interventions being introduced.

**Career development:** Covey and Blankenhagen (1991) described career development as an ongoing process that encompasses continuous growth through the acquisition of new skills and competencies, investment in learning opportunities, and the achievement of career aspirations. Yarberry and Sims (2021) stated that career development can be positively or negatively impacted by factors such as organizational support, individual goals, and external market conditions. Wang et al. (2021) emphasized that career-development opportunities pave the way for a successful career trajectory. Defining clear career goals during the performance-management process, and providing

networking opportunities with senior leaders, quality performance conversations with direct superiors, organizational investment in skills development, and flexibility to learn and grow within the organization signal the employer's long-term commitment to employee development (Marcus et al., 2021). This heightens the employer's image in the minds of employees and influences their overall perception of it (Jones & Campbell, 2021; Marcus et al., 2021). Robust career-development opportunities enhance employee engagement, job satisfaction, and overall employee retention (Young et al., 2019).

**Recognition and rewards:** Recognition and rewards are important components of the EVP (Armstrong, 2011). Recognition can be demonstrated through acknowledging employee efforts or showing appreciation for contributions and achievements through verbal praise, written recommendations, or public recognition such as awards (Danish & Usman, 2010). Rewards can be monetary, such as bonuses or salary increases; or nonmonetary, such as promotions, additional days off, or flexible work arrangements (Ghosh et al., 2016). Fundamentally, recognition and rewards increase employee engagement and job satisfaction, which in turn strengthens the EVP (Rosethorn, 2009).

**Organizational culture:** Schein (1990, pp. 109) defined organizational culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems.

Schein (1990) further explained that organizational culture comprises the shared beliefs, values, norms, practices, and assumptions that shape the behavior and attitude of individuals within an organization. Schein (1990) suggested that organizational culture can be viewed according to three lenses: artifacts, exposed values, and basic underlying assumptions. Artifacts are visible and tangible elements of culture (e.g., symbols, dress code, language, office layout); exposed values are organizational aspects explained through the mission statement and brand campaigns; and basic underlying assumptions are unconscious beliefs that are intangible in nature yet guide the behaviors, organizational traditions, decision-making processes, and socialization within the organization. Hofstede (1980) categorized organizational culture into six dimensions that describe organizational

behavior and how employees perceive and respond to authority, hierarchy, teamwork, and risks. The six categories are power distance index, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance index, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. In essence, organizational culture can be viewed through different lenses or frameworks to diagnose the current reality, and plays a critical role during transformative changes within an organization.

The above discussion clarifies the interconnectedness between working styles, leadership behavior, communication styles, and organizational culture. The culture, values, and principles form the identity of the employer, which then strengthens or weakens the organizational EVP.

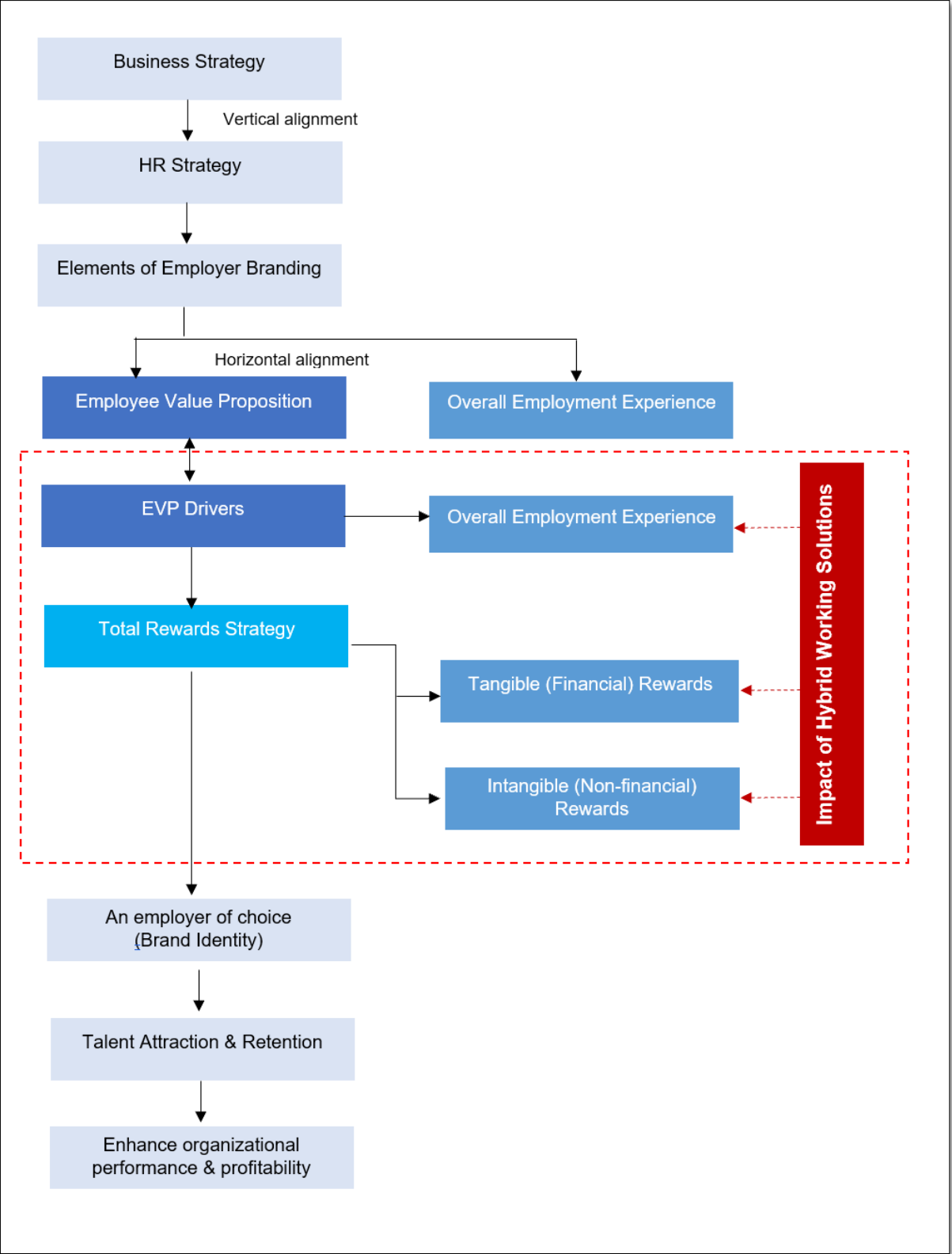


Figure 12: Defining Drivers of EVP to be Investigated through the Study

#### *1.4.10 How to Develop or Reshape the EVP*

In comparison to academic literature, few business research studies have provided a framework for, or described the process by which, organizational EVP can be designed or reshaped. Based on the above-reviewed literature, each organization must define its own EVP drivers, yet guidance on frameworks that can support organizations to reshape the EVP in tandem with life cycle changes is lacking. As discussed earlier, organizational behavior is influenced by changes in internal and external environments. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic is a real-life example that demonstrated the need for organizations to be agile and forward-looking. In times of change, it is essential for organizations to conduct a reality check on their EVP and to reshape their EVP drivers to cater to present and future talent needs. Furthermore, the responsibility to transform EVP drivers into actionable items is left to policymakers, line managers, and HR practitioners within organizations.

Armstrong (2014, p. 249) stated that the following aspects should be reviewed when building or reshaping the EVP. Below, these attributes are discussed in conjunction with empirical research findings.

- Reputation as a business and as an employer: The literature has suggested that organizational reputation plays a critical role in shaping organizational success. Surroca et al. (2009) highlighted that positive organizational reputation can enhance competitive advantage, attract and retain talent and customers, and provide the basis for developing strong business relationships with investors and regulatory bodies. The RBV posited by Barney (1991) and developed by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), suggests that internal resources and capabilities can create competitive advantage and increase organizational reputation. The positive reputation of being an employer of choice represents a rare, valuable, nonsubstitutable, and inimitable resource, and can thus strengthen organizational EVP.
- Working environment or workplace environment: The work environment can be viewed as a relational (nonfinancial) reward within the total rewards architecture (Armstrong, 2011). Figure 11 illustrates the relevance of work environment in this regard. Attributes that contribute to the successful functioning of an onsite



(physical) environment and remote work environment differ (Choudhury & Foroughi, 2019; Golden & Veiga, 2005), and the pandemic has brought significant changes to the work environment. Therefore, the evolution of onsite (physical work environment) to hybrid working environment is discussed in Section 1.4.14, along with the advantages and disadvantages that remote, work-from-home, and onsite-working environments can bring to the employees and the organization. As theory suggests, the work environment is a key aspect of the EVP, and areas where the work environment is negatively impacted or that give rise to negative employee experiences and perceptions need to be evaluated and realigned.

- Job location: prior to the pandemic, the physical place or geographical area where job responsibilities are expected to be performed was explained as the stationed job location (Armstrong, 2014). With the breakout of the pandemic and the evolution of hybrid working arrangements, job roles are no longer location-bound (Gratton, 2021). The nature of the job role, industry, and regulatory framework, respectively, contribute to determining job location (i.e., onsite or remote); however, the pandemic challenged all industries as it forced employees to work from home (Pass & Ridgway, 2022). With organizations rapidly transitioning to flexible working arrangements, it is essential to understand employee experiences and what effect the transition has had on the EVP.

A limitation in academic research is the lack of present-day information on how hybrid working impacts the EVP. Therefore, the present study aims to determine whether hybrid working is a driver of EVP or an enabler of EVP within the UAE health insurance industry. The author's reflections thereon are included in the conclusions and recommendations chapter.

- Career-development opportunities: as highlighted in Figure 11, career-development opportunities are part of the relational (nonfinancial) rewards strategy of an organization. Figure 12 illustrates the link between nonfinancial rewards and the EVP. Furthermore, career-development opportunities and the EVP are intertwined, as career development is a driver of the EVP. In addition, an EVP that includes structured career-development initiatives can help to attract and retain employees within an organization (Naden et al., 2023). A lack of career-

development opportunities is a disengagement factor that weakens the EVP of the organization and leads to talent-retention risks (Melin & Correll, 2022). Therefore, it is essential for organizations to build and sustain career-development opportunities. During transformative changes, it is crucial to evaluate the impact of hybrid working on employee development. It is the negative implications on employee career development that give rise to a need to reshape the EVP drivers.

- Terms and conditions of employment offered: derived from the previous discussion on employment relationship, an employment contract reflects financial and nonfinancial rewards that contribute to forming the EVP within an organization. Terms and conditions offered as part of EVP required to be evaluated based on changes in the external and internal environment of an organization. Figures 11 and 12 illustrate how extant work supports the above arguments, and also define the research questions.

In summary, negative impacts on the attraction and retention of talent must be taken into consideration when reshaping the EVP. In qualitative research, such negative impacts are determined based on employee perceptions, feelings, and awareness levels, and the overall employee experience. Rosethorn (2009) emphasized that a combination of the EVP (i.e., a unique promise offered by the employer to its employees) and the actual employee experience (i.e., the delivery of the employer promise) can generate organizational brand strength (see Figure 9). Therefore, the gap between what is promised by the employer and what is received by employees is considered as the gap in the EVP (Figure 14) that leads to a negative impact. RQ2 addresses this aspect of EVP. The need to reshape the EVP is measured based on the employee experience and perception level of EVP drivers.

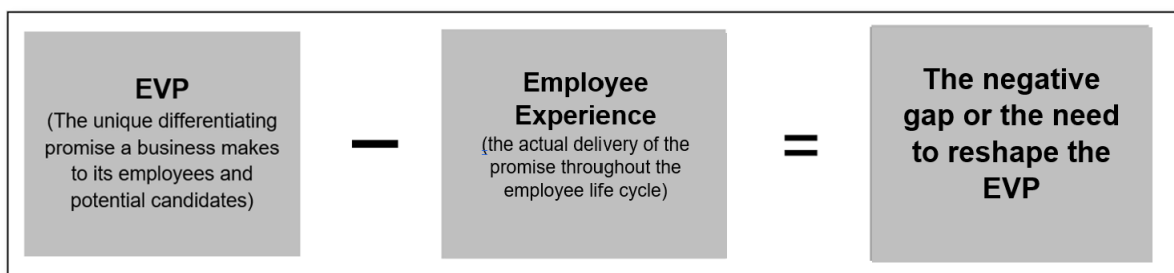


Figure 13: How to Determine the Need to Reshape the EVP

In the absence of an academic framework to develop the EVP, this study draws on best practice in business administration and organizational management. The model shown in Figure 15—developed by leading global professional research services company AON (2018)—recommends three steps for building a compelling value proposition: define the EVP, express the EVP through visuals and symbols, and align the EVP with the employee experience. Thus Figure 15 describes the process used to assess, build, and activate the EVP.

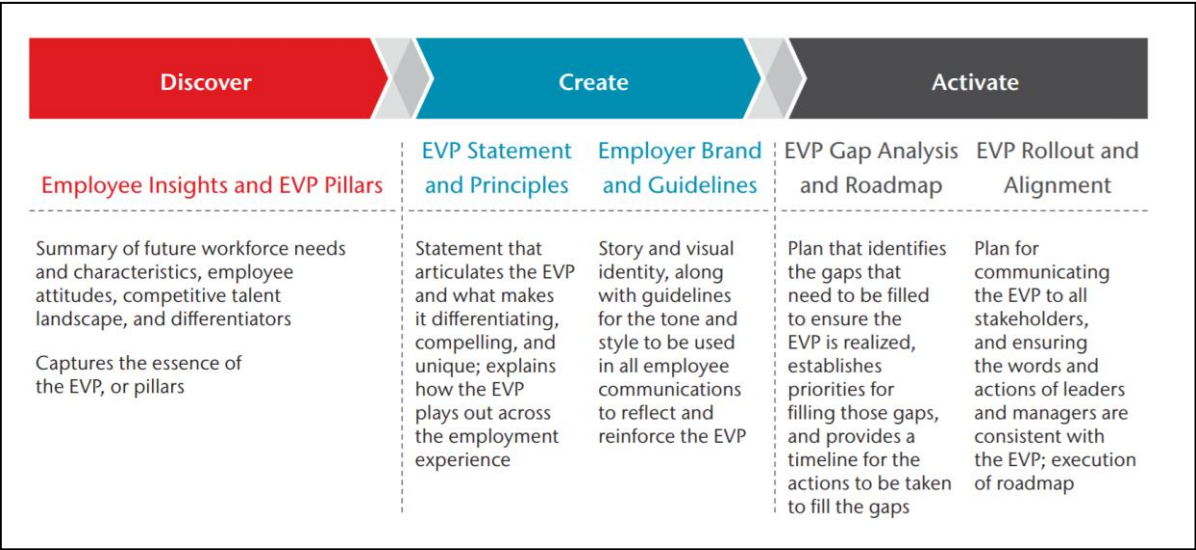


Figure 14: Steps for Building a Compelling EVP (Source: AON, 2018)

Dvorak and Robinson (2020, pp. 2–7) stated that analyzing characteristics of the brand promise through the lens of external customers has become more important in post-pandemic times. The authors broke the corporate brand promise down into three areas: brand essence, brand drivers, and service values. Dvorak and Robinson (2020) proposed the following clarifying questions that can be adopted to conduct an audit on EVP maturity or a reality check with internal customers (i.e., employees):

- Essence of the EVP: In what ways have we stayed true to our purpose (what we offer and what employees receive)? What specific elements of our EVP do employees value most during challenging times?

- EVP drivers: How do we want our employer brand to reflect the best version of itself?
- Value generated through the EVP: How is our EVP delivering what our employees want today? How do we deliver on employee experiences consistent with our employer brand promise in this new reality?

It is indeed challenging to remain consistent in delivering the brand promise (be it corporate brand or employer brand) in a disrupted environment. From an EVP perspective, a similar examination will support understanding how employees have been affected following the global crisis, and whether there is a gap between the employer brand promise and the employee experience.

Keller and Schaninger (2020, pp. 2–7), examined the “forgotten steps” of large-scale change, and referenced the need to measure EVP dimensions against those of competitors using means such as focus groups, exit interviews, site visits, and social media analysis (e.g., Glassdoor and LinkedIn).

A Mercer (2021) global talent trends survey for the Middle East revealed four key consideration statements for organizations in reimagining new working solutions:

- Well-being provisions are magnets for talent.
- The race to reskill is considered an opportunity as well as a challenge.
- Data privacy and security took a backseat in the crisis, and questions are being raised as to how employee information is collected, used, and secured.
- Potential and current employees can be inspired by an energized and empathetic employee experience.

In summary, the above-presented market practices and procedures provide guidance on how to rebuild or reshape the EVP in the post-pandemic environment, though extant theory or academic frameworks to formulate an organizational EVP are lacking. To address the research questions and to determine the effect of hybrid working on the EVP, this study develops a theoretical framework. Several positive impacts of hybrid working are said to strengthen the EVP, while negative impacts deteriorate the EVP positioning.

Thus, the present study takes a bottom-up approach to investigate changes in EVP drivers due to transitioning to hybrid working in the UAE health insurance industry.

#### *1.4.11 What is Hybrid Working, the Interlink with EVP and UAE Specific Research*

Hybrid working, or hybrid employment, is a combination of onsite and remote working that promotes workplace flexibility. It has a significant impact on the way a job is performed and the nature of the employment relationship. “Workplace flexibility” is described as employees having choices over working hours, location, and continuity of work to balance work and life obligations (Rhee et al., 2019). Remote work can take place from home (i.e., WFH) or anywhere else. Hybrid working became increasingly popular during and after the pandemic. The literature presented in this section sheds light on the evolution of hybrid working, covering pre- and post-pandemic developments.

The CIPD’s (2021) definition of flexible working incorporates an organization’s working arrangements in terms of time, location, and pattern. Offering flexible working options can help organizations attract talent, improve employee job satisfaction and loyalty, reduce absenteeism, and improve well-being; it can also make businesses more responsive to change. As the term “flexibility” indicates, theoretically such working can be viewed as a flexible approach that allows employees to balance working from home and onsite. The transition from traditional to hybrid working has created a significant culture shift (CIPD, 2021), and established new ways of working and associated policies and practices.

Gratton (2021) introduced a matrix that defines the concept of hybrid working within a structured framework. Hybrid working is predominantly based on two elements—place and time. Figure 16 illustrates the difference between traditional working arrangements and those within hybrid working. The concept of working onsite (e.g., in the office) is shifting toward “working from anywhere” (i.e., is not location bound); similarly, fixed, time-constrained jobs are shifting toward being time-unconstrained. Once these elements are placed on two axis, it forms the basis for conceptualizing differences between the two approaches. In quadrant 01 of Figure 16, time-constrained and place-constrained elements represent traditional onsite working. Quadrant 02 represents a place-unconstrained yet time-constrained model, which depicts working from anywhere (e.g.,

from home, a coffee shop, or any other geographical location). This is the most popular form of hybrid working today (Gratton, 2021). Quadrant 03 indicates time-unconstrained and place-unconstrained work, meaning that the nature of such jobs can be project-based, contracted, or freelance. Quadrant 04 represents a place-constrained but time-unconstrained hybrid model, which is prevalent in certain industries that entail strict data protection and are bound by regulatory requirements. Few organizations fall into this category. The differences among the four quadrants provide clarity on hybrid arrangements in the real world.

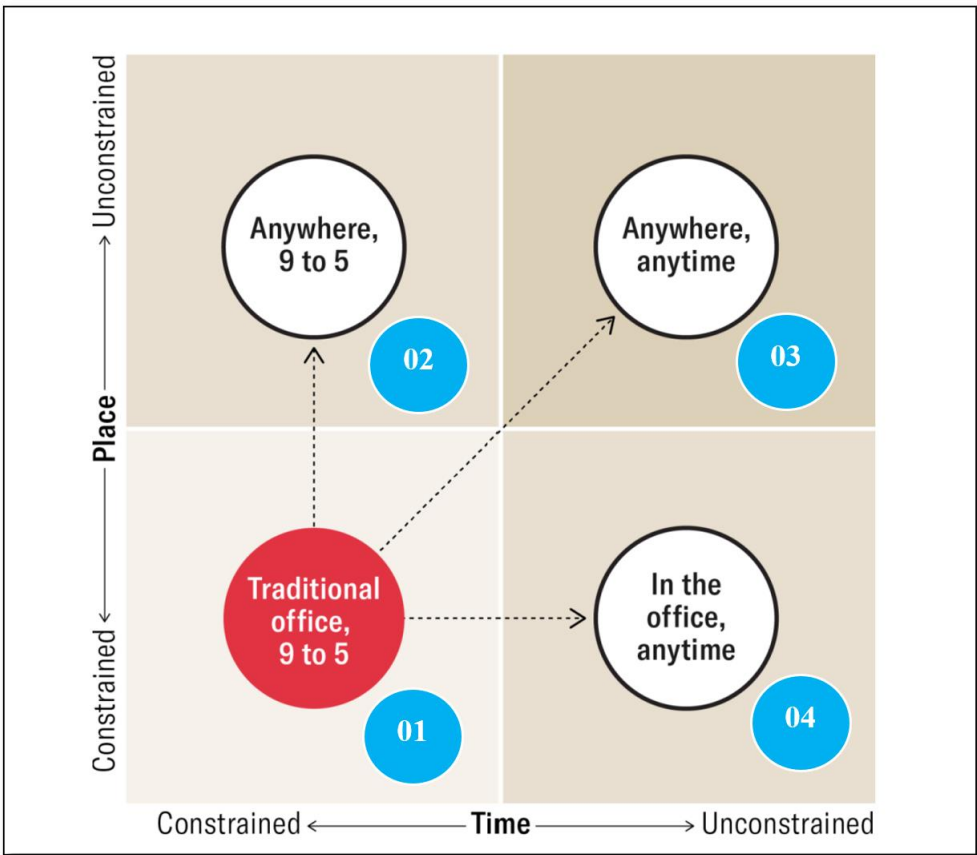


Figure 15: Defining Hybrid Working (Adapted from Gratton, 2021)

Remote working existed globally prior to the outbreak of Covid-19. The Gartner Glossary (2023) states that “Remote work (also known as work from home [WFH] or telecommuting) is a type of flexible working arrangement that allows an employee to work from remote location outside of corporate offices”.

The Cambridge Dictionary (2023) has defined remote working as “the practice of an employee working at their home, or in some other place that is not an organization's usual place of business”. Wang et al. (2020) described remote working as telecommuting or working from home, outside of the traditional office environment, to fulfill job responsibilities by utilizing technology to communicate and collaborate with team members.

According to the literature, prior to the pandemic, remote working or telecommuting had a significant effect on job satisfaction among those who moderately telecommuted as opposed to those who rarely or frequently did (Golden & Veiga, 2005). Choudhury and Foroughi (2019) investigated the interrelationship between remote working and boundary management, showing that those who maintained healthy boundaries between work and personal life and continued to work remotely experienced higher levels of well-being. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found that telecommuting increased autonomy and reduced work conflicts, but increased feeling of loneliness and limited career-development opportunities. Alen et al. (2015) evaluated the effectiveness of telecommuting and emphasized the importance of considering the nature of the job, individual preferences, and level of support extended by the organization prior to committing to remote work.

During and after the pandemic, the identity and meaning of remote working pivoted toward making every onsite or traditional worker a global remote worker. Gupta et al. (2022, pp. 1861) stated that “[working] from anywhere”, which is a form of remote working, “lets employees work and live anywhere in the world while also getting rid of several premises-based factors like proximity and office environment”. This coincides with quadrant 02 in Gratton’s (2021) grid. Parker et al. (2020) explained that effective remote work can increase productivity. At the peak of a pandemic, Capgemini (2020) reported that, with mandated WFH, 70% of large corporates achieved a profit margin crossing \$1 billion, which is a clear indication that WFH worked well during the pandemic.

Saridakis et al. (2023) highlighted the need to distinguish the WFH experience during the pandemic from the standard or voluntary homeworking experience, since knowledge-based companies often offer voluntary WFH as a possible working

arrangement, and this is usually agreed between employer and employee. During the pandemic, employees were forced to WFH without gauging their readiness, skills, knowledge, or availability of suitable working environments (Pass & Ridgway, 2022). As a post-Covid consideration, Shockley et al. (2021) highlighted that frequent virtual meetings can cause mental fatigue, while the lack of nonverbal cues such as body language or facial expressions make virtual experiences more challenging and less appealing to those who prefer personal interactions. Lack of social connections and isolation result in disengaged individuals (Chatha & Qayyum, 2022); in addition, technical difficulties faced during remote work can contribute to frustration and fatigue (Moro et al., 2020).

Prior to the pandemic, voluntary WFH options promoted a work–life balance (Dockery & Bawa, 2018), greater work–family integration (Raghuram et al., 2003), higher job satisfaction (Castellacci & Vinas-Bardolet, 2019), increases in employee productivity, reduced running cost, and improved management of work stress (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). The disadvantages of WFH options in the pre-Covid era can be summarized as exposure to cybercrime (Alsmadi & Prybutok, 2018), increased rate of conflict between domestic and work responsibilities due to work pressures and extended hours of work (Craig & Powell, 2012; Noonan et al., 2007), less career-development opportunities (Boom et al, 2019), and decreased employee engagement (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Post-Covid WFH experiences also entail struggles between managing demands of the family and job tasks (Khalid et al., 2022). Parry (2020) suggested that involuntary or enforced WFH can cause negative impacts on employee way of life, such as being socially excluded or lacking necessary technical support or a suitable working environment, which hinders work quality and output and eventually causes additional work stress. However, McKinsey (2021) emphasized that the future of work is more inclined toward remote working, such that robust technological platforms are required within organizations. In addition, Saridakis et al. (2023) drew attention to the need to evaluate WFH arrangements and the corresponding impact on employees, the organization, and the economy by diving into macro- (e.g., regulatory concerns), meso- (e.g., organizational support, strength of IT infrastructure, data protection laws), and micro-level (e.g., health and well-being concerns,



social distancing, diversity and inclusion, corporate culture, etc.) factors that drive and inhibit the social transition.

Following the pandemic, hybrid working has come to be considered the “new normal”, or the future way of working. Wiatr and Skowron-Mielnik (2022) pointed out that by the end of 2021, the *Oxford English Dictionary* had updated its definition of hybrid to include the term “hybrid working”. This is a clear indication of the social impact hybrid working modalities have had on organizations and employees. Wiatr and Skowron-Mielnik (2022) stated that the hybrid approach provides greater flexibility, autonomy, and sociability for employees; however, CIPD (2021) has cautioned that hybrid working may not necessarily be the right fit for all individuals or roles. The concept is still evolving, and many organizations have taken steps toward making hybrid working solutions a long-term strategy.

Regarding the global “great resignation trend” (i.e., a shift in the job market where employees are leaving their jobs as a result of burnout, work culture, and aftereffects of Covid-19), Selvi and Madhavkumar (2023) conducted a quantitative research study which revealed that the hybrid working model positively mediates happiness in the workplace, while flexibility has made a difference in employee retention rates in the ICT industry. The findings highlighted that hybrid working could be the most effective method for talent attraction and retention as it helps to influence employees’ intention to stay. Mitchell and Brewer (2021) stated that hybrid working is perceived as an offered benefit by employers, and that managers leading teams in such a hybrid environment must promote an active culture of teamwork and collaboration.

Some of the other key advantages of introducing hybrid working solutions for employers include reduced real-estate and facilities costs (Katsande et al., 2022), improved employee well-being (Chafi et al., 2021), increased diversity in the talent pool, the removal of geographical location as a barrier (Katsande et al., 2022), and enhanced inclusion measures within the working environment. These advantages seem to have improved overall job satisfaction in different industries and regions (Katsande et al., 2022). For employees, working from home (or remotely) means that less time and finances are spent on commuting (Ober & Kochmańska, 2022), while flexible schedules have positive effects

on quality of life outside of work (Baltes et al., 1999). Advantages of hybrid working models include improved employee well-being and diversity, and enhanced inclusion measures within the working environment (CIPD, 2021).

Despite the advantages of hybrid working, implementing hybrid models also brings challenges to organizations. Chafi et al. (2021) highlighted lost camaraderie and isolation as some of the major challenges in this regard. Their study emphasized the need for digital and physical working spaces to be redesigned in view of employee needs arising due to introduction of hybrid working models. Sampat et al. (2022) researched the facilitators and barriers to hybrid working and found several drawbacks, such as blurred lines between personal life and work, which can lead to increased stress levels and burnout. The authors pointed out that the lack of face-to-face interaction and reduced social interaction need to be compensated via effective virtual communication strategies and tools. According to Zhang et al. (2015), hybrid working may hinder spontaneous collaboration among teams. Katsande et al. (2022) cautioned that hybrid arrangements can give rise to feelings of unfairness, inequality and exclusion as certain individuals may continue to work more days from home or remote locations as opposed to working onsite. Further, blurred work–life boundaries can lead to burnout, and it is challenging to clarify those boundaries (Caruso, 2014). Reduced social interactions can bring feelings of isolation, and reduced opportunities to interact can affect team bonding and overall employee engagement. Another drawback is that hybrid arrangements significantly depend upon technology, and inadequate infrastructure can impact productivity and cause frustration among employees (Katsande et al., 2022). Gorjifard and Crawford (2021), conducted a post-pandemic study that demonstrated how the frequency of WFH can impact the work–life balance and well-being of individuals. Their results showed that working women find it challenging to strike a balance between domestic responsibilities and work accountabilities. Given the potential challenges, it is evident that new skills and approaches are required to manage teams and institute effective communication strategies (Zhang et al., 2015).

Bearing in mind the advantages and disadvantages of hybrid working, the following points are important to consider while planning for hybrid working models (CIPD, 2021, p. 4):

- “Decide on an overall strategic position on hybrid working for the organization and develop a policy and supporting guidance reflecting the strategy.
- Define hybrid working in the context of the organization or nature of the business. This may mean including several different forms of hybrid working within the same organization based on role requirements.
- Keep employees engaged throughout the organization, providing opportunities to ask questions and raise concerns, as well as training and development to support successful hybrid working.
- Develop a communication plan to share plans for future hybrid working with all employees, including information on how to request hybrid working.
- Contingency planning for the organizational implications of hybrid working on matters such as technology, employee well-being, inclusion, and facilities.
- Build team camaraderie to support effective team building and cohesion in hybrid teams”.

It is important to note that introducing a hybrid approach in the workplace can lead to a culture shift that can give rise to many people issues, of which managing employee expectations can be the most difficult challenge for line managers and HR. There is still much to learn about hybrid working solutions; therefore, new principles and policies should remain under review to support organizations in fine-tuning hybrid or flexible work arrangements.

Figure 17 depicts the evolution of hybrid working and the concepts discussed above, covering the pre- and post-pandemic environment.

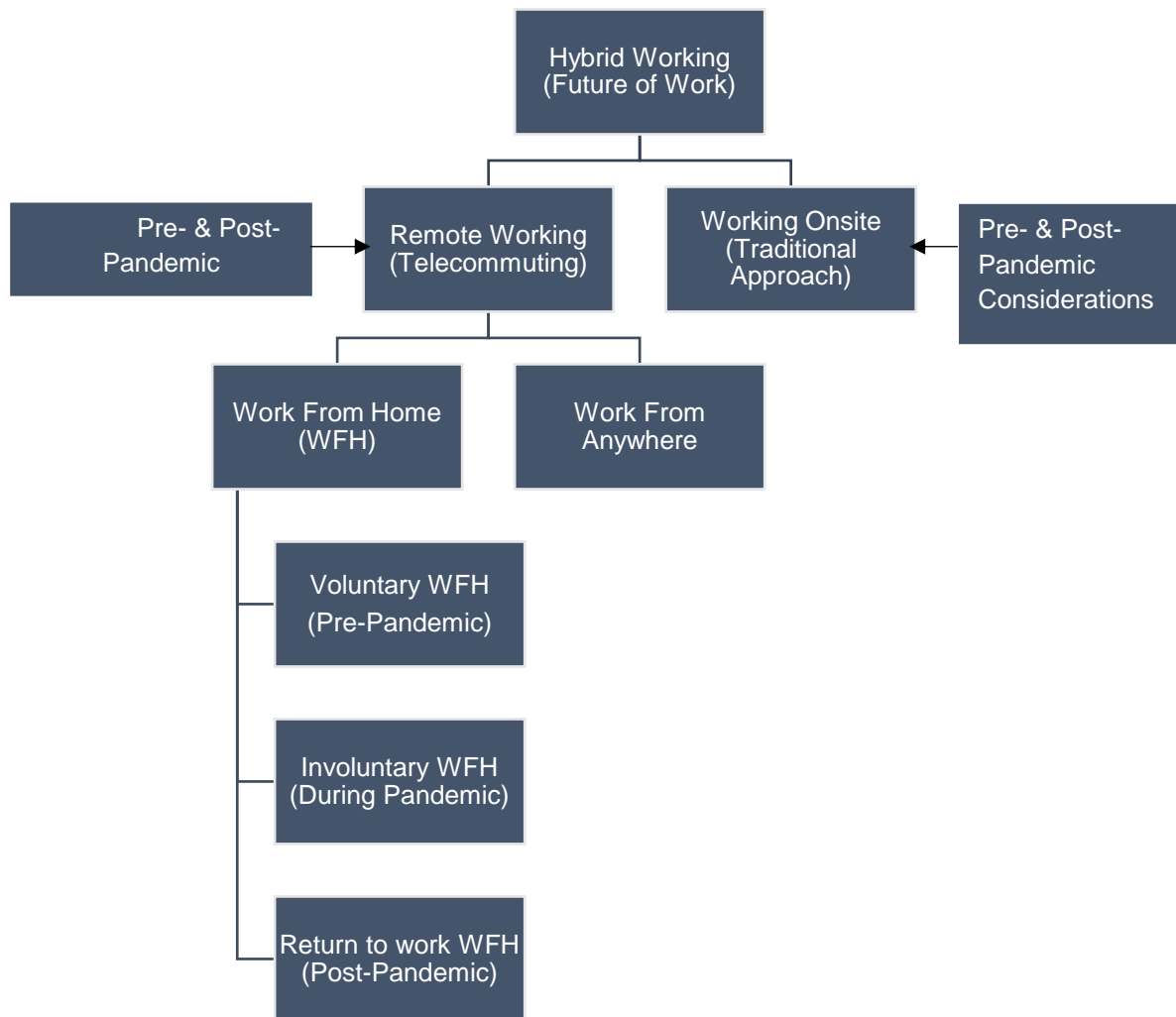


Figure 16: The Evolution of Hybrid Working Arrangements

SHRM (n.d.) has defined different types of flexible working arrangements, as follows:

- **Flextime:** Employees have the flexibility to choose their working hours within the day or over the span of a week or other specific period, allowing for greater flexibility in work start and end times.
- **Compressed workweek:** Employees work a standard number of hours over a period of fewer than five days a week. Compressing work hours into a shorter number of workdays provides additional days off throughout the week.
- **Shift work:** Employees have the flexibility to work in shifts according to their availability. Traditionally, this concept has been followed in 24/7 call center environments, yet as individuals work across borders and are required to work in different time zones, the shift-work model has become more popular.

- Part-time jobs: This is the most widely used flexible working arrangement in the corporate world. Part-time jobs allow organizations to retain professionals who would otherwise be lost due to personal commitments and other challenges.
- Job sharing: Two different employees perform the task of one full-time position and divide the job responsibilities in a manner that meets the expectations of the role and the employer. There can be challenges when one job is performed by two individuals, but if it works well then it can enhance efficiency. It is not suitable for all types of job roles and responsibilities.

Accelerated by the pandemic, the healthcare industry is undergoing radical changes, and the introduction of new business concepts—such as the digital customer, digital processes, and digital work—has created new demands within the HR cycle of organizations.

CIPD (2021) highlighted the need to understand the role of technology and the impact it can have on people. Keeping abreast of emerging digital trends can enhance the employee experience and influence the employer brand. Therefore, it is important to understand how technological decisions impact people—in other words, to identify how digital interventions such as remote working applied in the workplace correspond with the employee experience journey. The touchpoints of the employee experience journey comprise the elements of the EVP. As discussed above, the EVP elements or drivers are delivered through the functions of HR. This entails taking a closer look at hybrid working solutions that have been put in place or have yet to be implemented within HR strategy and other functional areas, such as policy formulation, manpower planning, recruitment, selection, onboarding, performance management, training and development, total rewards, employee engagement, exit formalities, etc.

As business strategies move toward the digital space, HR departments must find the right approach to deliver on business goals. While the Covid-19 pandemic was beyond human control, many organizations are conscious about how the post-pandemic environment has reshaped the employee experience, taking hybrid working solutions into account.

From the perspective of the UAE's healthcare sector, it is apparent that the future of the industry is dependent on digital health transformations and the future of work is transitioning to a hybrid structure. Therefore, it is prudent to create HR strategies and formulas to help organizations navigate this journey in the coming years. The organizations that acknowledge and incorporate influences of hybrid working into the EVP can enhance their attractiveness towards existing and prospective employees.

Several previous research studies have been conducted specifically in the UAE in relation to the EVP and hybrid working. For example, Parameswaran (2021) conducted a quantitative study among healthcare employees in the UAE on the relationship between cognitive flexibility and organizational flexibility with flexible work designs. The findings revealed that a flexible workforce requires tactical management strategies, and various initiatives to cater to employee demands and develop employee skills with respect to working in a flexible environment. Agha and Fitzsimmons (2022) explored the correlation between CSR and the EVP in the UAE following the pandemic. Their study revealed that companies' CSR initiatives improve employee loyalty and commitment, brand awareness, and trust, which has a significant positive impact on the EVP. Michael and Fotiadis (2022) investigated reasons for employee turnover within the hotel industry in the UAE. They found that employees' intention to stay increases when the organization delivers an EVP that includes development value, economic value, and social value. AlNeyadi and Aoul (2021) conducted a quantitative survey among UAE Government Ministry employees to explore how the pandemic has shifted working models, and the implications of this on work design. The results indicated that 57% of employees preferred working in a mixed (office/WFH) model and 26% indicated a preference for working full-time from home. The authors highlighted the increasing need to revise current working models and to introduce new guidelines for office design. Rañeses et al. (2022) investigated the impact of remote working on employee productivity and work-life balance in the consultancy industry. Their quantitative study indicated a strong positive relation to employees' productivity, but no significant impact on employees' work-life balance. The authors suggested that further research is required to identify other factors and discover new perspectives on the impact of remote working. Kurdy et al. (2023) studied the impact of remote working on employee productivity in the UAE during the pandemic; their findings

reiterate that workload, job satisfaction, work–life balance, and social support have a significant positive impact on employee productivity. In addition, they found that job level is not a significant moderator with respect to these factors. Parameswaran (2020) examined the EVP by selecting 10 companies operating in the UAE on a random sampling basis. Their analysis suggested that an attractive EVP strategy can be achieved subject to job aspects and organizational processes.

The above studies have collectively emphasized the significance of aligning EVP strategies with hybrid work dynamics in the post-pandemic UAE job market, emphasizing the pivotal role of flexibility, technology integration, and employee-centric approaches in enhancing organizational EVP. However, from the perspective of the health insurance industry in the UAE, little academic research has been conducted with respect to refocusing or reshaping the EVP in light of the transition to hybrid arrangements. This represents a limitation of existing academic research.

#### *1.4.12 Hybrid Working: A Transformative Organizational Change*

Emergent and processual perspectives on change provide theoretical frameworks that provide insights into how organizational change occurs. These perspectives transcend the traditional dichotomy of planned and emergent approaches to change (Guette & Vandembemt, 2020). The emergent perspective on change emphasizes that change is not linear and takes place in an unpredictable manner. It suggests that change can occur from various levels in the organization and is not necessarily a top-down directive. From a processual perspective, organizational strategy emergence is deemed to be continuous and changing, patterned and idiosyncratic, and individualistic and group oriented (Pettigrew, 1987). This suggests that change entails a series of interconnected processes and unfolds over time in an incremental manner. Internal power dynamics, conflicts, and stakeholder behavior shape the way the change process is viewed and managed. When these two change perspectives are viewed in conjunction with the interpretivist research paradigm, they represent a complementary approach to navigating change. The interpretivist research paradigm focuses on understanding the meaning behind social actions, behaviors, and events, and acknowledges that individual interpretations can be subjective and different. Therefore, these perspectives provide valuable lenses to understand the complexities of

the organizational change process, and how employees perceive and interpret these emerging changes.

Kotter (1995) described “change” as a process of altering the way in which things are done. Relatedly, “organizational change explains the movement of an organization from the known state (current state) state to the unknown state (Desired future state)” (Hussain et al., 2018, pp. 123–127). Organizational change can occur at different levels—that is, at the individual, team, department, or organization level (Jimmieson et al., 2004). Change can stem from implementing new ideas, practices, and technologies to improve organizational performance, to thrive in current market conditions, or to adapt in order to embrace new challenges (Bisesi & Kanter, 1984). Cummings and Worley (2003) suggested that as the future state of change is uncertain and can give rise to concerns and doubts in the minds of employees, it is important for employees to be convinced of the new status quo for the change initiative to be a success. In essence, organizational change involves making significant alterations to the firm’s structure, process, strategy, or culture, and employees are the ultimate drivers of the initiated change. The outcomes of a change process can trigger positive or negative results.

Organizational change can be categorized into two primary themes: adaptive changes and transformative changes (Stobierski, 2020). Adaptive changes are small and incremental in nature, and address needs that evolve with time, whereas transformative changes entail significant shifts in organization structure, strategy, culture, performance, and processes. Herold et al. (2008) explained that transformational change involves fundamental and significant shifts within the organization. Transformative changes are executed with the aim of creating long-lasting shifts, and directly impact organizational values, behaviors, and mindsets (Köhler et al., 2019). As explained in definitions transformative changes, oversees complex challenges (Feola, 2014) and therefore requires a structured approach to understand the dependency between variables and different stakeholder groups (Moore et al., 2021). Researchers have suggested that in order to drive transformative change, organizations need leaders who can foster innovation and collaboration, and make employees change-ready (Tayal et al., 2018).



The emergent change perspective can be applied to understand the transformative organizational change process. The unpredictable, nonlinear nature of emergent change as understood from this perspective recognizes that change can evolve in unexpected ways. It encourages the magnitude of the change to be continuously assessed as a reality check. The emergent change perspective supports the notion that transformative changes can be interpreted and perceived differently by different stakeholder groups. Embracing an emergent change perspective can pave the way for resilient and pragmatic change solutions. Notably, two years after the pandemic, organizations are still responding to evolving needs and seeking ways to understand employee experiences related to this unprecedented change.

Disruption was the hallmark of the year 2020. Hybrid working is a transformative organizational change that was triggered because of a global pandemic, and many organizations were compelled to adopt this change overnight in an unplanned manner. The disadvantage of such radical changes is that organizations need to put in place damage-control measures to mitigate any unplanned risks or aftereffects. CIPD (2020c) stated that changes such as digital interventions in the pre-Covid era were moving organizations from paying attention to health and well-being measures therefore in a post-Covid environment, well-being interventions has become timely to be explored and enforce corrective measures. Apart from the challenges and disadvantages of hybrid working discussed in the previous section, several aspects of hybrid working also require carefully curated damage-control measures. According to Everett (2022), transitioning to remote and hybrid working can potentially damage the corporate culture, since building relationships is becoming increasingly challenging. Mortensen (2023) stated that hybrid working can give rise to toxic behaviors that are disrespectful, noninclusive, unethical, cutthroat, and abusive in nature. De Smet et al. (2021) cautioned that implementing hybrid working is more complex compared to remote working, and that organizations need to address the disconnect between employer expectations and employee expectations. Nisa et al. (2022) indicated that the implementation of hybrid working is complex and can create communication gaps within the organization.

Regarding organizational behavior, there are multiple change-management theories that can be used to understand the steps involved in a change process. For an example,

Kotter's (2004) eight-step model for change (Feldman, 2000) begins with Step 1, creating a "sense of urgency"—that is, making the organization aware of the need for change and how it relates to organization success. Transparent communication that highlights potential risks can facilitate getting buy-in from employees and encourage them to participate in the change process (Kotter, 2004). Step 2 is "forming a powerful coalition", which supports in carrying out the change mission. This can involve appointing change agents across the organization who have the authority, expertise, and credibility to lead change (Kotter, 2004). Step 3, "creating a vision for change", provides a road map as to what the change will look like, and provides a sense of direction and purpose to reach the desired state. This enables employees to envision and understand the organization's mission (Hughes, 2016). Step 4 is "communicating the vision", which entails making sure effective communication strategies are put in place (Weiss & Li, 2020). Step 5, "removing obstacles", entails identifying barriers to change and taking suitable actions to address them (Kuo & Chen, 2019). Step 6 highlights the need to "create short-term wins", which will help to build confidence in the change process, and encourage employees to remain engaged and committed during difficult times of change (Sittrop & Crosthwaite, 2021). Step 7, "build on the change", emphasizes moving forward with the change initiative based on the milestones achieved, continuing to identify bottlenecks within the change initiative, and making adjustments to the change plan where necessary (Kotter, 2004). Step 8 entails "embedding changes into the corporate culture" through values, norms, and behaviors and institutionalizing new ways of working through updating policies, procedures, and systems.

Kotter's (2004) model can be considered appropriate for change initiatives within organizations where the change is deliberate and predictable. However, WFH and hybrid working initiatives became a solution for many organizations due to unplanned change that was unprecedented and chaotic in nature, therefore the author sees that the theoretical model can be used as a means of damage control or to mitigate future risks.

Kanter (1985, pp. 47–60) described several factors that can lead to resistance to change as a "threat to [the] status quo" is triggered when the existing structure, power, and established ways of doing things are disrupted. Such disruption often occurs when individuals perceive the change as a threat. The "fear of uncertainty" or "fear of unknown"

is a key reason why employees resist change. The unfamiliar nature of change can influence the perceptions of individuals and cause significant barriers or mental blocks against the change drive or the transition. “Fear or loss of control” regarding work responsibilities or an ability to make decisions can influence individuals to resist change. “Cultural inertia” emphasizes the difficulties in changing task, team, or organizational cultures in a short span of time. Culture changes require a significant amount of time to become part of the corporate DNA. “Lack of resources” and “lack of [a] well-articulated vision” are additional hindrances to the change process and can give rise to resistance (aligning with Step 3 of in Kotter’s change model, “creating a compelling vision”). Finally, a “lack of leadership support” impedes and disrupts the achievement of change objectives. These barriers can be considered relevant to changes in the context of implementing hybrid working solutions within organizations, and potential outcomes thereof. When viewed using an interpretivist research paradigm, the forms of resistance fall into the categories of expressions of feelings, experiences, expectations, assumptions, perceptions, and attitudes of individuals and organizational circumstances, which can describe potential ways in which hybrid working has impacted employee way of life.

From an emergent organizational change perspective, and to address the interpretivist research paradigm questions highlighted in earlier sections of the chapter, this study draws on Lewin’s (1947) force field analysis (FFA) theory. The theory of FFA originated in the 1940s. Kurt Lewin is known as the father of social psychology, and his theory of change, introduced in 1946, is still used to analyze social situations. According to Berthaume et al. (2014), Lewin has significantly contributed to social science, psychology, organizational development, process management, and change management. Lewin’s (1951) theory emphasizes that human behavior is caused by specific forces, which include beliefs, cultural norms, expectations, and perceptions. FFA can be adopted to understand transformative organizational changes based on the dynamic and evolving nature of the transformation process. Identifying the interplay between forces and incorporating assessments to conduct reality checks make the application of the model more relevant. Adeshina et al. (2022) recommended the framework as an effective tool to manage ongoing change and support successful implementation, while Rosca (2020) adopted the framework to analyze the impact of social change. Amjad and Rehman (2018)

explained that FFA is a theoretical model that can identify and mitigate resistance to change. The steps of FFA include thoroughly understanding the incremental change process, identifying driving forces (Cathro, 2011), identifying opposing factors (Capatina et al., 2017), and developing an action plan to reach an equilibrium (Lewin, 1947). Therefore, distinct features of FFA that support transformative change initiatives can be summarized as follows:

- It is a diagnostic tool: FFA is used as a diagnostic tool for ongoing assessment and adaptation. The model is suitable for discovering current realities and managing behaviors stemming from organizational change. The framework facilitates understanding why individuals or organizations behave the way they do in response to change.
- It focuses on identifying forces of change and achieving equilibrium in change outcomes: Lewin (1951) suggested that successful change outcomes can be achieved by strengthening driving forces or weakening restraining forces. Equilibrium is reached when driving forces meet restraining forces for change. Therefore, FFA emphasizes the need to balance driving and restraining forces, which aligns with the current study's objectives.
- It considers the nature of change and enables predictive analysis: FFA offers a flexible and adaptable approach to change management. It allows organizations to anticipate challenges and obstacles that may arise during the transformation process.

Thus, FFA is a valuable tool for gaining insights. However, a primary criticism of FFA is that it oversimplifies the complexities of organizational change (Swanson & Creed, 2013). Therefore, to reduce limitations in the diagnosis process, it is advisable to conduct pilot studies to test the assumptions and validate study findings against previous research.

#### *1.4.13 Theoretical Framework: Adopting Kurt Lewin's FFA*

A theoretical framework in qualitative research refers to a structure that provides the foundation for understanding the phenomenon under investigation and justifies the research design and methodology (Garvey & Jones, 2021). It helps researchers to view the research problem and research questions through a theoretical lens, and to analyze data;

identify themes, patterns, relationships (Collins & Stockton, 2018); and connect findings to existing theory (Yazdanparast et al., 2010). As stated by Rolfe (2006), a theoretical framework increases credibility and rigor in qualitative research. On the other hand, conceptual frameworks are developed by researchers following thematic analysis of qualitative data specific to the research study in order to organize and demonstrate relationships between key concepts and components of the study (Garvey & Jones, 2021; Jabareen, 2009). In other words, the theoretical framework provides a broader perspective on the overarching research process.

In line with the above explanation, this study leverages Lewin's (1947) FFA theory to address the research problem and answer the research questions. When transitioning from a traditional way of working to a new state of hybrid working, organizations undergo a transformative change process, as established through the literature review. Thus, there is a need to understand how this organizational change or transition has impacted employee way of life, and whether it has given rise to a need to reshape the EVP in the post-pandemic environment. The FFA framework will facilitate in determining positive and negative effects of the organizational transition to hybrid working from the employee perspective in the health insurance industry.

Studies referenced in the literature review have confirmed that hybrid working has both positive and negative aspects. Therefore, in this qualitative research study the impact is measured based on employee lived experiences with hybrid working—that is, a combination of feelings, assumptions, attitudes, and perceptions. The Oxford Dictionary has defined “lived experience” as “the things that have happened to you that influence the way you think and behave”. This ties in with the epistemological interpretivist research paradigm, which follows an inductive research logic. Figure 18 depicts the theoretical framework adapted to the context of the research topic under investigation.

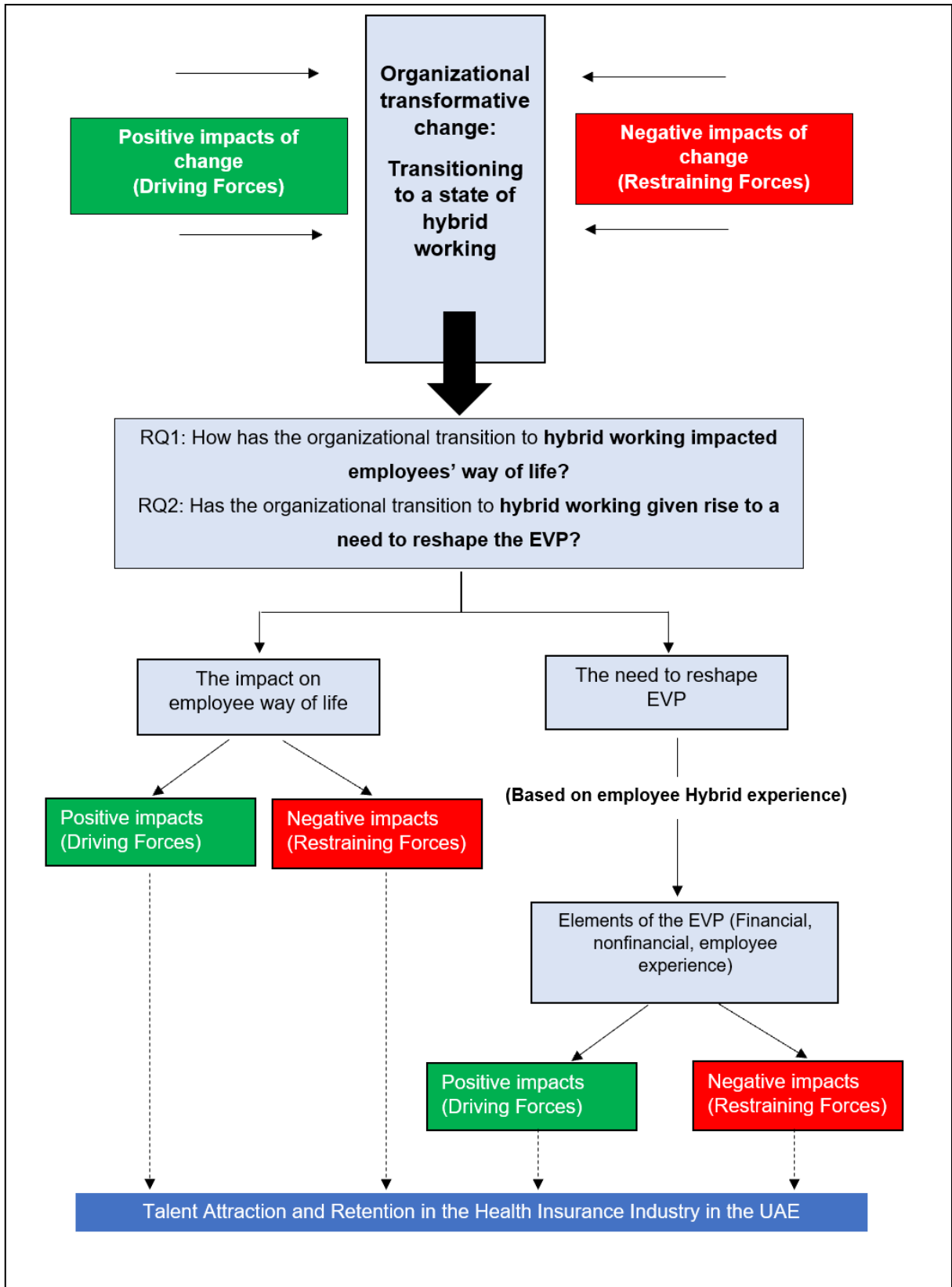


Figure 17: Adopting Kurt Lewin's (1947) and (1951) FFA Theory as the Study's Theoretical Framework

Per the literature review, the key concepts adopted in the theoretical model can be defined as follows:

- **Organizational transformative change:** The state of transition from traditional working to hybrid working. This type of change is transformative in nature as it impacts the people, structure, processes, policies, and culture of the organization.
- **Positive impacts of change:** The driving forces of change or transition (adopted from Kurt Lewin's (1951) FFA theory).
- **Negative impacts of change:** The restraining forces of change or transition (adopted from FFA theory).
- **The impact on employee way of life:** Examined through RQ1 to understand how hybrid working has impacted employee way of life (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship). The impact can be qualitatively measured as positive impacts (driving forces) and negative impacts (restraining or inhibiting forces), in line with FFA.
- **The need to reshape the EVP:** Examined through RQ2, employee lived experiences regarding hybrid working (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship) are viewed against elements of the EVP. The qualitative outcomes are to be categorized as positive impacts (driving forces) or negative impacts (restraining or inhibiting forces) in line with FFA.
- **Elements of the EVP:** Per the reviewed literature, and in the context of the present research study, drivers of the EVP are determined as a combination of three elements—financial rewards, nonfinancial rewards, and overall employment experience (see Figure 13).
  - a) Nonfinancial rewards include recognition, learning and career-development opportunities, work-life balance, well-being, employee involvement and participation, work environment, performance culture, leadership behavior, and communication.
  - b) Financial rewards are employee benefits associated with salary, bonuses, and other allowances.
  - c) Employment experience in the context of the employment journey are the lived experiences of the employee.

- Talent attraction and retention in the health insurance industry of the UAE: Considers the link between the two research questions and the significance of the study.

The adoption of Lewin's (1951) FFA framework will support the author in overcoming the limitations identified in existing literature and designing a suitable research strategy to achieve the research objectives.

#### *1.4.14 Conclusions on the Challenges and Limitations in Literature Review*

The author wishes to highlight some of the challenges faced and limitations observed during the literature review process.

Lack of theoretical frameworks to understand or measure gaps in the EVP: As outlined in the research problem, an outdated or unrealistic EVP can cause irreparable credibility issues for an organization (Pawar & Charak, 2014). In the face of transformative organizational changes (Köhler et al., 2019), it is extremely important to assess how the implementation of hybrid working ultimately impacts the organizational EVP in the post-pandemic environment. Existing literature lacks a structured approach or framework to understand and evaluate the EVP within organizations. To mitigate this challenge, the author has carefully reviewed relevant theories in organizational change management and developed a theoretical framework based on Lewin's (1951) FFA theory. The diagnostic theory facilitates understanding of the current realities of hybrid arrangements and measures employee experience, which feeds into the EVP.

Outdated theoretical definitions in view of post-Covid and hybrid realities: In defining key concepts related to the research study, the author observed gaps between academic interpretations and current realities. Definitions pertaining to work environment and factors that drive the EVP need to be realigned based on post-Covid and hybrid working arrangements. Job location is no longer geographically bound, and the employee working environment can be onsite, remote, or blended. These realities challenge the overall outlook of the EVP. A recent post-Covid study claimed that employee experience is the new EVP (Panneerselvam & Balaraman, 2022), while existing theoretical definitions of EVP do not incorporate this aspect. Although extant work has examined the concept of



the EVP and what it entails, the employment experience has not been extensively discussed as an element of the EVP, whereas employee offerings and benefits (both tangible and intangible) have been acknowledged. This indicates that EVP drivers and theoretical models were conceived in an era where pandemic circumstances were not at play.

In addition, post-pandemic research has suggested that it is important to identify and distinguish the impact of voluntary WFH and involuntary WFH, as the latter is detrimental to organizational growth (Parry, 2020). The struggles of female workers while working from home (Gorjifard and Crawford, 2021), prospective candidates preferring to work for socially responsible employers (Greening & Turban, 2000), hybrid working and potential damages to the corporate culture (Everett, 2022), and rise of toxic behaviors (Mortensen, 2023) are several emerging research findings that the author wishes to validate through the lens of respondents that have undergone a hybrid experience within the health insurance industry. Overall, the employment journey experience is an important element of the EVP and currently underrepresented in theoretical definitions.

While these gaps in theory make it more challenging for interpretivist researchers to conduct explorative studies, for the benefit of future research, the author will consider the employee experience regarding hybrid working as a qualitative measure to understand the need to reshape the EVP. The related EVP concepts discussed by the author provide a detailed overview on the drivers or components of organizational EVP (see Figure 13).

Lack of clarity in existing literature regarding whether hybrid working is a driver or an enabler of the EVP: Hybrid working has created new realities, demands, and perceptions among employees (Gratton, 2021), and it is worth evaluating whether blended working arrangements are a driver of the EVP that needs to be embedded into existing theoretical definitions and frameworks. Doing so can be viewed as an investment that may demonstrate better returns for progressive industries, such as healthcare. The findings of this research will provide evidence to determine whether hybrid working arrangements are a driver or an enabler of the EVP among the health insurance industry.

Limited academic research discussing hybrid working and the impact on the EVP from an employee perspective in relation to a specific industry and region: The literature

review revealed several quantitative academic studies on hybrid working that have addressed the effect of hybrid working on productivity, job satisfaction, and work–life balance. However, the employee perspective—that is, consideration of the employee experience, perceptions, and the overall interrelationship between hybrid working and the EVP—is lacking. Even among existing academic research, reference has been made to business research conducted by consulting firms or professional bodies such as CIPD, McKinsey, Mercer, SHRM, or Wills Towers Watson. This is due to the unique nature of the topic, which has been academically underexplored since the breakout of the Covid-19 pandemic. Consulting firms can capture current realities in tandem with occurrences of social events, while academic research can be longitudinal and explorative in nature. This limited academic qualitative research on hybrid working and its impact on, or relationship with, the organizational EVP covering the industry and the region represents a gap in theory and scientific interpretivist research. The current study aims to bridge this gap.

Lack of insights and critique into macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of hybrid arrangements: With the rise of global remote workers and flexible working arrangements becoming a long-term strategy for many organizations (McKinsey, 2021), it is worth exploring how employers can create and communicate t EVP (Nisa et al., 2022) that has both tangible and intangible elements. The recent research studies state that the complexity in implementing hybrid working arrangements has increased (De Smet et al., 2021) and the author sees the entrance of Generation Z into the workforce adds makes the task even more challenging for the employers. Moreover, possibilities of cybercrime (Alsmadi & Prybutok, 2018) and lack of governance over hybrid formulas approaches (Gupta et al., 2022, pp. 1861–1866) can expose organizations to greater risk. Therefore, there is a need to review the concept of hybrid working through macro-, meso-, and micro-environment frames (Saridakis et al., 2023). In the context of the present research study, the macro level refers to the health insurance industry and UAE-specific changes, the meso level entails organization-wide changes, and the micro level refers to individual or employee group-specific changes. The results of the present study will be categorized accordingly.

## 1.5 Research Design and Justification

Research design is the plan or strategy that guides the collection and analysis of data to address research questions. Therefore, this section is dedicated for highlighting the fundamentals of the adopted research strategy covering key elements such as applicable research paradigm, the rationale behind overarching procedures and methods adopted for data collection, relevance of sampling strategies, a discussion on sample size and selection of thematic analysis for carrying out the research.

### 1.5.1 Research Design Associated with the Selected Research Paradigm

Qualitative research encompasses various approaches and methods for studying and understanding social phenomena in depth. The literature reviewed in the previous sections has confirmed the link between the research paradigm and overarching research methodology. Table 5 details the types of research design that are relevant to the positivist versus interpretivist research design (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 60).

Table 5: Methodologies Associated with the Main Paradigms

<b>Positivism</b>	<b>Interpretivism</b>
a) Experimental studies	e) Hermeneutics
b) Surveys (using primary and secondary data)	f) Ethnography
c) Cross sectional	g) Participative inquiry
d) Longitudinal studies	h) Action research
	i) Case studies
	j) Grounded theory
	k) Feminist, gender and ethnicity studies

There are various methodologies available for research studies stemming from the positivism and interpretivism perspectives. These include:

- a) Experiments involve researchers applying quantitative measures to experimental and control groups (Bryman, 2012). Anderson-Cook (2005) stated that researchers actively intervene and control conditions to examine the cause and effect between dependent and independent variables. Addelman and Kirk (1969) referred to the manipulation of variables as a key feature in experimental studies.

- b) Surveys enable the researcher to gather primary and secondary data with a view to generalizing the results to the population (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Data are collected through questionnaires and interviews (Cobb et al., 2014).
- c) Cross-sectional approaches involve collecting data at a single point in time to examine the relationship between variables (Bryman, 2012). One key limitation of this research method is that it does not support establishing causality or temporal relationships between variables because the exposure and outcomes are evaluated simultaneously (Solem, 2015).
- d) Longitudinal or panel studies involve observations of the same individuals or units for an extended period of time (Cole & Maxwell, 2003). Such studies are useful for studying a phenomenon that can change over time and for making causal inferences (Thompson et al., 2011).
- e) Hermeneutics, as described by Collis and Hussey (2014), focus on understanding texts, symbols, and meaningful expressions in various contexts. Hermeneutic research is particularly common in the fields of philosophy, theology, literature, and the humanities, but it has also found applications in social sciences and qualitative research (Rennie, 2012).
- f) Ethnography is qualitative research that aims to achieve an in-depth understanding of the way of life, beliefs, values, and perspectives of the people being studied. Researchers immerse themselves in the context they are studying to gain deeper insights (Gibbons et al., 1986). Similar to longitudinal research studies, ethnographic studies entail prolonged engagement (Bryman, 2012).
- g) Participative inquiry involves participants as coresearchers or collaborators (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The research process can include various methods, such as interviews, focus groups, workshops, or visual or art-based techniques (Benton & Johnson, 2015). The differentiator in participative inquiry-type research is that participants shape the research agenda, methods, and outcomes (McDonald, 2012).
- h) Action research is considered to be a systematic and collaborative approach to address real-life problems (Badger, 2000). The goal is to generate practical knowledge and improve practices through reflection and timely evaluation (Meyer, 1993). It often involves collecting qualitative and quantitative data to arrive at

informed decisions (Kyro, 2004). Gummesson (2000) argued that the following criteria must be met for action research to be a meaningful exercise:

- Action science should solve a problem for the client and contribute to the world of science.
  - Both researcher and client must learn from the outcomes of the study.
  - Researcher and client must cooperate for the success of the study, and open feedback lines must be in place for continuous adjustment of the exercise.
  - Primarily suitable for planning change within social systems and for building research and consulting strategies for businesses.
  - Methodology must not be based solely on the research paradigm but must account for what is appropriate for solving the research problem.
- i) Collis and Hussey (2014) stated that action research and case study research share commonalities in several respects. Case studies emphasize “understanding the dynamics present within a single setting” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 534). Collis and Hussey (2014, p. 68) stated that a case can take the form of “a particular business, a group of workers, event, process, person, or other phenomenon”. Yin (2009, p. 18) stated that case studies:
- “Investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.
  - Deals with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points.
  - Relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion.
  - Benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis”.

Perry (1998) highlighted that case studies have been used in fields such as the social sciences, healthcare, education, business, and marketing. Collis and Hussey (2014) categorized case study research under the interpretivist paradigm, but stated that positivists can adopt the framework if it is relevant to their research methods. Ryan et al. (2002) outlined four types of case study research approaches:

- Descriptive, to describe current practice.
- Illustrative, to outline new and innovative practices adopted by organizations.
- Experimental, to examine barriers to implementing new procedures or techniques and evaluate pros and cons thereof.
- Explanatory, using theory to understand and explain a status or circumstances.

As theory suggests, case study research is valued for its ability to provide insights into complex real-life problems and uncover context-specific information. Limitations of case study research include an inability to generalize to other contexts or populations, unlike scientific, quantitative research methods (Suryani, 2007). Case studies approach is critiqued for misconceptions, biases, or preconceived notions (Flyvbjerg, 2006). While case study research generates rich and detailed qualitative results, it can be challenging to present the findings in a concise manner (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The applicability of the case study methodology in the context of the present research will be discussed in the Section 1.44.

- j) Grounded theory, conceived by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is a framework adopted for collecting, coding, and analyzing qualitative data (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Suddaby (2006) suggested that grounded theory aims at discovering and developing theories rooted in data collected from respondents. Scott and Glaser (1971) considered grounded theory as a flexible and open-ended approach, and Wakeford (1969) stated that it allows researchers to dive into complex social phenomena and develop theories thereon. Limitations of grounded theory include difficulties analyzing and interpreting large volumes of data (Baid et al., 2019), uncertainty around theoretical data saturation (Gurd, 2008), a lack of guidance from the literature on how to develop and refine theories (Belfrage & Haulf, 2016), and its time-consuming and highly resource-intensive nature (Wakeford, 1969).

Silvermann (2013) described key stages of grounded theory as follows:

- Develop categories that illuminate the data.
- Use theoretical sampling to identify sample categories.

- Saturate the categories with many appropriate cases to identify themes and importance of categories identified.
- Continually compare existing and new data to make necessary adjustments to identified data categories.

Table 6 provides a comparison between grounded theory and case study approaches to research (Mfinanga et al., 2019). Both case study and grounded theory are widely used qualitative research approaches, and the author mentions there's inadequate literature to differentiate the two.

Table 6: Comparison between Grounded Theory and Case Study Research

Characteristics	Grounded Theory	Case Study
Focus	Developing a theory grounded in data from the field	Developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases
Type of problem best suited for design	Grounding a theory in the views of participants	Providing an in-depth understanding of a case or cases
Discipline background	Drawing from sociology	Drawing from psychology, law, political science, medicine
Unit of analysis	Studying a process, action, or interaction involving many individuals	Studying an event, a program, an activity, more than one individual
Data collection forms	Using primarily interviews with 20 – 60 individuals	Using multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, documents, artifacts
Data analysis strategies	Analyzing data through open coding, axial coding, selective coding	Analyzing data through description of the case and themes of the case as well as cross-case themes
Written report	Generating a theory illustrated in a figure	Developing a detailed analysis of one or more cases

Crewell (2012) stated that grounded theory is a powerful tool for researchers that wish to construct a broad theory from the social phenomenon under study. Grounded theory development is based on data obtained in the field, whereas case studies focus on an individual, group of people, or unit to draw in-depth conclusions (Gustafsson, 2017). Case study research supports answering “how” and “why” research questions (Teegavarapu et al., 2009), whereas grounded theory is more suited to understanding causal processes related to what is going on, to help resolve participants’ main concerns (Glaser 1978). Mfinanga et al. (2019) highlighted several differences between the two

approaches in terms of data-collection, data-analysis, and theory-building stages. As exhibited in Table 6, data collection under grounded theory is largely dependent on interviews, whereas case studies provide the flexibility to gather data from multiple sources.

- k) Feminist, gender, and ethnicity studies typically utilize the interpretivist paradigm (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Coolican (2009) highlighted that the aim of feminist research is to challenge the traditional research paradigms, highlighting gender influence on social, cultural and political structures and frameworks. Such academic disciplines contribute to understanding human and societal behaviors.

In summary, after reviewing the research approaches associated with the two main research paradigms (interpretivism and positivism), the author opted to follow an inductive logic supported with the interpretivist paradigm for the present study. The next section outlines the theoretical relevance and validity of adopting a case study approach for designing the research strategy.

### *1.5.2 Justification for Selecting an Epistemological–Interpretivist Paradigm and a Case Study Approach*

As discussed in Section 1.4.2, the epistemological–interpretivism paradigm addresses how knowledge is acquired, wherein the researcher plays the role of investigator. The relevance and validity of the case study approach in the context of the present study is outlined below.

The RQs (see Section 1.2) stem from an epistemological philosophy. RQ1 focuses on how transitioning to hybrid working has impacted employee way of life. To answer this, the magnitude of the impact (in terms of quality of life and the employment relationship) is measured by analyzing employee perceptions, feelings, and awareness levels in transitioning to hybrid working. RQ2 asks whether the impact on the employees' way of life has given rise to a need to reshape the EVP. Components of the EVP are discussed in literature review, along with how these drivers can support in assessing the research claim (how do we know what we claim to know). Answering these two RQs will facilitate in ensuring talent attraction and retention within organizations in the UAE health insurance industry. Hence the RQs justify the need for a qualitative research methodology.



Eisenhardt (1989, p. 548), stated that the case study approach is particularly well suited to new research areas or research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate. This type of work is highly complementary to incremental theory building from normal science research. The former is useful in early stages of research on a topic or when a fresh perspective is needed, whilst the latter is useful in later stages of knowledge.

Per this statement, the impact of hybrid working on employees is an evolving topic, and it is hoped that the current research will contribute to theory-building in human resource management and organizational change-management disciplines.

Key advantages of adopting a case study design include the ability to focus on a particular activity or specific event (Mfinanga et al., 2019), and the fact that the approach allows individuals to share and understand each other's experiences (Stake & Trumbull, 1982). In comparison to experimental research (see Section 1.4.3), the case study approach does not involve the manipulation of variables or experimentation on individuals. Quantitative research lacks the ability to develop new theories and hypotheses using inductive logic (Starman, 2013). George and Bennett (2005) stated that the case study approach is suitable for new theory-building for the following reasons:

- It can reveal links between causes and outcomes (the present research investigates the notion of hybrid working and how it has impacted employee way of life and thus the EVP).
- It can develop and test, using real scenarios, historical explanations (i.e., this study is assessing a real-life problem and whether traditional assumptions are still valid in view of the changes that have occurred).
- Understand the distinct features between concepts (i.e., the study aims to delineate the relationship between emerging trends and employee viewpoints).
- It provides the opportunity to form new hypotheses (i.e., considering that hybrid working is a new research area, findings on this topic will facilitate building new perspectives).

It is equally important to highlight misconceptions around the case study approach and arguments that undermine the credibility of it (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 302):

- Misconception 1: General theoretical knowledge is more useful than concrete case knowledge.
- Misconception 2: The case study approach is best suited for the first stage of a social research process whereas other methods are more appropriate for hypothesis-testing and theory-building.
- Misconception 3: One individual case cannot be used to generalize an experience or social phenomenon, and therefore cannot contribute to scientific development.
- Misconception 4: The case study approach tends to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions (Section 2.2 discusses in detail membership roles in qualitative research to elaborate how active participation is maintained without distorting the credibility of the research).
- Misconception 5: It is difficult to develop and summarize theories on the basis of specific case studies.

Sturman (1997) advised several strategies to confirm reliability and validity of research using a case study design. In light of these, the present study incorporates:

- Clear descriptions of data-collection methods and underlying qualitative logic.
- Demonstrations of how data are analyzed (e.g., categorized into codes) and theoretical frameworks are leveraged to arrive at themes.
- Reporting of negative instances (where applicable).
- Acknowledgment of biases (where applicable).
- Transcription of collected data for analysis and to confirm data saturation.
- Clarification of the relationship between assertion and evidence.
- Clear distinction between primary and secondary evidence, which are interpreted accordingly.
- Feedback notes and logs to track what was actually done during different stages of the study while adhering to ethical standards.
- Data accuracy throughout.

Data saturation in qualitative research is rooted in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Table 6 indicates the differences between grounded theory and case study methodologies, and data saturation issues pertaining to the present study are further

discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2. The nature of the research problem at hand determines the research paradigm and research design (Mfinanga et al., 2019); therefore, to investigate and draw in-depth interpretations on the impact of hybrid working on employee way of life (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship) and organizational EVP, the study adopts a qualitative case study research methodology that shadows an inductive theory-building approach. The group of individuals representing an organization, that have undergone a transition falls within the definition of a “case” under the selected research design. A single case study covering one organization is less expensive and time consuming in comparison to multiple case studies and allows the researcher to carefully review and question traditional theoretical models (Gustafsson, 2007). The researcher’s stance in carrying out the study is explained in relation to ethical considerations in Chapter 4, Section 4.3, in line with Adler and Adler’s (1987) typology of membership roles in the field.

### *1.5.3 Sampling and Data Collection in Interpretivist Studies and the Rationale Behind Selecting Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Groups*

A “sample” is a subset of a population, a “sample population” is a collection of people or items under consideration for a research study, and a “sampling frame” is a record of the population in which a sample can be drawn (Collis and Hussey, 2014, p.131). Under the interpretivist paradigm, research data are not statistically analyzed, [unlike](#) in the positivist paradigm (see Table 3). It is essential to consider the purpose of the research study and research objectives prior to selecting a sampling method. Sampling in qualitative research refers to choosing individuals or cases that can provide meaningful data to address the research problem and associated research questions (Gentles et al., 2015). Figure 6 illustrates the step-by-step approach to data collection in interpretivist studies (Collis & Hussey, 2014).

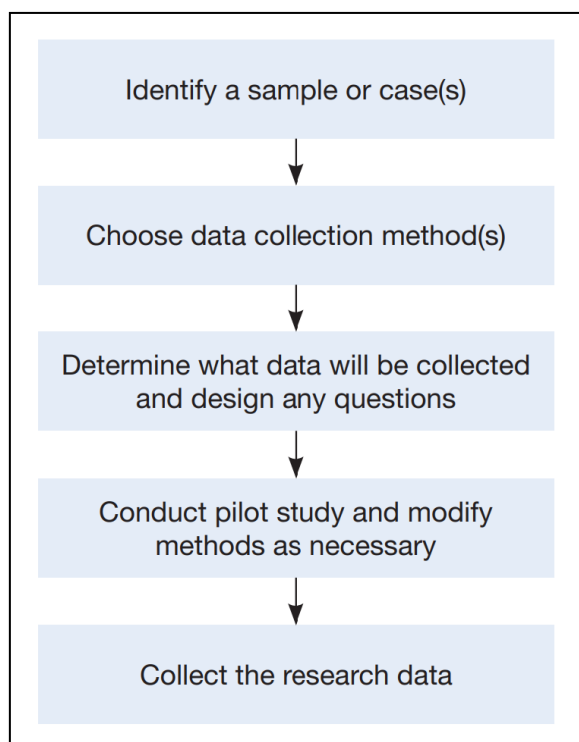


Figure 18: Data Collection in an Interpretivist Study (Source: Bryman, 2012)

As noted in the literature, commonly used nonprobability sampling techniques that are applicable in qualitative, interpretivist studies are as follows:

- a) Snowball sampling: A common qualitative research sampling technique used to reach marginalized populations (Gentles et al., 2015). It starts with a small group who are knowledgeable about the topic and who are then asked to network with other potential participants. This facilitates reaching out to hidden subsets of the research population.
- b) Purposive sampling: Participants are selected by the researcher on the strength of their experience (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The researcher's judgment and expertise play a crucial role in this process (Gentles et al., 2015).
- c) Convenience sampling: Respondents are selected based on accessibility and availability (Coyne, 1997). A key drawback of this technique is the limited generalizability of findings.
- d) Theoretical sampling: A technique used in the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The present study utilizes purposive sampling. The rationale behind this is explained in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.

There are several qualitative data collection methods available under the interpretivist paradigm. In the context of the present research, interviews and focus groups were deemed appropriate. These approaches can be described as follows.

a) Interviews: Arksey and Knight (1999, p. 2) defined interviews as suitable for collecting “data on understandings, opinions, what people remember doing, attitudes, feelings and the like, that people have in common”. Interviews can be structured, unstructured, or semi-structured. Easterby-Smith et al. (2012, p. 132) suggested that interviews are appropriate if:

- The aim is to understand the personal constructs (sets of concepts or ideas) used by the interviewee as a basis for their opinions and beliefs.
- The aim is to develop an understanding of the respondent’s “world” so that the researcher might influence it (for example through action research).
- The logic of a situation is unclear.
- The subject matter is highly confidential or commercially sensitive, or there are issues about which the interviewee may be reluctant to be truthful.

Interviews can be conducted individually or in groups; the most appropriate method depends on the size of the sample, the location, and accessibility (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Interviews can be conducted in various formats, such as face-to-face, via telephone, or online, again depending on the research objectives (Rubin & Rubin, 1996). Qualitative interviews facilitate obtaining in-depth understanding on the phenomena under review (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Creswell (2004) highlighted that qualitative interviews involve transcribing, coding, and identifying themes from the collected data. Structured interviews entail a predetermined set of questions being posed to respondents in the same order and format for systematic comparison (Fernandez & Pougnet, 2017). Unstructured interviews are more flexible and open-ended, thereby encouraging free-flowing conversations (Stevens & Kristof, 1995); however, unstructured interviews can be time-consuming and are not necessarily suitable for academic research. Semi-structured interviews combine elements of structured and unstructured interviews.

b) Focus groups: defined as “a method for collecting data whereby selected participants discuss their reactions and feelings about a product, service, situation or concept, under the guidance of a group leader” (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.141). The primary goal of focus groups is to gather in-depth qualitative data and insights into participants’ attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and experiences (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011). Interactions among participants facilitate the emergence of new perspectives (Kitzinger, 1994). Focus groups are generally hosted in smaller groups, and discussions are audio or video recorded for transcribing data (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011). Discussions are conducted in a neutral setup (e.g., a meeting room or online platform), which supports honest and open communication and promotes the sharing of experience (Rivaz et al., 2019). A limitation of this method of data collection is that dynamics within a group can potentially influence participant responses (Rivaz et al., 2019). According to McQuarrie and Krueger (1989), the effectiveness of discussion forums is dependent on the composition of the group, facilitator skills, and dynamics within the group. The design of focus groups plays an important role in maintaining reliability and validity in qualitative research.

The following steps have been recommended when conducting focus groups for a qualitative study (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 142):

1. Prepare a list of issues to be addressed.
2. Invite a group of people with sufficient experience in common on the research problem to meet at a neutral location.
3. Create a relaxed atmosphere when introducing the group members and explaining the purpose of the focus group and how it will be conducted.
4. Start the session with a broad, open question. This can be displayed on an overhead projector or flip chart. If possible, provide visual explanations or examples.
5. Allow the group to discuss the issue(s) as the moderator introduces them without intervening and ensure that all members have an opportunity to contribute to the discussion and all the issues are covered.

The optimal size for a focus group depends on the research context. Hambrook et al. (2020) and Simha et al. (2011) stated that an adequate focus group size is six to 12 participants. Guest et al. (2016), however, indicated that there can be no universal sample size for a focus group as it varies according to research parameters. In this vein, Kitzinger (1994) and Morgan (1996) emphasized the need to consider the nature of the research topic, the desired depth of the discussion, and the homogeneity or heterogeneity among participants. In addition, Patterson and Kelly (2005) drew attention to the dynamics of group interactions in determining the ideal size for a focus group discussion. Metcalfe et al. (2018) stated that the recommended focus group size is usually five to eight participants.

#### The rationale behind selecting semi-structured interviews and focus groups for the research study

The present study uses semi-structured interviews for the pilot study and focus groups for the second phase of data collection. Semi-structured interviews were deemed the best fit for the research purpose because they:

- Facilitate in-depth conversations, providing the opportunity for the researcher to ask probing questions and explore the topic in more detail (Kallio et al., 2016). Considering that hybrid working is an evolving topic, semi-structured interviews are suitable as they can lead to unexpected avenues and enable deeper investigation into the topic (Qu & Dumay, 2011).
- Prioritize participant feedback (Komesuor et al., 2023). Since semi-structured interviews are focused yet not heavily structured, they allow participants to express their views freely and researchers to capture participants' feelings and experiences.
- Can elicit context behind participant responses. Unlike in structured or unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews facilitate the researcher to understand the context behind the claims or feedback shared by respondents, thereby enhancing the value of the research.
- Use open-ended questions, leading to rich data (Pritchard et al., 2016) that can provide a holistic view on the topic and compare emerging themes.

- Build rapport and trust, helping the research to break down barriers and build trust with the respondents (Hebron & Humphrey, 2012).

Semi-structured interviews require careful planning and offer significant benefits.

However, they are subject to several limitations, as they are:

- Subjective: It has been argued that the flexibility involved in semi-structured interviews can lead to bias (Lewis, 2015). In addition, information is interpreted based on the researcher's judgment.
- Time-consuming (Bryman, 2006): Organizing semi-structured interviews requires preparation, for example identifying suitable participants, seeking their consent, scheduling interviews, and manually transcribing interviews.
- Unsuitable for large populations: Semi-structured interviews are more appropriate for smaller research groups, which limits the generalization of results (Caldas, 2003).
- Subject to complexity in data analysis: The open-ended nature of questions can lead to lengthy answers that require in-depth thematic analysis (Liem, 2020) to identify themes and patterns within them.

The above limitations in semi-structured interviews can be mitigated through careful planning and designing interview questions that are linked to the research questions and objectives. Therefore, the present research utilizes a robust interview design model that caters to the overall research purpose.

Focus groups were deployed for the main study because they:

- Are conducted in a group setting, which can stimulate meaningful conversations (Owen, 2001) and the presence of a moderator helps to steer the conversation in the right direction. They are particularly appropriate when respondents represent a single organization.
- Empower participants to voice their opinions and concerns (Owen, 2001). This is an important aspect to measure the employee experience with hybrid working arrangements.



- Are an efficient method of conducting research with an impactful outcome (Underhill & Olmsted, 2003). They are particularly appropriate for academic settings and research arrangements that entail time specific goals.
- Provide the ability to be transparent with respondents on how data has been recorded by the researcher while maintaining anonymity. This adds to the credibility and rigor of qualitative research.

As with any other theoretical concept, focus groups have been critiqued for being subject to unexpected challenges, such as participants not attending the session (Gill et al., 2008), and for being time-consuming due to the need for facilitation (Smithson, 2000). Other research (Cooper et al., 2003) has highlighted that focus groups can face geographical limitations, especially in the presence of scattered groups—though with respect to remote and hybrid working arrangements, such challenges are no longer applicable, as focus groups can be held onsite or virtually. In this study the focus groups were thoroughly planned, and possible challenges were preempted by providing advance interview invites, securing confirmations two weeks in advance of the focus groups and 24 hours before the actual session, pre-booking meeting rooms, and providing virtual dial-in arrangements in case participants were unable to attend in person, to ensure any unexpected challenges did not hinder the data-collection process.

In summary, interview questions were designed under the interpretivist paradigm in order to probe and gather rich qualitative data from the respondents. Likewise, the interviews were open-ended and semi-structured. A pre-determined set of questions was prepared and shared with the respondents as a guideline for the interview and to allow the respondents to be well-prepared. The interview design logic linking back to the research questions is explained in Chapter 2, Section 2.6.

#### *1.5.4 The Theoretical Debate on Sample Size in Qualitative Research*

The ideal sample size for qualitative research has been widely debated by various scholars. Guest et al. (2006) stated that the ideal sample size varies depending on the research problem and methodology used to carry out the investigation. Bertaux (1981, pp. 29–45) recommended 15 as the minimum acceptable sample size for qualitative research. Bekele and Ago (2020) stated that the most frequent sample size range in qualitative

research is 20 to 60, though this depends on various factors pertaining to the research study in question. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) argued that a sample size of less than 20 increases the researcher's chance of arriving at fine-grained data. Young and Casey (2018), likewise, stated that samples must be sufficiently large to adequately capture themes and codes. Byrman (2012, p. 425) highlighted differences between authors to indicate how difficult it can be to specify a minimum sample size in qualitative research.

Extant research has suggested that minimum and maximum sample sizes are not relevant in qualitative research, as the focus is on establishing data saturation, meaning that it is not pragmatic to have a predetermined, fixed sample size in qualitative inquiries (Malterud et al., 2016). Data saturation is the point at which no new information or themes are emerging out of the collected data (Malterud et al., 2016). The notion of data saturation evolved from grounded theory, posited by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Morse (2015, p.5 87) stated that it is a “guarantee of rigor in qualitative research and it is the one we least know about”. Choe and Lee (2014) pointed out that the lack of a predefined sampling process and the fact that the researcher must exercise stringent theoretical sensitivity in data analysis are weaknesses of the grounded theory approach. The scholarly debate and criticism around on how data saturation can be confirmed is an observation derived from existing literature.

According to Sandelowski (1995), deciding on a sample size in qualitative research is a matter of judgment and experience of the researcher. Vasileiou et al. (2018) highlighted that the lack of justification for specific sample sizes, especially for interview-based research, can lead to insufficient sample sizes.

Based on the reviewed literature, the following considerations determined the sample size for the present study:

- The research focuses on one organization, so as to allow the researcher to deeply examine the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1, Section 1.3.
- The research utilizes the interpretivist paradigm and a case study research methodology, and studies have suggested that a small sample size increases the ability to uncover fine-grained details in data.

- Although the above-reviewed literature has suggested that minimum or maximum sample sizes are not applicable to qualitative inquiries, an average sample size of 15 to 20 appears to have been followed by researchers investigating interpretivist research problems that are still evolving within society.
- Using purposive sampling, a preliminary sample of 40 respondents was identified by the researcher from an organization with 200 employees in the UAE. Per ethical guidelines, respondent participation in the study was entirely voluntary. The execution of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions was subject to receiving respondent consent.

An extended discussion on the sample size and sample selection criteria for the study is included in Chapter 2.

#### *1.5.5 Use of Thematic Analysis in an Interpretivist Study*

Morse (1994) highlighted four key elements that should be considered when analyzing qualitative data.

- a) **Comprehending:** While there has been some debate on how much prior knowledge an interpretivist researcher should have, as this may lead to preconceived notions, it is important to sufficiently understand the culture and the research topic prior to commencing the study. The researcher must be aware of existing literature yet remain distant so that theories and concepts do not stand in the way of discovering new perspectives.
- b) **Synthesizing:** This entails drawing conclusions out of the themes and concepts derived from the analysis. The researcher's focus at this stage is to interpret the qualitative data.
- c) **Theorizing:** This involves the "constant development and manipulation of malleable theoretical schemes until the best theoretical scheme is developed" (Morse, 1994, p. 32). The stage involves linking and comparing findings against existing theoretical concepts and constructing any theories following inductive logic in the interpretivist paradigm.

- d) **Recontextualization:** This involves highlighting theories that emerge through the data-analysis process and placing results in context to develop new models, frameworks, or theoretical links.

Bearing the above factors in mind, it should be noted that thematic analysis is a valuable qualitative research method for analyzing textual data. Boyatzis (1998) defines thematic analysis as a process of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting themes and various aspects within data. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 6) discussed under representation of the concept of thematic analysis “it can be a very poorly branded method and does not appear to exist as a renowned analysis (e.g.: narrative analysis or grounded theory), when in actuality a lot of research analysis is essentially thematic but named as something else (e.g.: discourse analysis or content analysis)”. This is further supported by comparing the process steps of thematic analysis against practices of other qualitative data analysis methods. Braun and Clarke (2006) counter argued against critique put forward by other scholars undermining robustness of thematic analysis process. In essence a rigorous thematic analysis approach can produce insightful information to answer research questions.

Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended that researchers follow six phases when conducting thematic analysis:

- a) **Phase 1: Familiarizing oneself with the data:** Transcribing verbal data is the best way to become familiar with it. Azevedo et al. (2017) described transcription as the process of transforming oral speech or interviews into written and meaningful text for further analysis. The researcher can immerse themselves in collected data by actively reading and searching for patterns and themes. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggested that the sample should be small enough that the researcher can read and reread collected data in text format.
- b) **Phase 2: Generating initial codes:** Coding is the process of organizing and categorizing data to identify patterns, themes, and concepts within it. Coding themes can be data-driven or theory-driven. In a data-driven coding approach, themes will depend on the data, whereas in a theory-driven coding approach, the researcher can approach data

with specific theoretical questions in mind. The process of coding can be done manually or through software such as NVivo.

- c) Phase 3: Searching for themes: At this stage, the researcher investigates all codes created from the collected data and explores the possibility of combining some of the codes to arrive at themes.
- d) Phase 4: Reviewing themes: This entails reviewing and refining themes. A thematic map—that is, a visual representation of a subject that indicate patterns, relationships, and overarching themes (Slocum et al., 2022)—can support in refining the themes identified.
- e) Phase 5: Defining and naming themes: This involves further refinement of the thematic map and understanding the story that the data convey.
- f) Phase 6: Producing the report: This final stage entails detailing theoretical relationships that are visible through the identified themes. It is important to convince the reader of the merits and validity of the data through this stage.

NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software that can support the researcher in the data coding process. Data transcription must be completed manually prior to uploading text to the software. Using software is considered an efficient way of sorting, retrieving, and searching for data in qualitative research (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). The hierarchical representation of codes helps researchers in identifying patterns and themes (Miranda et al., 2017). Hope et al. (2021) emphasized that NVivo can enhance depth and rigor in qualitative research and support thematic analysis. However, it is important for researchers to be mindful that NVivo provides a platform that assists in the overall analysis process but does not replace comparative and thoughtful interpretation of data (Ferns & Amaeshi, 2017).

As stated by Saunders et al. (2017), NVivo helps in achieving data saturation in qualitative research; however, the ultimate determination of data saturation and interpretation of themes relies on the researcher's judgment (Bowen, 2008). NVivo does not provide an automated solution regarding data saturation, and the researcher is responsible for making informed decisions based on the research objectives and the richness of the collected data (Bowen, 2008).

This study utilizes NVivo to organize the transcribed data and to arrive at a thematic map for the research study. Related thematic maps and visuals are provided in Chapter 3.

Whilst NVivo offers numerous advantages, it is important to note that it is also subject to certain drawbacks. NVivo is a commercial software for which a license needs to be purchased; therefore, it can be a costly investment for individual researchers. The software uses the English language, so the researcher must have a high level of proficiency in English to navigate the system features, potentially inhibiting non-English-speaking researchers from using the software (Daradkeh, 2022) and limiting the use of qualitative data in other languages. The structural features of the software also make it time consuming for coding qualitative research data (Svantesson et al., 2017) According to Robinson and Eisen (2017) the nature and features of the software prevent the analysis of large volumes of qualitative data in a short time. Previous researchers have also highlighted that the software can trigger data file compatibility issues and challenges with importing data into the system (Svantesson et al., 2017). Additionally, the software does not replace researcher flexibility, intuitiveness, or creativity (Daradkeh, M., 2022; Wali et al., 2021); therefore, it is advisable for researchers not to overly rely on it.

## **Chapter 2: Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Introduction to Research Methodology of the Case Study**

Research methodology describes the systematic approach applied by the researcher in conducting the case study. Research design and research methodology are essential for ensuring a well-structured, rigorous and meaningful case study. As discussed in the previous chapter, the choice of research design is dependent on the researcher's epistemological assumption and research paradigm followed (Alford et al., 1995). The author has discussed the characteristics of the research study justifying that the study rests on an epistemological interpretivist paradigm and follows an inductive logic. The theoretical framework adopted by the author provides an overarching view as to how the qualitative data are sourced and analyzed in a case study approach.

Figure 19 summarizes the research design and the link between the RQs, the theory, and the methodology applied throughout the study.

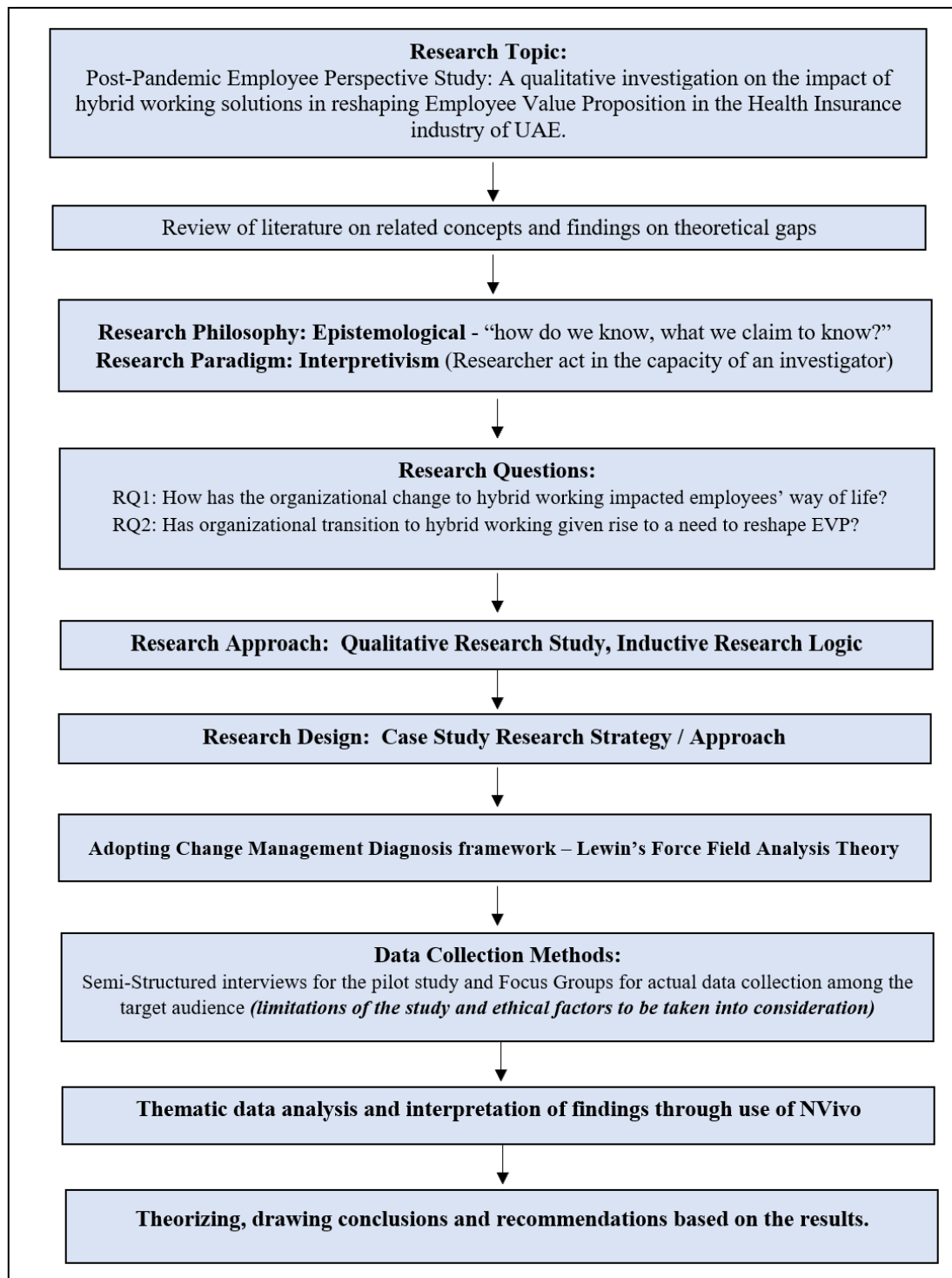


Figure 19: Linking the Research Problem with the Research Design (Framework Developed by the Author)



### *2.1.1 Health Insurance Organization Used in the Case Study*

The health insurance organization utilized in this study is one of the leading primary health insurers in the UAE, as well as catering globally to individual members, small and medium-sized businesses, and large conglomerates. For data privacy and confidentiality reasons, the author is not at liberty to disclose revenue and membership details across various emirates, nor insured-member demographics; however, as per internal data, the corporate brand has a market share of 25% approximately. It is worth noting that the market size can change over time due to various factors, including economic conditions, regulatory protocols, and consumer behavior. The UAE health insurance market is dominated by 10 organizations and the company under consideration for the current research is among the top three insurers based on market share, staff strength, and industry performance (see Section 1.12 for data on overall healthcare market value). The UAE's health insurance industry is governed and regulated by Central Bank and Insurance Authority of the UAE, and the operating models adopted by health insurers are similar. Therefore, job roles and responsibilities are homogenous in nature within the industry and the industry players face largely similar talent-attraction and -retention challenges. However, differences in organizational setup and ownership (e.g., local partnership or branch under foreign direct investment) lead to diverse structures, systems, cultures, and management practices within the health insurance industry, making it challenging to conduct industry-wide benchmarking studies. The movement of talent within the industry is relatively common, and retaining top talent is a challenge due to the high demand for health industry experience. This is further exacerbated by the industry practice of including a noncompete clause (article 127 of UAE labor law) within employment contracts to protect intellectual property rights and prevent talent-poaching within this competitive industry. However, as reviewed in literature, in reality it is not legal boundaries that support employees' intention to stay. The respondents selected for the present study represent one health insurance organization; however, considering the homogeneous nature of operating models across the industry, the research findings of the selected group are expected to be applicable to other health insurance market players in the UAE.

The company under consideration manages multiple product lines; however, for the purpose of the present study the focus is on the domestic business segment covering the

UAE and GCC markets. The organization has been operating in the UAE for the past 10 years, and the domestic business employs around 200 staff. From a diversity perspective, the organization employs individuals from 45 nationalities, with a 50:50 gender balance ratio and an average turnover among both nationals and nonnationals of 12–14% (data as of 2021). Following the pandemic, in 2022, there has been a rise in employee turnover among female employees and expats. Like other employers in the health insurance industry, the employer under consideration implemented full-time WFH (or offsite) measures during the pandemic years until Q3 of 2021, and is currently transitioning to a hybrid working arrangement across Middle East, Europe, and other global segments. At present, the employer adopts a two-day onsite, three-day offsite working strategy with a view to making necessary changes in line with business demands. As employees are at the receiving end of the hybrid arrangements, the findings of the present study are expected to reveal areas that have not been considered by the managers, HR professionals, and other decision-makers within the organization to date.

The career architecture of the organization consists of broad bands with subdivisions (e.g., band 2+ and band 2-) ranging from band 1 to band 8. The senior executives of the organization belong to band 5 up. The knowledge workers—that is, the specialists and supervisors—are band 2 to band 4. The employer is at the forefront of firms in the region with respect to introducing digitized health solutions and well-being measures, and has been recognized as health insurer of the year in the MENA region both prior to and following the pandemic. Therefore, best practices set by this employer can positively influence fellow health insurance players. The employer is bound by the Emiratization policy enforced by the UAE Labor Ministry and prefers to hire professionals with relevant industry experience. For the present study, there is a need to understand employee experiences that would drive existing and prospective talent to choose the employer in this post-pandemic environment.

A copy of the employee benefits offered by the employer is provided in Appendix 1. Based on preliminary discussions with employees from the industry and research produced by consulting agencies in the Middle East region (referenced in previous sections), the author has observed a lack of awareness of employee perspectives pertaining to hybrid arrangements. Furthermore, the absence of a defined EVP in the post-pandemic

environment has prevented the organization from curating timely, relevant employer branding and retention strategies, despite the fact that these are crucial for talent attraction and retention in this competitive market and industry.

## **2.2 The Key Features of Research Methodology**

Qualitative research aims to explore the phenomenon in question by focusing on the individuals who experience it (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). Qualitative methods primarily focus on measuring feelings, experiences, observations, and attitudes, rather than providing statistical interpretations (Coughlan et al., 2007). The author wishes to summarize the features of research methodology based on Coughlan et al. (2007) analogy.

Based on previously reviewed literature, the characteristics of the current study can be summarized as follows:

### *a) Research truth*

Social science scholars consider ontology as “the starting point of all research and after which epistemological and methodological positions follow” (Grix, 2002, p. 177). Blaikie (2000, p. 8) defined ontology as claims and assumptions about the nature of social reality, or what constitutes reality, and how we understand existence. In contrast, epistemological assumptions question the knowledge of knowing—the researcher is expected to uncover how we know what we claim to know. According to Bryman (2012), the interpretivist epistemological position requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action. In essence, the researcher’s ontological and epistemological positions can lead to varying viewpoints. From a research truth perspective, the chosen research paradigms influence what constitutes the research truth and the application of systematic and rigorous research methodologies.

Researchers may adopt a combination of ontological and epistemological positions depending on the nature of the research questions at hand, and the philosophical framework that aligns with their perspective. Given that the research topic in the present study is hybrid working and the future way of working following the recent Covid-19 pandemic, multiple truths may be revealed during the study and generalization is not sought. The RQs stem from the interpretivist paradigm, which aims to understand the

meaning behind human behavior, the readiness to embrace hybrid working solutions, and the impact of this on existing EVP drivers of organizations. Some of the research interview questions entail certain ontological assumptions and delve into nature of reality in terms of hybrid working and the influence of this on organization culture, the perceived reality of leadership behavior and communication, and how recent changes in organizational practices have influenced the quality of employees' work life and the employment relationship.

b) *Research purpose*

Research purpose refers to the primary objective or reason for carrying out research. The research objectives of this study are framed to find meaning to the research problem and research questions outlined in chapter 1. The author is investigating how has hybrid working impacted employee way of life (i.e., quality of life and employment relationship) and whether the organizational transition has triggered a need to reshape the EVP. The need to reshape EVP is measured based on employee hybrid experience. The findings of this research will enable talent attraction and retention within the UAE's health insurance industry which is rapidly being influenced by digital interventions.

Figure 20 depicts the author's contribution to theory and practice in view of the research problem, availability of academic research and real-life evidence (i.e., qualitative data). In other words, the author's purpose is to shed more light into the concepts of EVP and hybrid working in a post-Covid era considering the limitations in existing theory and lack of academic qualitative research. Furthermore, limitations and challenges highlighted under literature review provide the fundamental basis to carry out this academic research study and it adds to the significance of research findings.

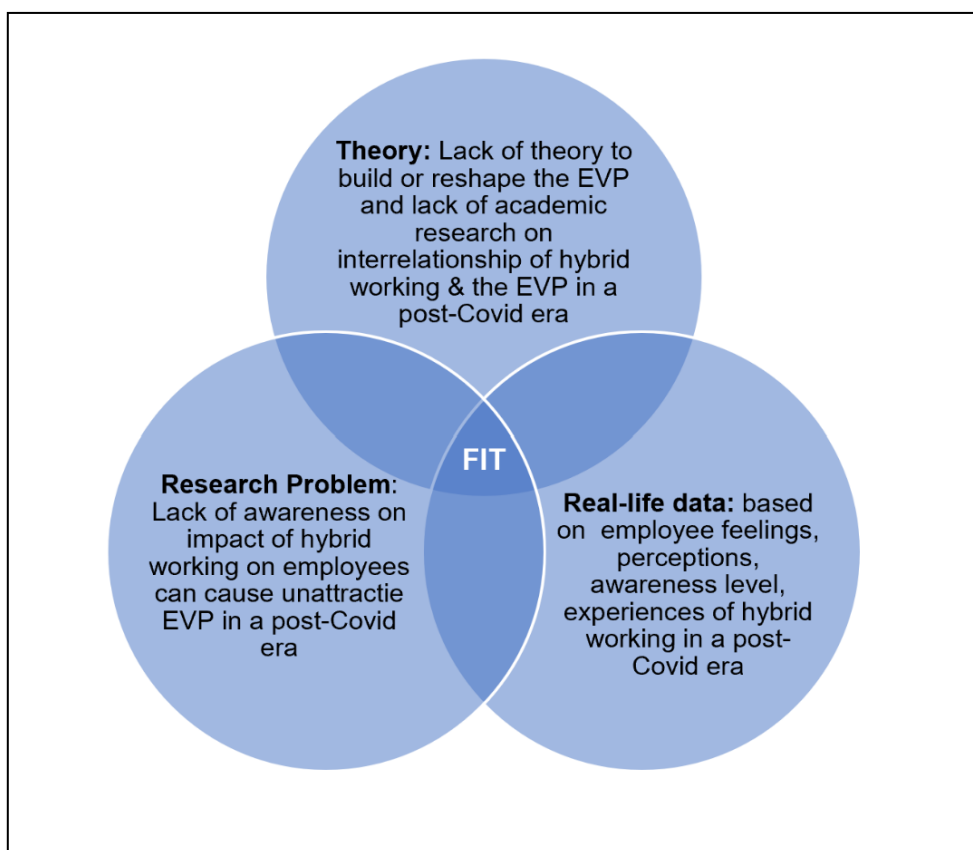


Figure 20: The Contribution to Theory and Practice

c) *Research emphasis*

The author’s curiosity for in-depth investigation triggered because of emerging trends in hybrid working arrangements, the relevance to organizational behavior and most importantly to be future proof in attracting and retaining talent. EVP as a theoretical concept is widely discussed in literature yet application of theory is an area that is under-developed. EVP is of paramount interest for organizations to plan talent attraction and retention strategies and hybrid arrangements in a post-Covid era have led to complex and multifaceted problems that require interdisciplinary approaches and collaboration.

Therefore, the emphasis is placed upon understanding how the transition has affected and been perceived by employees, and whether the transformative change has triggered a perception gap warranting reshaping of traditional EVP frameworks in HR. This is highlighted in the RQs defined in the study: “How has the organizational change to hybrid working impacted employees’ way of life?” and “Has the organization transition

to hybrid working given rise to a need to reshape the EVP?” To investigate the RQs, Kurt Lewin’s (1951) force field analysis (FFA) framework is leveraged (Figure 18).

d) *Research approach*

The research approach or overarching strategy is determined based on the research philosophy identified and investigations required to be carried out. As stated in chapter 1, the research follows an epistemological interpretivist research paradigm. In qualitative research, inductive research approach fits the purpose well. Inductive research commences with observations, followed by collecting data, analyzing that data to identify certain patterns, and thereby arriving at possible theoretical conclusions. The research strategy follows a case study approach based on the RQs the author is attempting to answer. Section 1.5.2 provides a detailed overview on the relevance of case study approach in comparison with other qualitative approaches available in literature.

e) *Relationship between researcher and respondents*

The author has been employed in the HR profession within the health insurance sector of the UAE for the past 13 years. Therefore, integration of knowledge between the author (as researcher) and study participants is expected.

Adler and Adler’s (1987) typology addresses the membership role in field research and stated that the type of role played when conducting the research study will influence data collection and interpretation. Adler and Adler (1987) highlighted the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research, and the fact that one’s own assumptions and biases may impact the narrative of the study. Therefore, understanding one’s membership, or rather the role they play in the research study, will enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. A detailed description of the author’s involvement in the research study is provided in Chapter 4.

f) *Case study approach & data saturation*

The research design provides a detailed justification as to why case study approach is more suited for this research study. The research problem is a relatively new, real-life problem, and the study is exploratory in nature; therefore, the case study approach is used. Case study is a widely used method among qualitative researchers as it provides flexibility

to investigate and theorize patterns emerging from a social phenomenon (Stake, 1995). It is particularly useful when answering the RQs requires in-depth and meaningful insights, and determination of sample size is guided by the principle of data saturation.

Data saturation refers to the point at which new data or analyses no longer generate novel insights (Guest et al., 2020). Data saturation has been widely discussed and debated in social science projects and qualitative studies and has roots in grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Grounded theory has been defined as discovering theory from a logical analysis of patterns emerging from social science data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Table 6 provides comparison on the characteristics of the case study approach and grounded theory in a research study context (Mfinanga et al., 2019). Data saturation helps the researcher to save time and cost, and, most importantly, enables them to reach a conclusion. Bazeley (2013) confirmed that data saturation can occur with any number of interviews greater than six. Past theories have highlighted that the sample size can vary subject to the complexity of the case, availability of resources, and research objectives. Therefore, the researcher's goal is to ensure that the selected cases are rich in information and support the achievement of desired research outcomes.

*g) Purposive sampling and sample size*

Purposive, or purposeful, sampling is considered as the most effective, yet nonprobability-based, sampling method in qualitative research (Chun et al., 2019). According to Bryman (2012), purposive sampling is used to investigate specific RQs and does not allow the researcher to generalize findings to a population; rather, the researcher needs to be strategic in identifying the research sample and be clear on the units (e.g., people or sites) to be included or excluded. Appropriate sampling provides relevant information for the study. Here, a preliminary sample of 40 respondents was identified subject to the purposive sampling technique (Appendix 2) provides an anonymized interviewee profile for the pilot study). Certain sampling criteria, such as job grade, date of joining, and duration in the organization have not been disclosed in the appendix to maintain the anonymity of respondents. Further sampling was guided by the outcomes of the pilot study.

The target audience for the research includes employees representing one organization within the health insurance sector of the UAE. Therefore, in light of reviewed literature, the author chose to aim for a sample size of 15–20 respondents (employees experiencing hybrid working patterns in the health insurance sector) for inclusion in the study. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and adherence to ethical principles by the interviewer and the participants was required.

#### h) *Data*

As explained in literature, the research follows an interpretivist paradigm and data are qualitative in nature. Qualitative data are used to explore and interpret human behaviors, experiences, assumptions that are non-numerical and subjective. Based on the research approach data collection methods are determined. As for the present study, the case study research approach is justified. The open-ended nature in qualitative data helps to uncover themes and patterns. Thematic analysis and coding are data analysis techniques that support interpreting meaning behind qualitative findings. Popular data collection methods for case study research are interviews and focus group sessions. Data for the pilot study was gathered through semi-structured interviews, while focus groups were run for the main data collection. The data elicited are “soft” (i.e., words).

The differences between semi-structured interviewed and focus groups are discussed in detail in section 1.4.3.

#### i) *Data collection method*

As the present study follows an interpretivist research philosophy, data collection follows an inductive logic. A pilot study was deployed using semi-structured interviews to identify any potential research gaps and finetune the research design. Interviews were administered in person, via telephone and video. Following the pilot study, for actual data collection, focus groups were used.

The relevance and limitations of each method of data collection are discussed in Section 1.5.3. Additional insights are provided in the in the following sections.



j) *Data analysis*

The analysis is primarily narrative and is not focused on numerical forms; however, to arrive at valid comparisons and interpretations, a thematic analysis has been deployed. The use of thematic analysis in an interpretivist research paradigm is discussed in Section 1.5.5. As highlighted in previous sections, data collected are in the form of words and required to be transcribed to categorize into themes. NVivo software does not support transcribing therefore the author has manually transcribed all interviews and focus group discussion and uploaded on to the software. The software is used for the purpose of organizing, coding and re-evaluating data till saturation is achieved.

k) *Rigor*

Rigor in qualitative research is achieved through maintaining credibility, trustworthiness, and validity throughout the research process to ensure thorough and robust findings (Krefting, 1991). In scientific research, high validity and reliability enhance truthfulness of research findings. To increase transparency in the research process, it is important to highlight the researcher's perspectives and biases. As discussed with respect to the characteristics of qualitative research, the present study must maintain high credibility, dependability, and confirmability, and the findings should be transferrable and provide guidance for further research in HR and healthcare industry transformation. Furthermore, reflexivity in qualitative research is defined as critical reflection on the researcher's own biases and assumptions (Pillow, 2003). In this vein, self-awareness is essential for maintaining credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research, as this helps to validate the research strategy and execution (Norwood, 2018). A detailed discussion on reflexivity from the perspective of research ethics is provided in Section 2.7. On the other hand, subjectivity in qualitative research is an inherent trait that contributes to rich and meaningful qualitative data. While it can be perceived as a limitation in comparison to quantitative research, subjectivity helps to capture the true nature of human experiences and impressions. As stated by Ryan et al. (2007), qualitative interpretivist research does not strive for objectivity, but aims for rigorous and transparent research methods. Objectivity in qualitative research is challenging to achieve due to the context-dependent nature of information, researcher influence, and the emergent nature of the

research design. Confirmability in qualitative research refers to the degree to which the findings of the study are not reflective of the researcher's biases (Seale, 1999). Strategies to achieve confirmability include establishing the researcher's positionality with respect to the research design and methodology, journaling personal biases regarding the research topics, triangulating data through multiple sources, keeping track of data credibility checks and data saturation, and cross-checking findings from different data collection methods. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the research process in the current study, the author has explained gaps identified during the literature review, ensured transparency of the research process, explained the rationale for adopting the theoretical model used, highlighted misconceptions regarding the case study approach, and disclosed sources of data whilst adhering to ethical boundaries. Ensuring data accuracy, maintaining data audit trails, ensuring adequacy in sample size, and adhering to ethical standards are means of establishing overall rigor in qualitative interpretivist research. The author has thus included such quality control measures to ensure robustness in the proposed study.

### **2.3 Method of Data Collection**

The author has discussed the data collection approaches in an interpretivist paradigm in section 1.5.5.

As indicated in the previous chapter, two of the most effective qualitative methods of collecting information are semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The rationale behind selecting semi-structured interviews for the pilot study is that it provides an opportunity to gather textual information from participants in the field. Pre-determined questions were shared with the identified interviewee list (see Appendix 2), which allowed respondents to think about their experiences and observations. In-depth discussions stemming from the semi-structured interviews enabled the author to refine the participant questions, gauge the time required per focus group session, and plan for other virtual and logistical arrangements.

Subsequently, focus groups were used as they allow for more nuanced and natural feedback compared to individual interviews and provide an open platform to a wide variety of opinions, which can lead to unexpected conclusions. The researcher can steer the forum as a moderator, per Adler and Adler's (1987) theory on active membership. Bryman (2012)

indicated that a focus group session should typically include a minimum of four participants. The presence of a skilled moderator helps to build trust and deeper exploration of the topic. Therefore, focus groups are considered as an effective method of data collection for research that rests on an interpretivist research paradigm.

The collected data then underwent two stages (Figure 21): data coding/sorting and categorizing into themes and analyzing until thematic saturation was reached.

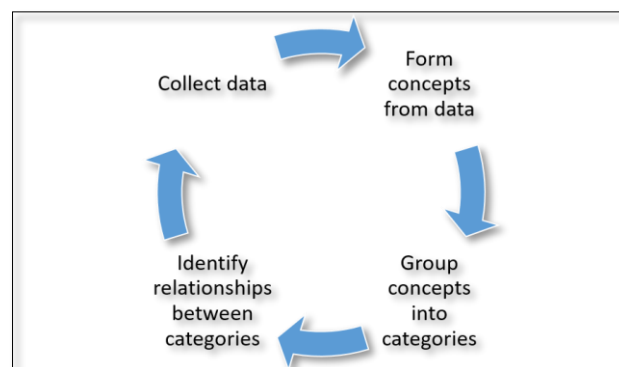


Figure 21: Case Study Data-Collection Approach

### 2.3.1 Sampling of Respondents for the Research Study

Purposive sampling criteria for this research included the following:

- Participation was voluntary and participants provided formal consent to be included in the qualitative investigation.
- The respondents are presently employed in one of the largest health insurance organizations in the UAE (see Section 2.1.1). Due to the local governance structure and regulatory controls in place, the target operating models used by UAE-based primary health insurers are homogeneous. Therefore, industry hiring needs and retention challenges are comparable. This similarity in business models and operations also increases talent movement among competitor organizations in the industry. Therefore, viewpoints of the selected sample can be generalized across the health insurance organization and the industry in the UAE.
- The organization under consideration recently commenced transitioning to hybrid working arrangements.

- Tenure in the organization included employment years prior to the implementation of hybrid working (i.e. employment spanned pre- and post-pandemic years).
- The respondents falls within the category of knowledge workers and represents gender diversity.

### *2.3.2 The Profile and Selection Criteria of Respondents for the Research Study*

To select the participants, a preliminary list of 40 potential interviewees (Appendix 1) was identified based on purposive sampling criteria. The health insurance organization under consideration for the study had approximately 200 employees (data as of January 2023) in the UAE managing the domestic business portfolio; of these, 40 potential respondents were identified randomly (using unique employee IDs) as per the existing career architecture. These employees had an average employment tenure of at least two years that was inclusive of pandemic years (2020–2021). Of the 200 employees, 70% held healthcare industry related professional qualifications and approximately 75 employees were within job bands 2 to 4 (excluding senior executives), qualifying them as potential respondents for the study. These 75 employees included those who were on annual leave, maternity leave, or serving their notice period, which reduced the potential respondent count to 40.

As mentioned in chapter 1, the organization’s career architecture comprises of 8 broad job bands with sub-bands from band 02 to 05. The lowest job band is 01 and senior most is at band 08. Job bands 02 to 04 would include knowledge workers (single contributors), combination of supervisors, team leaders, managers, and senior managers representing medically qualified expert professionals and job roles. The senior executive leadership team are holding job bands from 05 – 08 and are excluded from the sample. Similarly, other HR professionals who are falling within Band 2 to 4 job grades are excluded. Band 01 employees are temporary contracted and support staff who are falling under different employment terms, therefore excluded from the identified sample.

Interview invitations were sent to all 40 potential respondents, with an expected 4–5% withdrawal rate. Appendix 2 contains the invitation letter (including possible questions) sent to the preliminary list of interviewees. Table 7 outlines the sample template for recording interviewee data.

Table 7: Sample Template for Recording Interviewee Data (after Receiving Acceptance)

Sr No.	Respondent ID (Anonymized)	Job Family	Job Grade	Single Contributor or Team Manager	Date of Joining	Employment Tenure
	R-01	CS	Band 2	Single contributor	01/09/2018	3+

The gender diversity among the 40 selected participants is 25 are females and 15 are males. The average age of the respondents is 39 and living in Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman and Abu Dhabi cities of UAE. 20 females are married and working mothers whereas only 12 males are working fathers. The selected group hold a bachelor’s degree as minimum educational qualification. Most of the respondents were bilingual, and the interviews were held in English language. The average tenure in employment within the selected group ranges between 4.5 to 5 years. The respondents represented different departments across the organization and 10 employees of the selected group are supervisors or in team management roles.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. The respondents were approached confidentially post securing all required internal compliance approvals. Four of the individuals who participated in semi structured interviews are females and two are males. All interviews were held within the organization premises post sending formal interview interviews and pre-booked meeting rooms (with mobile, Webex and Zoom suggested as alternative options to connect).

## 2.4 Pilot Study

The pilot study included six semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted via telephone, video conferencing, and face to face, since respondents were currently working in a hybrid model so flexibility was needed regarding the interview mode to according to participant availability.

The six interviewees for the pilot study were selected based on the number of operational departments representing core health insurance business activities, the participants’ seniority (e.g., head of a function), their current people-management responsibilities, and their experience in partnering with HR for talent-attraction and -retention discussions. These qualifying criteria were used to filter interviewees for the

semi-structured interviews. Participant consent was sought prior to recording and transcribing the interviews. All transcribed interviews were uploaded to NVivo for comparative data analysis.

The findings from the pilot study enabled interview questions and sample selection for the focus groups to be further refined.

#### *2.4.1 Interview Design Logic of the Semi-Structured Interviews*

Section 2.4.1 and Table 8 explains the rationale behind semi-structured interview design. It represents the link between interview questions and research questions which ultimately feeds into research objectives of the study.

Table 8: Semi-Structured Interview Design Logic Deployed for Pilot Study

Corresponding Section of the Interview Script (Appendix 4)	Interview Question	Qualitative reasoning behind
<b>General information</b>	For interviewer’s reference	Interviewee profile information: job role in the health insurance industry, years of experience, team manager or single contributor, work and life responsibilities (Linked to research objective 1)
<b>Perception on hybrid working</b>	1.1 Is your organization currently utilizing hybrid working?	Screening question to validate interviewee’s relevance to the study (Linked to research objective 1)
	1.2 How would you describe the segregation between remote and onsite working?	To understand awareness levels, perception of, and attitude toward hybrid working (Linked to research objective 1)
	1.3 What have the positive outcomes of this change been for you personally?	To gather information on the advantages of hybrid working (Linked to research objective 2)
	1.4 Have you faced any challenges related to work or personal responsibilities since the move to hybrid working?	To gather information on the disadvantages of hybrid working (Linked to research objective 2)
	1.5 Would you like hybrid working to become a long-term solution? Why/why not?	To understand the future employment needs of health insurance workers in the UAE (Linked to research objective 4)
<b>Impact on the EVP</b>	2.1 With the introduction of hybrid working, have there been any changes to your current pay or employee benefits?	To understand the impact on financial rewards, such as pay and employee benefits, in view of the implementation of hybrid working solutions within organizations (Linked to research objective 3 & 4)
	2.2 In your opinion, what kind of employee benefits need to be revised while working remotely and onsite?	To understand the employee perspective on future financial rewards in view of the implementation of hybrid working solutions within organizations (Linked to research objective 3 & 4)
	2.3 What are your thoughts on employee recognition in the hybrid working environment? Please share any personal experience you have in this regard.	To understand the impact on nonfinancial rewards, such as recognition, in view of hybrid working ((Linked to research objective 3 & 4)
	2.4 How is performance currently managed by your direct manager, or how is this received by subordinates?	To understand the impact on nonfinancial rewards, such as performance monitoring process in view of hybrid working (Linked to research objective 3 & 4)

Table 9: Semi-Structured Interview Design Logic Deployed for Pilot Study (Continued)

Corresponding Section of the Interview Script (Appendix 4)	Interview Question	Qualitative reasoning behind
	2.5 Do you feel able to identify your training needs and development opportunities as effectively as before hybrid working was introduced?	To understand the impact on nonfinancial rewards, such as learning or development opportunities, in view of hybrid working  (Linked to research objective 3 & 4)
	2.6 What changes have you observed in the organizational culture or environment following the implementation of hybrid working?	To understand the impact on organizational culture, and the psychological contract between employee and the organization, in view of hybrid working  (Linked to research objective 3 & 4)
	2.7 With all the changes that have happened due to the pandemic, how do you perceive your employer brand?	To observe the link between the EVP and the employee brand  (Linked to research objective 3 & 4)
<b>Current and future HR readiness for hybrid working</b>	3.1 How did HR colleagues prepare you for the introduction of hybrid working?	To understand HR readiness in preparing employees for a culture change, and HR's level of involvement in communicating and strategizing the concept  (Linked to research objective 4)
	3.2 If you were to change jobs, what kind of information would you expect from the new employer or from HR related to hybrid working?	To evaluate the future expectations of employees in the health insurance industry of the UAE related to hybrid working  (Linked to research objective 4)
	3.3 As a new joiner or as an existing employee, please describe your employment journey or experience over the past year in one sentence.	To reflect on the employment journey in a post-pandemic era as an existing or potential employee in the health insurance industry of the UAE  (Linked to research objective 4)

#### 2.4.2 Learnings from the Pilot Study

Based on the results of the pilot study, the following actions were taken to refine the research interview design and deployment:



- Employees from senior leadership teams and HR practitioners from the identified organization were excluded from the sample selection to assure anonymity and confidentiality during focus groups.
- Considering the organization was undergoing a transition phase, the senior supervisors and managers involved in the pilot interviews provided feedback that questions pertaining to HR readiness may not have been appropriate or timely, and that not all employees across job bands had full visibility regarding planned actions. Given the author's relationship to the HR function and the organization, a question arose as to their interpretation and level of objectivity. Therefore, upon discussion, questions 3.1 to 3.3 of the pilot questionnaire were omitted or revised for the focus group sessions in order to gauge employee views on the future of hybrid working. Section 2.6 and Appendix 5 provide the refined focus group interview questions.
- In some interviews, the researcher had to identify eight to 10 key questions/areas that could be covered within a 60-minute timeframe, as it became apparent that 90 minutes was too long when the interviews were conducted individually. This led to the realization that the focus group approach would be more appropriate for the main study.
- Focusing the research interviews exclusively on one employer required further approvals and signoffs.
- Thinking patterns about the hybrid working culture appeared to be quite similar when the research audience was limited to one function/job grade.
- Diverse views about hybrid working arose; in some cases, respondents considered it a "deal-breaker" (key motivational factor) that stimulated them to change employers.
- Hybrid working has had both negative and positive influences on employees' way of life.
- Hybrid working is not necessarily popular with certain functions, and has made certain employees feel discriminated against.

## **2.5 Methodology for Designing the Focus Groups**

A preliminary list was identified as 40 (Figure 22) respondents representing different job bands and roles, and with an original hiring date prior to breakout of the

pandemic and having experienced both regular and hybrid working arrangements. Of these 40, six respondents took part in the pilot study. This enabled the researcher to refine the focus group questions and randomly assign respondents into focus group sessions that would best suit the purpose of the study and eliminate any ambiguity around responses.

The purpose of randomized selection of individuals for forming focus groups is to improve constructive feedback. Based on the qualifying criteria outlined in Table 9, focus group sessions were organized, and invites were sent to 32 participants excluding the pilot study participants (four sessions × eight invitees per focus group), out of which 20 participants volunteered to take part. Each session was designed to last 90 minutes, and at the end of the four sessions the average was 100 minutes.

The individual focus group session sample size was based on the reviewed literature and the desired depth of discussions. This led to a desired minimum of five and maximum of eight respondents per focus group. The selected invitees include a diverse group of individuals representing mixed job bands and genders, and included both individual contributors and people managers; therefore, it was important for the author to make the participants feel comfortable, to enable deep discussions and gather rich data. As opposed to a larger group, a smaller focus group can support group interaction and participation.

The focus group population included 15 female and five male colleagues. All female colleagues were married, working mothers and three held team-management roles. Two the five male colleagues were working fathers. The average age among this group was 35, and they represented cities such as Ajman, Dubai, and Sharjah. The focus group sessions were conducted in English language, as this is the language used within the organization, including in the company's written code of conduct.

Following the outcomes of the pilot study, focus groups were designed based on the rationale below (Table 9).

Table 10: Qualifying Criteria for Designing Focus Groups

<b>Purposeful Qualifying Criteria</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>For consistency &amp; relevance</b>	Employees representing one organization within the health insurance industry, to allow the researcher to gain in-depth insights into employee experience and EVP aspects.
<b>Pre- &amp; post-Covid-19 employment experience / tenure in the organization</b>	Employees who have been in the organization pre-Covid-19 and have completed more than two years of service, as these individuals have witnessed organizational changes in the post-Covid-19 environment.
<b>Mixed job bands</b>	Employees who represent job grades / band 2–4 (inclusive of people-management roles) to ensure a broad range of responses. Senior leadership and HR teams are excluded to reduce biases and ambiguity.
<b>Mixed job roles</b>	Employees representing various job functions across the organization to ensure a broad range of responses. Senior leadership and HR teams are excluded to reduce bias and ambiguity.

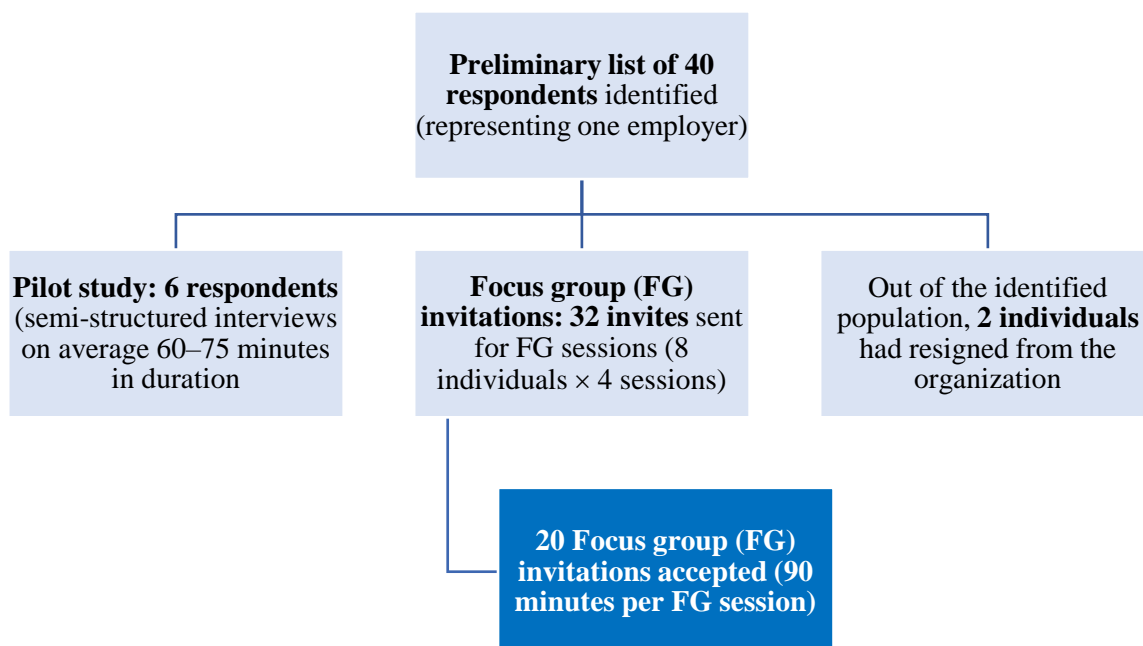


Figure 22: Overview of the Sample Size of the Research Study

## **2.6 Focus Group Interview Design and Logic**

Table 10 provides an overview of how the research questions were designed. The interview questions are summarized and broadly defined in this thesis with respect to the research objectives, the format at hand, and the specific information the researcher aimed to gather. Questions were phrased in an open-ended manner to elicit a variety of responses and to encourage participants to ask further questions. When participants responded to a broader question, the facilitator was expected to actively listen, be aware of nonverbal cues, and probe for clarification or elaboration where necessary. The probing techniques adopted include seeking clarification when responses were ambiguous, encouraging participants to elaborate, asking participants to compare different aspects of their experiences, and exploring potential reactions or perspectives regarding the future state of hybrid working. In this case, the author served as the facilitator and note taker for the focus group sessions, and periodically summarized key points to ensure nothing important was overlooked. To confirm the accuracy and transparency of all topics discussed, the note-taking process was visible to participants on a digital screen.

Appendix 5 provides a detailed overview on the list of probing questions and the related qualitative measures taken to achieve the research objectives. While maintaining academic integrity, focus group interview questions pertaining to hybrid working and its positive or negative effects (on employee way of life, organization culture, working styles, psychological contract, leadership behavior and communication, performance management, work environment, career development opportunities, and work–life balance) were paraphrased to convey information in a personalized and digestible manner to participants.

Table 11: Broadly Defined Questions for Focus Group Sessions

No.	Broadly defined questions	Link to research objectives	How it relates to RQs being investigated
1	How would you describe “hybrid working”—what words resonate with the term?	The concept of hybrid working – objective 1 & 2	RQ1: Impact of hybrid working on employee way of life
2	What drove you to work in a hybrid structure/what changes have you encountered?	Factors positively influencing hybrid working – objective 1 & 2	RQ1: Impact of hybrid working on employee way of life
3	In your opinion, what are the negative outcomes of hybrid working?	Factors negatively influencing hybrid working – objective 1 & 2	RQ1: Impact of hybrid working on employee way of life
4	What is your experience of hybrid working in terms of the impact it has had on rewards or recognition?	Hybrid working and its impact on rewards & recognition – objective 3 & 4	RQ2: Need to reshape the EVP
5	What is your experience of hybrid working in terms of the impact it has had on the organizational culture, working styles, leadership behavior, or communication?	Hybrid working & its impact on organization culture objective 3 & 4	RQ2: Need to reshape the EVP
6	What is your experience of hybrid working in terms of the impact it has had on the career progress, performance management, or learning needs?	Hybrid working & its impact on learning, performance management, career development – objective 3 & 4	RQ2: Need to reshape the EVP
7	Under hybrid working, what kind of new employee benefits would be beneficial to you?	Hybrid working & its impact on financial benefits – objective 3 & 4	RQ2: Need to reshape the EVP
8	Would you consider hybrid working as a must-have for future career opportunities or ways of working? If so, why?	Managerial considerations, new policy development and future talent readiness – objective 4	

## **2.7 Research Ethics and Reflexivity**

Ethics and moral obligations are used interchangeably in social research (Wiles, 2012) and research ethics is indispensable to good research. It is the guiding principles that govern integrity and credibility of the research process. The author conducted a considerable amount of research on ethical guidelines pertaining to qualitative research prior to embarking on this journey. Qualitative research is complex in nature therefore research ethics play a pivotal role. To note, ethical considerations are critical during all five stages of the study—namely, research planning, design, data-gathering, execution, and dissemination of information (Aita & Richer, 2005). From an ethical standpoint, researchers have an obligation to ensure potential benefits of the research outweigh any risks towards the participants (Orb et al., 2001). All researchers are obligated to maintain integrity and authenticity in their studies. Orb et al., 2001 describes three ethical principles that can be used to address and minimize issues arising in qualitative research:

- First ethical principle – maintaining principle of autonomy: the respect for research participants is maintained by honoring their participant rights i.e., the right to be informed of the research ideology and expectations (achieved through a written informed consent), the right to decide whether to participate in the study or not and recognizing the right to withdraw from the study at any given point in time.
- Second ethical principle – beneficence: “doing good for others and preventing harm” (Orb et al., 2001, pp. 95). This can be achieved through maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants. It is challenging to maintain confidentiality in smaller research groups therefore use of pseudonyms, restricting circulation of research results, excluding direct quotes from the participants and anonymizing data can prevent breaches of participant identity.
- Third ethical principle – justice: understanding vulnerabilities of participants, acknowledging their contributions to the study, and ensuring no exploitation of participant’s time, knowledge, skills, or reputation.

The author adopted the framework introduced by Wiles (2012) to ensure ethical decision making throughout the study (Figure 23).

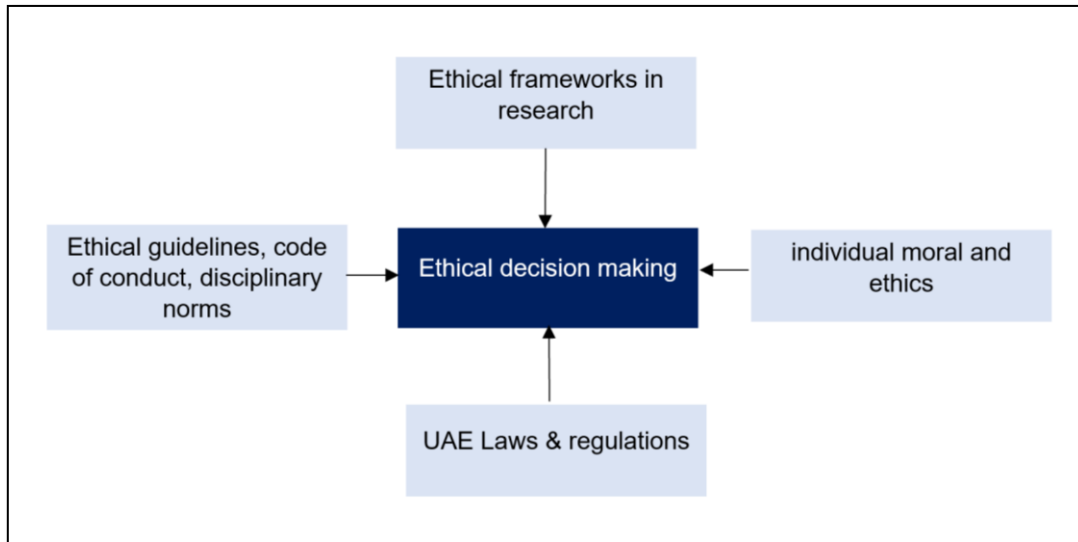


Figure 23: Ethical Decision-Making Framework Adopted by the Author

- Ethical framework: the author reviewed ethical frameworks available in research such as consequentialist, principlist, ethics of care and virtue ethics (Wiles, 2012). Consequentialist approach suggests that actions which produce a good outcome are morally correct. Principlist framework refers to the three ethical guidelines of principles of autonomy, beneficence, and justice (Orb et al., 2001). Non-consequentialist approach such as “ethics of care” follows an ideology of ethical decisions are made based on care and concern towards the research participants and the community. The virtue ethics framework is centralized around the moral character of the researcher for ethical decision making rather than principles or act of care. The author adopts principlist approach for ethical decision making related to the study.
- Ethical guidelines, code of conduct and disciplinary norms: the author is bound by ethical guidelines issued by the University and the organization under scrutiny for this research. The researcher is obligated to follow the code of conduct of the University, and the employer. Prior to venturing into the sourcing of data for the intended study, the author sought approval from United Arab Emirates University’s (UAEU’s) Research Ethics Review Committee (Appendix 6). The checklist to be submitted as part of Ethics Review Committee approval is provided in Section 2.9.1 Any actual or potential conflicts of interest that may have affected the research were

declared when submitting the research proposal for ethics committee review. Data collection is a critical aspect of the research investigation, and all qualitative data included in this study were subject to the written consent (informed consent) of the respondents (Appendix 2), while the anonymity of the individuals and the employer are maintained.

- This research study is subject to UAE's Federal Decree Law No.45 of 2021 stipulates Protection of Personal Data. Participant's identity and information is protected under this law.
- And above all the author's personal values, honesty, integrity, and respect for others are maintained whilst executing research decisions.

Reflexivity is considered as a way of ensuring rigor and credibility in qualitative research (Adler & Adler, 1987), Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Morse (2015, p.587) however reflexivity as a notion of ethics in social research is referred to as “a process whereby researchers place themselves and their practices under scrutiny, acknowledging the ethical dilemmas that permeate the research process and impinge on the creation of knowledge” (McGraw et al., 2000, p. 68). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) suggests extending principles of reflexivity in qualitative research to ensure ethical standards. According to the author's, acknowledging and sensitizing towards ethical issues in practice can help researchers to obtain a deeper understanding on ethical dimensions and minimize adverse impacts. Dodgson (2019) describes three lenses that support reflexivity in qualitative research and the author wishes to explain how it is applied in conjunction with research ethics framework:

- a) Self-awareness (Lambert et al., 2010): originating from the author's active involvement in the research process and acknowledging that all researchers are part of the social world being investigated (Morse, 1991; Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991). It is important for the researcher to be self-aware of strengths and weaknesses, own beliefs, values and biases that can potentially influence decision making process. A contextual understanding of social, cultural and historical reasons facilitates the researcher to maintain boundaries while interpreting qualitative data.
- b) Self-reflection: the concept is defined as “a process is introspection on the role of subjectivity in the research process” (Palaganas et al., 2017). The aim is to maintain



objectivity and impartiality in situations where the researcher comes across diverse opinions and vulnerable situations. Critical reflection on the researcher's knowledge and how constructs are formulated and acknowledging limitations of the study boosts transparency and validity of the research. Furthermore, it reinforces the ethical value of the research study.

- c) Critical examination of researcher's role and positionality (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004): Adler and Adler (1987), theory on membership roles in research examines three roles i.e., peripheral member, active member, and complete member.

Peripheral membership maintains a moderate position or balance between participation and observation of the study (Baker, 2006). This is achieved by not participating in research activities along with the participant group yet engaging with them to carry out the research. Active membership or active participation consider more involvement with the participants, building trust and relationships that makes individuals feel comfortable to share information and “do not commit to personal values and goals of the participants” (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 380). Persall (1970, pp. 343) consider maintaining good relationship with the participants as an advantage to the research study because the participants can “instruct the investigator the intricacies of their personal and social worlds” however Gold (1958) viewed this active participation leading to problematic situations. Therefore, it is important for the researchers to be mindful about ethical boundaries. The author follows an active membership during the research.

Complete membership “relate to each other as status equals, dedicated to sharing in a common set of experiences, feelings, and goals” (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 67). It encourages the researcher to be naive during the research process with the expectation of gathering rich data through exchanging information between the participants and the researcher.

Palaganas et al. (2017, pp. 427) emphasize that “positionality must be seen as a dialogue – challenging perspectives and assumptions both about the social world and of the researcher him/herself. This enriches the research process and its outcomes”. It is the author's ethical commitment to compartmentalize personal opinions or preconceived notions from affecting research outcomes.

At the end of Chapter 5, the author provides a practical overview as to how ethical considerations were maintained through the research study.

*2.7.1 UAEU Checklist to be Included in the Application Forms for Ethics Committee Approval (Excerpt from UAEU Ethics Review Portal)*

- **Project Title:** This offers a quick reference for any interested party and indicates the broad sphere of interest.
- **Expected Duration:** This indicates the commitment required of subjects, and time to be given by researchers.
- **Identity of Field Researchers and Organizational Base:** This contains names, positions, qualifications and functions of those involved in the proposed research, of all holders of responsible positions, and of all persons who might be in direct contact with research subjects according to the UAE law. It offers an overview of competence, together with a chain of responsibility and accountability.
- **Purpose of Study:** This cites aims and objectives that may indicate hypothesis testing, policy evaluation, and any potential “value” added to the subject group and/or society in general. (v) **Source(s) of Funding:** This names the organization(s), individual(s) or group(s) providing the funding for the study.
- **Scientific Background:** This offers a rationale for conducting the study.
- **Design of the Study:** This contains a brief description of what will be done, of how subjects are expected to participate, and of what will be required of them. All procedural matters will be clarified here, including data analysis methods and procedures; time commitments; and data-collection settings.
- **Potential Benefits and Hazards:** This identifies any risks to the subjects entailed by involvement in the research; any potential physical, psychological or disclosure dangers that can be anticipated; and any potential benefit or harm to the subjects or society from their participation or from the project as a whole. It also outlines procedures for the care and protection of subjects (e.g. insurance, medical coverage), and for the control of any information gained from them or about them.
- **Recruitment Procedures:** This contains information on whether participation will be purely voluntary, or whether any subjects will be in any sense “obliged” to participate, as in the case of students or patients. If participation is in any sense

compulsory, there must be adequate provision for indicating any potential consequences of non-compliance to subjects; if it is strictly voluntary, there must be adequate provision for an entitlement to withdraw consent, and if applicable, an indication of a date when that entitlement expires.

- Informed Consent: This specifies the procedure for obtaining informed consent according to the following principles:
  - a) Where appropriate, consent of participants must be requested in terms easily comprehensible to lay persons. Consent will be given in writing and ideally also communicated orally.
  - b) An information sheet setting out factors relevant to the interests of participants in the study must be written in like terms and handed to them in advance of seeking consent. They must be allowed to retain this sheet.
- Data Protection: This will illustrate by what means the project will comply with the requirements of current data protection legislation, and how this compliance will be disclosed to participating subjects and those monitoring the research procedure. It will include information on proposed data storage arrangements, degrees of security, etc., and whether any material facts have been withheld (and when, or if, such facts will be disclosed).
- Confidentiality and Anonymity: This will list the steps taken to safeguard the confidentiality of records and will disclose the circumstances under which any potential identifying information about the subject must be revealed.
- Monitoring of the Research: This will outline the organizational procedures for monitoring the project.
- Dissemination of Findings: This will address the anticipated use of the data, forms of publication, dissemination of findings, etc.

## Chapter 3: The Analysis of Results

The theoretical framework developed by the author (adopted by Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis theory) provides the fundamental basis for analyzing and interpreting data (Figure 24). As an overview, this chapter illustrates the process of qualitative data analysis arising from the transcribed interviews gathered during the pilot study exercise and via focus groups; the method followed in categorizing the qualitative themes and the use of NVivo for creating codes. The discussion of the overall interpretation of qualitative results is presented in Chapter 4.

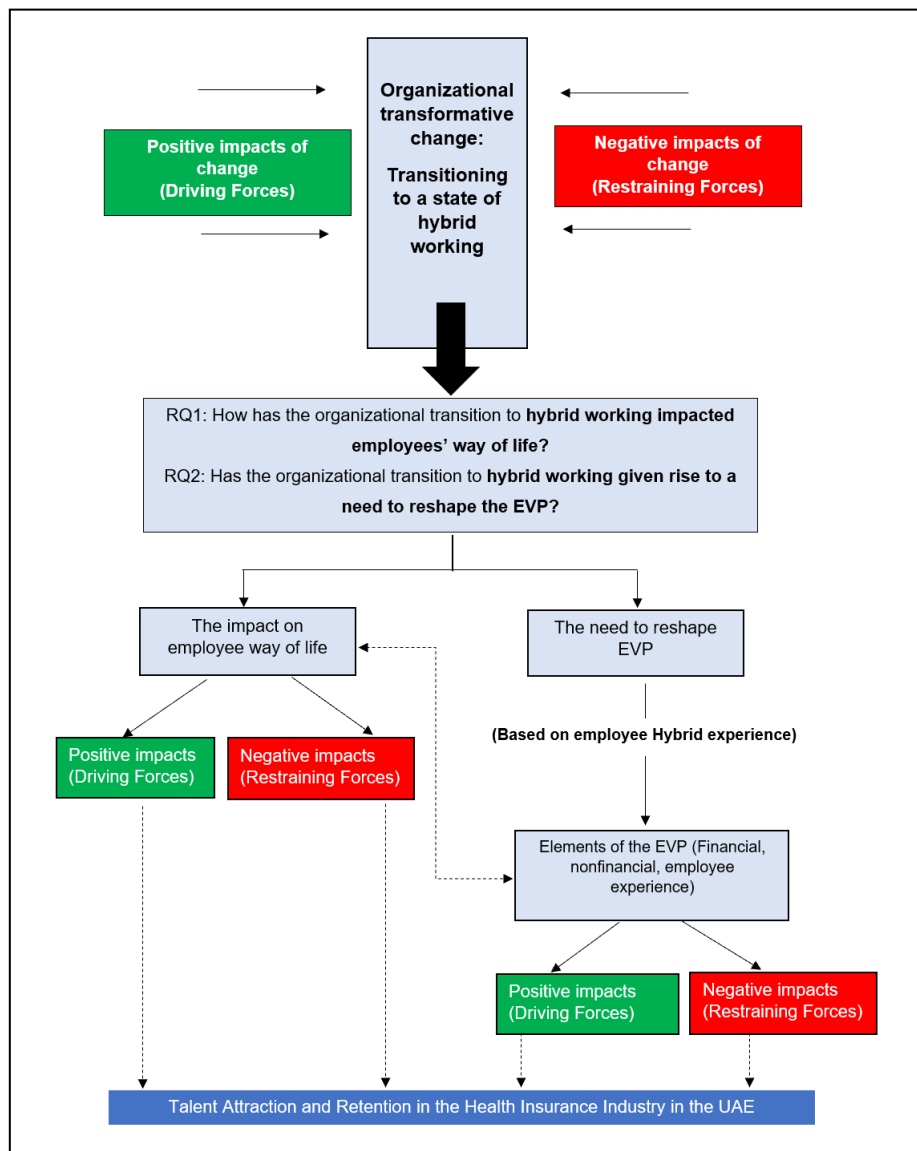


Figure 24: A Recap of the Theoretical Framework Developed by the Author for Data Analysis

### **3.1 Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data**

According to the literature, thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research as it supports the identification of patterns and exploration of different perspectives (Lewis, 2015). Bryman (2012, p. 717) stated that thematic analysis is used to extract key themes from collected qualitative data. Forbes (2021) suggested six practical phases for thematic analysis: familiarization of data, coding or categorization of the data, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, refining themes, and final write up. A detailed description of the rationale for adopting thematic analysis for this study is provided in Chapter 1, Section 1.5.5.

### **3.2 Coding of Qualitative Data**

The purpose of coding is to systematically analyze qualitative data obtained through interviews transcripts, field notes, documents and assign labels to signify meaningful units of analysis (Burnette et al., 2018). While coding can be done manually, researchers can use computer assisted software for organizing and categorizing data (O'Connor & Joffé, 2020).

The data collected from the 26 respondents (6 from the pilot study and 20 from the focus groups) were transcribed and coded into NVivo-12 to conduct thematic analysis. Figure 25 is a representation of a thematic map which demonstrates how the themes have been categorized. Essentially, the responses from semi-structured interviews and feedback generated out of focus groups are categorized into two themes: positive impact (driving forces) and negative impact (restraining forces).

The positive factors are further coded into positive impacts on the employee's way of life (i.e., quality of life and employment relationship) and positive impacts on drivers of the EVP. The author sees an inter-relationship between the how positive impacts on employee way of life translate into strengthening the EVP. This will be discussed in Chapter 4 with relevant research examples.

On the other hand, negative impacts are categorized into two themes: negative impacts on employee's way of life and negative impacts on the EVP. The interrelationship between negative experiences on employee way of life and effects on organizational EVP

is discussed separately. Figure 26 depicts how the codes were created in NVivo for the analysis of themes.

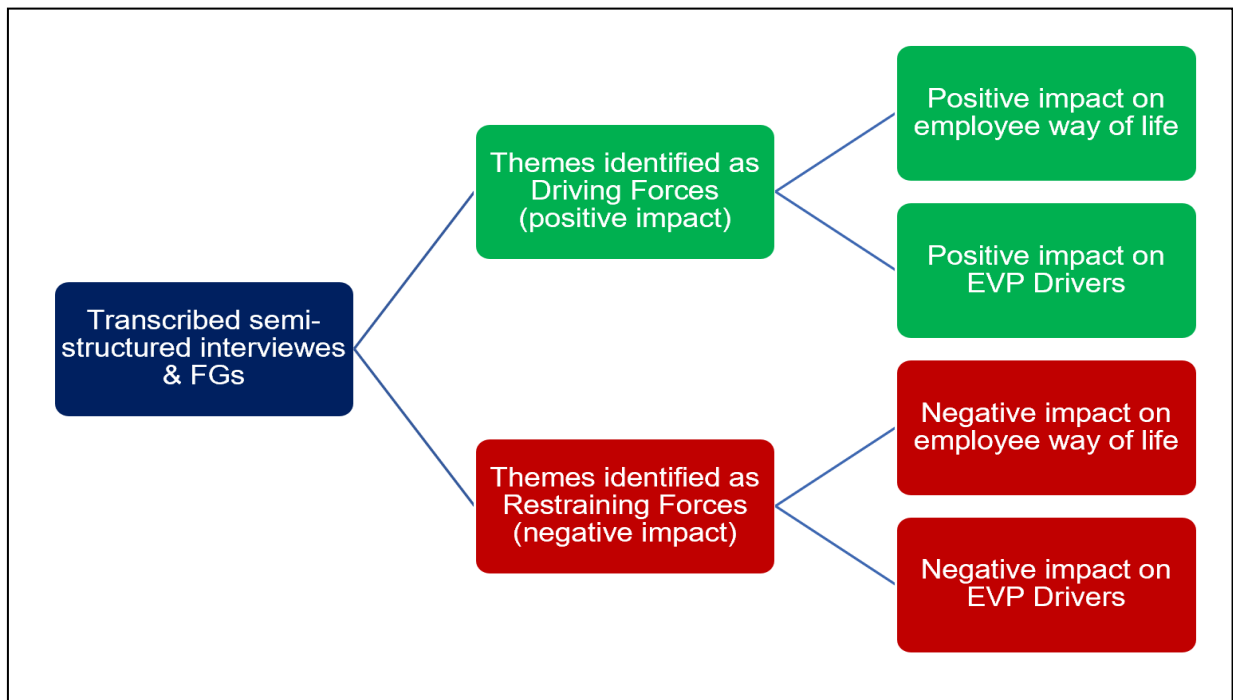


Figure 25: Themes Identified Prior to Their Input as Codes to NVivo

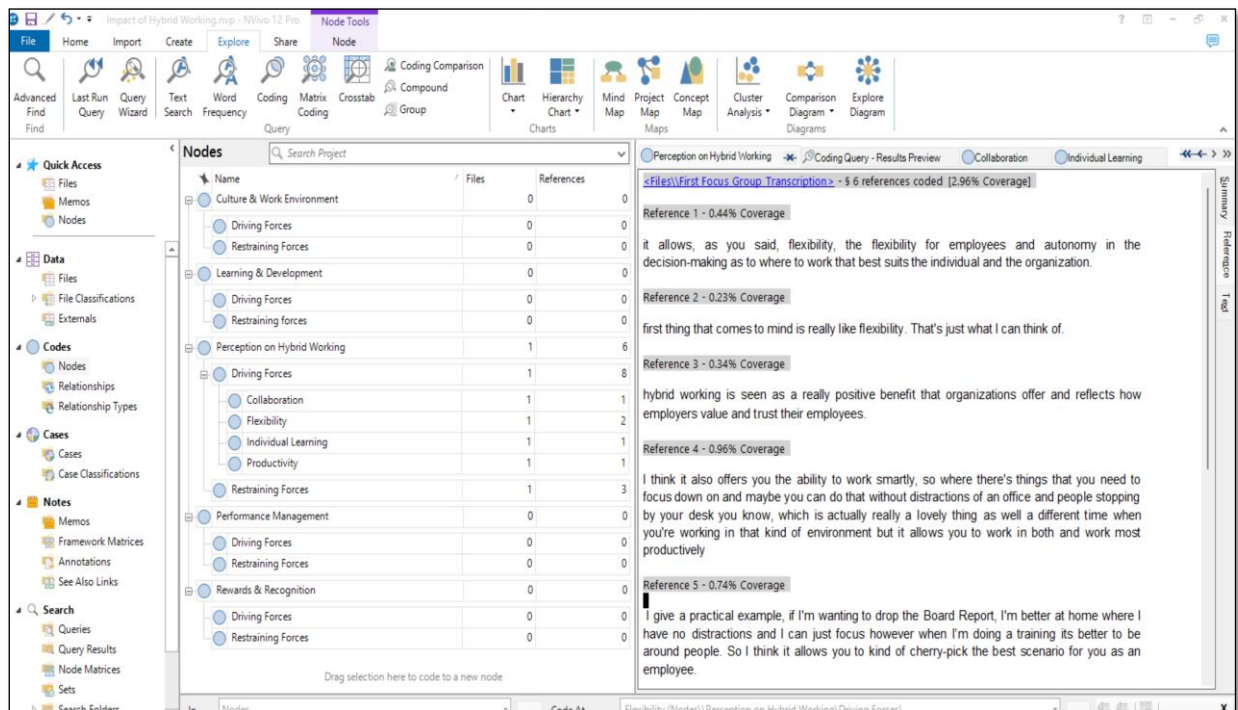


Figure 26: Coding of Collected Data on NVivo to Arrive at Qualitative Themes

### **3.3 Results on Employee Perception, Awareness Level on Hybrid Working and the Overall Impact on Employee's Way of Life (i.e., Quality of Life and the Employment Relationship)**

As reiterated in previous sections, the results are analyzed in line with the theoretical framework developed by the author. Under the microscopic lens, this section elaborates employee perception and awareness level springing from employee viewpoints, feelings, assumptions, observations and experiences on hybrid working. The objective of semi-structured interview questions is to investigate new meanings deriving out of employee impacts on way of life (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship). Verbatim employee quotations are included to convey a sense of the employees' voice.

#### *3.3.1 The Positive Impacts on Employee Way of Life*

As illustrated in Section 1.3, the first research objective was to gauge employees' understanding of the overall concept of hybrid work, as this set the baseline for the rest of the research aims and goals. Several themes became visible following the review of the qualitative data. Specifically, the concept of hybrid working mostly resonated with the term "flexibility".

Example verbatim quotes from employees:

- "Hybrid working is all about being flexible and achieving [maximum] productivity".
- "To me it is about allowing flexibility for employees and autonomy to decide where to work, I see it as [the best option] for the employee and the organization".
- "First thought that comes to my mind is flexibility. Flexibility to work from home or office or from any other location. Employees are responsible for results and managers don't micromanage, unlike pre-hybrid".
- "It is a combination of working from home and office. My personal view is that it is a positive attribute. Allows collaboration, provides ability to expand individual skills".

- “Offers ability to work smartly—no distractions and [improved] focus. Allows you to cherry pick what [best suits] the employee. I see that clear policies and guidelines are required to make sure flexibility is not misused by both parties”.
- “I consider it as a plus. Not location- or time-bound. Hybrid work flexibility [allows] me to manage work and family responsibilities”.

Figure 27 provides a graphical presentation of word frequency extracted from NVivo. This highlights the prominence of the term “flexibility”. The respondents demonstrated a strong positive response toward hybrid working and considered the opportunity as a privilege, highlighting the trust the organization has placed in employees by allowing them to work in this way.



Figure 27: Word Cloud Extracted via NVivo on the Term that Mostly Resonates with Hybrid Working

The focus group respondents quoted examples to compare traditional ways of working still followed among certain competitor health insurance organizations in the UAE and that employees of such organizations do not appreciate lack of flexibility and it is viewed as a trust gap in the employment relationship. Therefore, focus group respondents were highly appreciative of being part of a progressive organization.



Based on the respondent experiences, Table 11 summarizes key themes that emerged as positive outcomes of hybrid working arrangements during the thematic analysis process. In addition, these themes clarify employee perception and awareness levels on hybrid working within the health insurance industry of UAE.

Table 12: Positive Impact on Employees’ Way of Life as a Result of Transitioning to Hybrid Working

<b>Themes resulting in positive impacts on employees’ way of life (driving Forces) and leading to positive perceptions</b>
<p><b>1. Flexibility:</b> relaxed working hours, greater autonomy, improved time management and work–life balance due to work not being location or (in some cases) time bound, suitable for different personalities and working styles.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Working onsite and anywhere else – not location bound”.</li> <li>• “It is a flexible working strategy with a positive connotation”.</li> <li>• “Hybrid work is a good blend of work and personal life”.</li> <li>• “It allows team members to find their own working style, not everyone prefers to work from the office all the time”.</li> <li>• “Provides the most excellent flexibility to manage workload, very considerate approach of working”.</li> <li>• “It signals organization’s trust in their employees, we don’t even have a clock in and clock out system in a hybrid setup and yet work gets done as usual. All employees value that about our employer”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Productivity:</b> increased effectiveness and efficiency due to the ability to work “smartly” and “cherry-pick”; fewer distractions and improved focus, resulting in higher productivity.</p> <p>Note: Employee having the ability to decide which day of the week to work onsite or remotely or from any other location is referred to as “cherry-picking” by the respondents.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “More time to focus and dedicate time for tasks as I am avoiding travel time and expenses”.</li> <li>• “Cherry picks your working situations, and it automatically increases productivity as you do something that you like the way you want to do it”.</li> <li>• “I feel a lot more accomplished than sitting in office-based physical meetings”.</li> <li>• “Better time management, efficient and productive [and able to improve] response rates”.</li> <li>• “Can log in late and adjust work schedules as per personal responsibilities”.</li> </ul>

Table 11: Positive Impact on Employees’ Way of Life as a Result of Transitioning to Hybrid Working (Continued)

<p><b>Themes resulting in positive impacts on employees’ way of life (driving Forces) and leading to positive perceptions</b></p>
<p><b>3. Balance between family and work priorities:</b> quality time with family, time to socialize, attending to family needs or other personal pursuits, resulting in increased buy-in for working onsite and at home; ideal method for working parents</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “At the beginning it was hard for me to cope with blurred lines between work and personal responsibilities. After a while I learnt the rhythm, now I am able to prioritize”.</li> <li>• “Extremely beneficial for working moms juggling [...] multiple tasks”.</li> <li>• “It has given me better work–life balance than before. I sleep better, eat better, and [am] able to be much more organized”.</li> <li>• “Good blend of office and remote—preference is to work from home”.</li> <li>• “Allows time for socializing, family bonding time, and pursuing other ambitions”.</li> <li>• “Compared to before, [I am] spending more time with family and kids”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Increased collaboration:</b> increased need for individuals to build relationships and support each other within and outside of teams</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I have observed there’s increased focus on collaboration within the team and outside of the team to ensure work goals are accomplished. I feel like the team’s relationship with our manager improved because of hybrid working”.</li> <li>• “As you often don’t see your colleagues, onsite meetings have become warmer and more exciting than before. Everyone is making an effort to build relationships”.</li> <li>• “Due to the need to achieve business results, individuals interact more than when attending the office”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Investment in personal learning:</b> more personal time to learn new hobbies and invest in new courses to upskill knowledge and abilities</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I don’t travel to and from office more than two times in a week and that has saved time for me to read more”.</li> <li>• “[I] enrolled myself [on] a master’s degree program very recently. I was not even able to think of a study program [before] because work was too overwhelming”.</li> <li>• “During my spare time, I managed to complete a few LinkedIn learning programs on Excel skills. I am keen to learn a new language”.</li> <li>• “Gives mental space to think and be creative as you are less stressed all the time”.</li> </ul>

Table 11: Positive Impact on Employees’ Way of Life as a Result of Transitioning to Hybrid Working (Continued)

Themes resulting in positive impacts on employees’ way of life (driving Forces) and leading to positive perceptions
<p><b>6. Well-being:</b> positive lifestyle changes such as healthy eating habits, better sleeping patterns, lower stress levels, increased fitness, more time to rest</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[Home working] provides time to take breaks at home unlike in the office”.</li> <li>• “[Home working has allowed me] to take time off to improve [my] fitness levels”.</li> <li>• “Can manage or balance life better”.</li> <li>• “Stress levels around traffic and spending two hours on the road has reduced. [I feel] refreshed and more rested”.</li> <li>• “Ability to cook, make healthy food for myself and [my] family”.</li> <li>• “[I can maintain] healthy eating habits even [during] nonsocial hours”.</li> </ul>

3.3.2 The Negative Impacts on Employee Way of Life

Below are the key themes arising around experiences that make hybrid working solutions challenging for respondents. In addition, these themes (Table 12) clarify employee perception and awareness levels on hybrid working within the health insurance industry of UAE.

Table 13: Negative Impact on Employees’ Way of Life as a Result of Transitioning to Hybrid Working

<p><b>Themes resulting in negative impacts on employees’ way of life (restraining forces) leading to negative perceptions</b></p>
<p><b>1. Extended working hours and increased anxiety levels:</b> “always-on” culture and increased working hours invading personal time; increased screen time; higher anxiety levels when emails go unanswered while not working onsite because there are no colleagues around to verify if it is a system failure or the individual has left for the day.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Definite increase in working hours. I work more than nine hours in a day. Sometimes even on weekends to keep up with client expectations. When you are working from home, screen time [increases] considerably. It has created an always-on culture”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“One example is my anxiety levels naturally shoot up when I don’t see a response within a few minutes. When in the office, I’m able to walk up to the person’s desk and find out the reason for the delayed response, if it is a system failure or person has signed off for the day”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“Building unsustainable expectations or biases towards work. Extended hours have become a norm because you are working from home”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“The biggest negative impact or challenge is the extended hours of work—even the external clients expect that there will be someone to respond beyond usual work hours or sometimes even on weekends”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“Hybrid [seemed] to be very lucrative at the beginning however now feels like social hours are no longer applicable and meetings take place even after usual working hours”.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Managing expectations from family members:</b> family unable to understand work boundaries; working parents expected to attend to family needs during and after working hours</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“As a working mom, [a] wife, [and a] daughter in law, it is a challenge to work from home”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“[There are] increased family expectations as they see me at home more and more. There is no break for [yourself] when you are working from home. Need to take care of kids and household responsibilities before and after [your] work shift finishes even when you are working from home”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“[The] hybrid arrangement doesn’t fit all job roles—sometimes it is better to work from the office than from work as you get personal space and privacy to discuss confidential work-related topics”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“On the day you work from home, [you have to] switch off from work and take on family responsibilities straight away”.</i></li> </ul>

Table 14: Negative Impact on Employees’ Way of Life as a Result of Transitioning to Hybrid Working (Continued)

<p><b>Themes resulting in negative impacts on employees’ way of life (restraining forces) leading to negative perceptions</b></p>
<p><b>3. Lack of routine and discipline, need for extra planning:</b> additional discipline needed to work outside the office and outside normal office routines and standard working hours; extra planning needed to accomplish certain tasks within a day, feeling of loneliness</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Can get easily distracted if not well organized”.</li> <li>• “No time for socializing, feeling lonely”.</li> <li>• “Need to find motivation from within to be [organized throughout the] day”.</li> <li>• “Can take a long time to clarify even minor topics in [the] virtual meeting environment”.</li> <li>• “Within teams, it has become important to remind individuals about [the fact that] they are still accountable for their own work [and] delivery timelines regardless of [whether they are ] working from home or anywhere else”.</li> <li>• “Professional and personal boundaries tend to get blurred—requires more discipline. Need to have a good routine that makes you more focused [on] preparing for work”.</li> <li>• <b>Excessive communication through virtual meetings, and lack of face-to-face interaction:</b> excessive communication from senior leaders and direct managers; work becoming monotonous due to limited personal interactions; overuse of Webex/Zoom meetings and no space for socializing or informal discussions</li> </ul> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Senior leaders mostly interact and communicate through Webex or Zoom meetings. Number of leaders times number of video interviews gives us too many video recordings to view and listen to and it is becoming less attractive as opposed to during pandemic times”.</li> <li>• “I have observed over-collaboration happening with virtual meetings and resulting unproductive, time-consuming meetings that delay [the] decision-making process”.</li> <li>• “Personal touch is missing in these virtual meetings”.</li> <li>• “[You] miss out on the team spirit, working as a team, and [overhearing] things that would make your work easier”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Home environment not being conducive for work:</b> lack of dedicated home office space (particularly since UAE is an expatriate-dominant market), leading to an unwillingness to use video software or discuss confidential matters</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Lack of dedicated space cause many distractions while working from home, makes it difficult to discuss confidential topics”.</li> <li>• “Not everybody has the luxury to have a separate room to work from home, this makes me reluctant to switch on my video camera during meetings”.</li> <li>• “Work can get very monotonous looking at a screen at home”.</li> </ul>

Table 15: Negative Impact on Employees’ Way of Life as a Result of Transitioning to Hybrid Working (Continued)

Themes resulting in negative impacts on employees’ way of life (restraining forces) leading to negative perceptions
<p><b>5. Lack of allocated personal space at work:</b> fewer designated or permanently allocated desks and chairs, which hinders individuals from keeping their belongings at the office (e.g., in drawers) and increases the need to carry laptops and other office materials every time the office is visited. Particularly problematic for individuals travelling on public transport.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[There are] no more dedicated workstations in the office, [which makes it difficult] to store personal belongings”.</li> <li>• “I can no longer keep any of my personal photos, awards, business cards, [or] certificates on my work desk—[I] feel [like] there is no personal space”</li> <li>• “If you are travelling by the metro, then you need to carry your laptop and other bags every time when you are working from the office. Not very convenient as before”.</li> <li>• “Sharing of desk spaces and chairs [isn’t] very hygienic in my opinion”.</li> </ul>

**3.4 Results on Employee Hybrid Experience and the Need to Reshape Organizational EVP**

The respondents were questioned on their hybrid employment experience with drivers that contribute to the organization’s EVP in a post pandemic, hybrid work environment. As established in the literature review and methodology sections, EVP drivers are the financial, nonfinancial reward elements offered in an employment deal together with the overall employment experience (refer Figure 13). Nonfinancial rewards include recognition, learning and career development opportunities, employee involvement and participation, work environment, performance culture, leadership behavior, and communication. Financial rewards are employee benefits associated with salary, bonuses, and other allowances. Employment experience in the context of employment journey are the lived experiences (refer to definition of key concepts in the Kurt Lewin’s FFA (1947) theoretical framework adopted by the author in Chapter 1).

Summarized below are the key themes related to the impact on EVP drivers from perspective of employees.

Table 16: The Impact of Hybrid Working on EVP Drivers

<b>1. Hybrid Working and Recognition and Rewards</b>	
<b>Positive impacts are the driving forces of change</b>	<b>Negative impacts are the restraining forces of change</b>
<p><b>Easy recognition of high performers</b> Some respondents felt that hybrid working positively influences employers to identify exceptional performance and thereby recognition has improved within teams.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[I have] received recognition purely based on skills or output despite joining the organization [in] the midst of [the] pandemic”.</li> <li>• “[I] do not see the need to be in the office to be recognized—recognition happens regardless of [whether] you are working onsite or offsite”.</li> <li>• “Managers can [more] easily identify the high performers in a team [compared to] before. Hybrid work demands [that] individuals [...] perform even better than before”.</li> </ul>	<p><b>In-person and public recognition seem to have become nonexistent:</b> Recognition has become limited to emails and e-cards and gift vouchers, while the personal touch on employee appreciation has diminished.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Recognition and rewards are less—visible as it is mostly delivered through emails and e-cards”.</li> <li>• “[We lack the] personalized approach that [we had] pre-hybrid work”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Proactive approach: Frequency in recognition has improved</b> as line managers are keen to improve engagement when teams are performing in a hybrid set-up.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We see that line managers are [more] proactive in recognizing team members than before—especially within our team”.</li> <li>• “More efforts [are being made] to recognize even small wins, which was not the case previously”.</li> <li>• “[I feel] more valued”.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Inconsistency among team recognition:</b> Depending on the management style of the line manager, rewards and recognition differ in the hybrid environment. Greater flexibility increases inconsistency in recognition among teams.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “On the contrary, I see [that the] recognition approach differs based on [the] direct manager’s leadership style”.</li> <li>• “There’s inconsistency between departments [in] the frequency [of] recognition and offered rewards within [the] hybrid setup”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>No requirement for being physically present in the office</b> to be recognized due to introduction of new HR policies.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I joined in the midst of [the] pandemic and then we are now working in a hybrid setup, and I still received my promotion based on results delivered in an offsite environment”.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Lack of tools to easily recognize</b> employees working onsite and offsite. Bureaucracy around approvals process does not fit the new way of working.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We need to have recognition tools that can reward employees on the spot”.</li> <li>• “Existing recognition process requires approvals from multiple senior leaders”.</li> </ul>

Table 17: The Impact of Hybrid Working on EVP Drivers (Continued)

<b>1. Hybrid Working and Recognition and Rewards</b>	
<b>Positive impacts are the driving forces of change</b>	<b>Negative impacts are the restraining forces of change</b>
	<p><b>Lack of motivational examples/benchmarks of exceptional performance:</b></p> <p>There is a need to hear more success and real-life stories on employee accomplishments in the hybrid environment.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It is important to hear some real-life success stories in [the] hybrid world”.</li> <li>• “We [now] see recognition notes for certain colleagues without knowing the context, [where previously] we had more knowledge about what kind of performance [was] being rewarded”.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Hybrid Working and Organization Culture/Working Styles/Leadership Behavior and Communication</b>	
<b>Positive impacts are the driving forces of change</b>	<b>Negative impacts are the restraining forces of change</b>
<p>Improvement in leadership communication (more townhalls and feeling part of a bigger team): Hybrid working has allowed employees to expand into global teams; reach has increased.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Leadership communication [has] improved during hybrid times, [with] more employee townhalls. [You feel as though you are] part of the bigger team”.</li> <li>• “Interdepartmental and team communication with respective leaders [has] improved. It used to be quite formal, however hybrid working [has] improved working relationships”.</li> </ul>	<p>Lack of availability and physical presence of leaders onsite: Hybrid and flexible working have reduced physical interaction with employees. Open door policy no longer seems to be applicable.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It’s hard to get hold of certain employees or leaders, even during work hours”.</li> <li>• “Face-to-face interactions [are] limited, [and the] open-door policy is almost irrelevant”.</li> <li>• “Leadership presence in the office is limited”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Team culture is more visible:</b> Employees feel valued and are given the opportunity for managers to bring the team together.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[There is a] task- and team-oriented culture”.</li> <li>• “[There have been] more efforts from the manager to bring the team together—we [have] monthly team meetings”.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Misconceptions arise</b> due to lack of awareness of individual circumstances of team members.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “During hybrid [working] you are unaware what your team members are working on—suddenly you see recognition coming through [for] another team member, which increases self-doubt”.</li> <li>• “The team members are not aware of each other’s personal circumstances, which can create [difficulties and cause] demotivation”.</li> </ul>



Table 18: The Impact of Hybrid Working on EVP Drivers (Continued)

<b>2. Hybrid Working and Organization Culture/Working Styles/Leadership Behavior and Communication</b>	
<b>Positive impacts are the driving forces of change</b>	<b>Negative impacts are the restraining forces of change</b>
<p><b>Increased inter-departmental interaction and collaboration</b>, with no need for late-evening in-person meetings.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Interdepartmental or team communication [has] improved as compared to before. It used to be quite formal, however hybrid working [has] improved working relationships. Late evening in-person meetings are no longer needed to resolve bottlenecks”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“Hybrid [working] has allowed [us] to expand into global teams, the reach has increased [and] employees in different regions can get connected”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“[The] ability to address business needs [has] improved”.</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>External stakeholder communication style is more demanding</b> and places more pressure on teams. High expectations around response rates even during weekends and days off.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“[We] have grown to be a task-oriented culture—people are overwhelmed”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“There’s a noticeable increase in demand for quick turnaround times from external clients, even during weekends and when on annual leave”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“[The] style of external communication has changed among clients and brokers—[there is] increased pressure, more escalations, leading to anxiety and [higher demand] for [fast] responses”.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“[There is a] need for a business communication strategy and reminders on email etiquette internally and externally”.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Team meetings</b> can be more efficiently run in the office/onsite than virtually.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Team meetings are more meaningful [when they] take place in the office”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“Face-to-face team [meetings] are more productive than remote [meetings]”.</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Meetings are less formal</b>, requires significant amount of effort in planning (availability of each team member on different days, etc.).</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“[We lack the] agenda and structure that was maintained before. [There is a less] formal approach to meeting attendance and the level of importance given”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“Working two times a week in the office restricts planning spontaneous team meetings”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“[A] significant amount [of effort is required] to fix a meeting date and a time”.</i></li> <li>• <i>“[I do] not have visibility of [the] onsite schedule of all team members in and outside of my team”.</i></li> </ul>

Table 19: The Impact of Hybrid Working on EVP Drivers (Continued)

<b>2. Hybrid Working and Organization Culture/Working Styles/Leadership Behavior and Communication</b>	
<b>Positive impacts are the driving forces of change</b>	<b>Negative impacts are the restraining forces of change</b>
	<p><b>Seminars and emails during work hours are excessive.</b></p> <p>Inability to cope with reading all emails received per day increases the fear of missing out on some important information. Social touch points used to be more organic.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[There is an] overload of seminars. I have this constant feeling of I might have missed out on some important information because I’m not in the office”.</li> <li>• “[There is a] tendency to overcommunicate because of hybrid [working]. [Social connection] mostly [happens] via emails”.</li> <li>• “Newsletters from marketing [are] good, however [I] do not think everyone has time to read it, [unlike] before”.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Employees are disconnected and lack enthusiasm</b> for taking part in onsite organizational activities. The rationale behind certain business decisions is not conveyed to employees.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[An] increase in workload prevents employees from attending social events that take place in the office”.</li> <li>• “[We] need more transparency on decisions made by the leaders—[it] feels [like] there’s a disconnect”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Training is being organized around hybrid working.</b></p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Our training days are organized [around the fact that] we work in a hybrid set-up. We adjust our timings to include colleagues working in different time zones.”</li> <li>• “There’s more options for trainings on different days of the week.”</li> </ul>	<p><b>Individual learning has gone into “sleep mode.”</b></p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “When you come to office, there’s hardly any time left for doing a learning course during office hours.”</li> <li>• Individual learning is in a sleep mode in [the] hybrid set-up. [We] don’t get to hear about opportunities as before, [we] need to dig into emails to find information.”</li> </ul>

Table 20: The Impact of Hybrid Working on EVP Drivers (Continued)

3. Hybrid Working and Career Progress/Performance Management/Learning Needs	
Positive impacts are the driving forces of change	Negative impacts are the restraining forces of change
<p><b>Performance-management discussions are more structured</b> in comparison to pre-hybrid era.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Since everyone wants to be efficient, I feel performance discussions with the direct manager have become more structured with clear goals and timelines [compared to] pre-hybrid. It has helped all of us in the team”.</li> </ul>	<p><b>It is difficult for new joiners to learn organizational dynamics in a hybrid set-up.</b></p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “New joiners seem to get impacted more as opposed to [...] existing [employees]. It’s better for new joiners to learn onsite rather than [remotely]”.</li> <li>• “How can new joiners learn about the people and the culture if they are to work from home even in their initial days of joining the organization”?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Goal-setting discussions take place during team meetings</b></p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “In our team, we make use of the team meeting time to discuss performance goals—it is useful for everyone in the team and saves time”.</li> <li>• “Most of the teams operate in this hybrid manner, making team meetings more effective and efficient”.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Career-management discussions are perceived as more biased</b> in a hybrid environment and lead entirely as per line manager characteristics and style. This tends to limit visibility and exposure of other stakeholders and key decision-makers.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Compared to pre-hybrid, I have witnessed performance and career discussions take place [based on] the [availability] of the direct manager, and the orientation [of] the discussion entirely depends upon his or her style of working”.</li> <li>• “[There is] less visibility in front of other key department heads and leaders, unlike before”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reduced travel time to office has helped to address individual learning needs.</b></p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “When you are working from home, there’s four to five hours [saved] of travel and getting-ready time. I personally have invested that time to listen to an audio book or complete assignments with my master’s program”.</li> <li>• “Most colleagues that I interact with have enrolled themselves into learning something new—a hobby or a language or a software skill like Excel or Visio”.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Lack of transparency:</b> Projects that team members are working on are not known by the rest of the team.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The way that you manage people [needs] to change in a hybrid model—[you] manage people on deliverables rather than number of hours online. The traditional mentality doesn’t seem to have changed and lacks transparency”.</li> <li>• “[I am] unaware of new projects other team members are working on as cross team and interdepartmental team [briefings] are limited now”.</li> </ul>

Table 21: The Impact of Hybrid Working on EVP Drivers (Continued)

<b>3. Hybrid Working and Career Progress/Performance Management/Learning Needs</b>	
<b>Positive impacts are the driving forces of change</b>	<b>Negative impacts are the restraining forces of change</b>
<p><b>More networking events</b> (internal and external)</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[I am] noticing more breakfast meetings and coffee mornings being organized for employees to interact with other teams and leaders. We get to know new joiners who have joined six months ago in these events”.</li> <li>• “Mentoring is visible during hybrid working”.</li> </ul>	<p><b>More chances of missing out on self-nomination opportunities, unlike in the pre-hybrid environment</b></p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Since all communications come via emails, there’s a big chance [that you will] miss [out] on career-development opportunities”.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Learning in the team environment is more productive than online/individual approach.</b></p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It is a cost saving for the organization to run virtual learning programs, however learning is more fun, engaging, and meaningful when you do it onsite and [as] a team”.</li> <li>• “Online trainings are very monotonous and [we] lack motivation to concentrate”.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Less visibility and transparency around promotions within hybrid environment.</b></p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We suddenly hear about a colleague being promoted in an email, or manager changes, or a department being merged together”.</li> <li>• “[It] would be good to have some transparency and knowledge around how people grow their careers and business reasoning in a townhall or via a face-to-face meeting because certain changes impact others”.</li> </ul>

Table 22: The Impact of Hybrid Working on EVP Drivers (Continued)

<b>4. Hybrid Working and Changes in Employee Benefits</b>	
<b>Positive impacts are the driving forces of change</b>	<b>Negative impacts are the restraining forces of change</b>
<p><b>No reduction of existing employee allowances,</b> such as transportation allowance, in the gross salary.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “There have been no changes to our benefits regardless of whether we work from home, or [in] another country or in the office. We greatly value the trust placed [in] us by the organization”.</li> <li>• “We expected there might be reduction in the transportation allowance since we don’t commute to office weekly. However, we use our own internet to work from home”.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Imbalance in office ergonomics:</b> More investment is needed into ergonomic work arrangements/furniture.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[There is a need for] improvement with [respect to] office chairs and desks and a proper occupational health assessment to be done prior to approving work-from-home arrangements”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mental health coach is present in every team or department:</b> This enables team members to feel safe and address any pressures triggered as a result of hybrid working.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It’s a good investment that we have certified mental health first aiders in the team or within the department. Line managers have been trained on these topics too”.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Lack of policies on hybrid working:</b> “Work from anywhere” requires clearly defined policies to ensure transparency, fairness, and impartiality.</p> <p><i>Example verbatim quotes from employees:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There need to be clear policies around [the] work-from-anywhere concept—eligible time period, tax liabilities, data protection regulations, and who can approve such arrangements. It shouldn’t be limited only to certain individuals. Everyone should have access to such information”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Additional employee benefits/allowances relevant in a hybrid set-up.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobile allowance</li> <li>• Parking allowance</li> <li>• Higher-speed Internet package for corporates</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Flexible benefits around marital status (e.g., working parents vs. single individuals)</b> to support in reshaping the EVP according to employee needs and current working style.</p>	
<p><b>Increased focus on employee well-being measures</b> (e.g., gym membership, allowing flexi time to attend gym sessions during lunch hour while onsite).</p>	

### 3.5 Hybrid Working—A Deal-Breaker for Employees?

Finally, the respondents were questioned about their future outlook on hybrid working and whether a failure to offer hybrid working would be a deal-breaker when considering future employment opportunities. The response was unanimous, with all respondents in the focus group sessions indicating that hybrid working has been life changing. None foresaw a future where hybrid options are nonexistent or a return to old ways of working with long shift hours onsite.

*Example verbatim quotes from employees:*

- “I can’t see myself working five days a week in the office based on all the lifestyle changes I have been through—it is a deal breaker to me”.
- “Hybrid is the only preference”.
- “The pluses outweigh the minuses, so hybrid is a plus for me and a must-have”.
- “It was difficult to make this mindset change already and now when we are so close to settling down to hybrid work, [I] can’t see myself going [back] to old ways of working”.
- “Definitely an employer who provides flexible working is more attractive than a traditional nine to five job or a company”.
- “Hybrid is the future of work; many companies have made permanent adjustments to their real estate space as they don’t foresee going back to pre-hybrid era”.
- “I would take a lesser pay to hold on to the flexibility and mental peace that I have in a hybrid setup”.
- “In my opinion, hybrid is a nice to have, very [useful] to everybody, some have been very lucky. However, this is the future, and it is here to stay”.

## **Chapter 4: Discussion of Results**

This chapter summarizes the interpretations of the results that were thematically analyzed in Chapter 3. This discussion of results provides context and meaning for the data and is compared against research objectives outlined in Chapter 1 to identify discrepancies and to confirm the rationale behind research questions being investigated.

### **4.1 Understanding Employee Perceptions and Awareness of Hybrid Working and the Overall Impact on Employees' Way of Life (i.e., Quality of Life and the Employment Relationship)**

RQ1 pertains to how transitioning to hybrid working has impacted employee way of life (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship). Figure 28 depicts the approach used to address this question. The research objectives used to address RQ1—that is, to understand employees' perceptions and awareness level of hybrid working and the positive and negative impacts on employees' way of life—are as follows:

- Objective 1: Understand overall perceptions and awareness of hybrid working among health insurance workers in the UAE.
- Objective 2: Investigate the (positive or negative) impact of change on employees' way of life (i.e., quality of life and employment relationship) due to transitioning to hybrid working.

As per the theoretical framework developed by the author (Figure 18), the results pertaining to these two objectives are categorized as positive impacts (driving forces of change) and negative impacts (restraining forces of change).

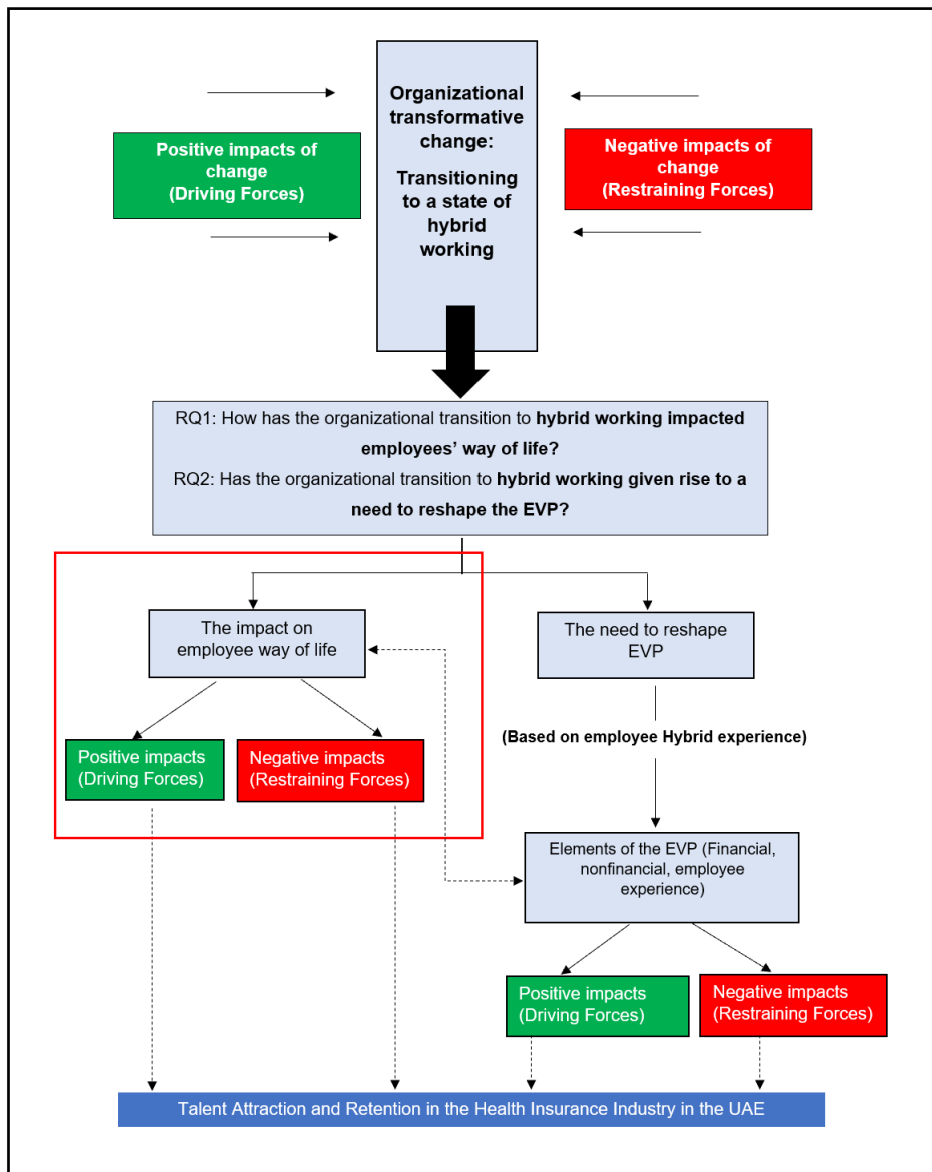


Figure 28: Addressing RQ1 through the Theoretical Framework

#### 4.1.1 The Positive Impacts on Employee Way of Life

As shown in the literature on organizational change management, positive impacts experienced by employees because of hybrid working have made the transition successful (Cathro, 2011). The lower employee resistance, the greater the chances of a change process being completed (Lewin, 1947). Equally, an organization that can offer positive lifestyle changes will be viewed as an employer of choice (Armstrong, 2014) in the competitive job market by existing and potential employees. Therefore, the following positive impacts on employee way of life as a result of transitioning to hybrid arrangements should be highlighted by organizations:



Hybrid working generates workplace and psychological flexibility that leads to personal and work–life flexibility: In general, flexibility can be explained as the ability to adapt or change. However, in academic literature, flexibility can have different meanings or interpretations depending on context. The Cambridge Dictionary (2023) has defined flexibility as “the ability to change or be changed easily according to the situation”. Kashdan and Rottenberg (2010) described flexibility in the context of psychology as shifting one’s mindset to new experiences and realities, maintaining balance in different life domains, and aligning with personal values. According to Kashdan and Rottenberg (2010), psychological flexibility is considered a key contributor to individuals’ health and well-being. As shown in the literature, “workplace flexibility” refers to employees having choices regarding working hours, location, and continuity of work, which enables them to balance work and life obligations (Rhee et al., 2019). Empirical research has shown that workplace flexibility has a positive relationship with employee retention (Rhee et al., 2019) and is a contributor to employee engagement and overall job satisfaction (Eaton, 2003). Smite et al. (2023) defined hybrid working as employees having the flexibility to divide time between working onsite and remotely. Appel-Meulenbroek et al. (2022) stated that it is about having flexible working hours and locations per employee preference. Adekoya et al. (2022) explained that the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development has defined hybrid working as a flexible working arrangement that combines remote and in-person work.

In summary, the above theoretical definitions align with the results obtained from real employees in this study. Notably, the employee feedback confirms that hybrid working relies on a foundation of trust within the employment relationship. In addition, employee experiences and viewpoints on the organization’s culture of flexibility stem from the power dynamics within the employment relationship, including the tone at the top. As discussed in the data analysis stage, employee definitions of hybrid working repeatedly highlighted the term “flexibility”. Employees thus clearly associate the term “flexibility” with flexi-work hours, more independence and autonomy in performing their job role, and better work–life balance, since their job role is no longer location- or time-specific (in some cases). Such arrangements are suitable for employees with different personalities (e.g., introverts, early risers, late risers) and working styles (e.g. individual

contributors, roles that require working across time zones). Flexibility influences all aspects of the employment relationship and overall quality of life. Thus, workplace flexibility and psychological flexibility are positive contributors to employee engagement, employee retention, a strengthened psychological contract, and overall job satisfaction. However, the meaning of flexibility differs from the perspective of the individual versus that of the business; therefore, the nature of the job role plays a critical role in defining flexibility at work, which in turn facilitates in strengthening the organizational EVP. It is important to note that the majority of the definitions do not indicate that hybrid or blended working is only possible based on the nature of the job role and the industry in which the organization operates; therefore, a lack of awareness regarding this aspect can lead to unrealistic expectations.

Hybrid working reduces travel time and expenses, thereby improving employee quality of life: The respondents highlighted saving of travel time as a significantly favorable aspect of hybrid working as it allows employees to avoid rush hour (e.g., travelling long distances from Sharjah to Dubai and Dubai to Abu Dhabi, and vice versa). The reduced expenses include fuel costs and parking tickets, and additional savings are made on areas such as snacks, coffee, cigarettes, after-work socializing, and expensive formal office attire. Most importantly, gaining back valuable time has reduced work-stress levels. Employees feel energized with improved sleeping patterns and reduced fatigue. Several individuals have been able to invest saved hours into personal development opportunities. These are nonfinancial rewards in a employment relationship, which are intangible in nature and help to add value to employees' way of life. The respondent group included both single individuals and working parents, but feedback was consistent regarding reduced travel time and expenses contributing to improved quality of life. Therefore, in view of the theoretical framework adopted in this study, reduced travel time and expenses can be seen as a positive driver of change.

Hybrid work promotes efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of job responsibilities, and improves the employment relationship: Based on employee responses, perceptual and attitudinal drivers of productivity in the context of hybrid working include fewer distractions, greater focus (and thus reduced need for redoing work), higher-quality work, and faster turnaround. The phrase “work smarter, not harder”

was used by respondents to express the deliberate choices made to maximize productivity, which involves prioritizing tasks, delegating tasks to other team members, collaborating effectively, avoiding overcommitting, learning to say no, and setting boundaries. The flexibility and autonomy provided by hybrid work empowers individuals to structure their day around their peak productivity times and personal commitments, leading to increased efficiency levels. Employee empowerment and trust (e.g., the employer not imposing an attendance-monitoring system to track work hours) boost employee morale and the motivation to work effectively. The respondents in this research belong to the knowledge worker category, and, as noted by Hopkins and Bardoel (2023), such employees have a great appreciation for, and newfound meaning of, hybrid working. The term “cherry-picking” was used to express employees’ “selective focus” and “selective workdays”, and this notion of prioritization has helped in enhancing efficiency and effectiveness. Thus, perceptions of work meaningfulness have changed as a result of hybrid working. Therefore, an increase in employee productivity can be seen as another positive driver of hybrid working arrangements.

Hybrid working improves work–life balance, resulting in greater employee job satisfaction: The respondents primarily touched upon the aspect of balance between work and family. In particular, working mothers of the present study stated that hybrid working is a “blessing in disguise” similar to research findings of Katsande et al. (2022). “Allowing work–life balance” is a key contributor that defines work as “a force of good”. (CIPD, 2022, pp.1). As theory suggests, the ability to balance work and family priorities has generated greater satisfaction among existing employees and it is a contributor to employee retention.

Following the great resignation trend and female employees compromising their careers in the post-Covid environment, several studies have been conducted to understand work conditions that support gender balance in the workplace. Harmonization between work and life responsibilities is particularly important for the mental health of working women (Sharma and Kapur, 2022). Equally, in the present study several respondents held caregiver responsibilities, therefore striking a balance between work and personal life has reduced their stress levels. However, work–life balance and burnout are two interrelated concepts that significantly impact an individual’s overall well-being and quality of life,

especially in the context of the modern workplace. The effects of work–life balance and burnout on job satisfaction, has a positive correlation between work–life balance and job satisfaction and a negative correlation between burnout and job satisfaction (Roney et al. (2022). Evidently, in a post-Covid environment, the intention to stay in jobs is correlated with work–life balance (CIPD, 2022).

In line with extant academic theories, the present study reveals that hybrid working improves the work–life balance, which reduces work pressures, stress levels, and possibility of burnout, and improves mental health and gender balance in the workplace. The combination of these factors leads to greater employee satisfaction. In addition, it enhances the employer brand, employee experience, and overall EVP (see Chapter 1 for further discussion of elements of the EVP). Therefore, work–life balance can be identified as a driver for the shift to hybrid working.

Hybrid working increases the need for individual and team collaboration: According to the respondents' experience and perceptions, the need for collaboration has increased in hybrid working. The respondents observe that onsite meetings have become warmer (especially the way individuals greet each other), making efforts to bridge relationship gaps in order to achieve team goals and business results. Some of the participants felt that the team's relationship with the direct supervisor improved with transitioning to a hybrid mode. In essence the changes in working models have influenced individuals to make efforts to collaborate and build relationships. In an academic lens, collaboration can be described as a group of individuals working toward achieving a common goal (Cummings & Kiesler, 2005). Collaboration can occur through informal discussions or brainstorming sessions. Previous research has highlighted several difficulties in collaboration, including coordination challenges and lack of communication, in geographically distributed teams (Hinds & Bailey, 2003); however, present study results indicate that hybrid working arrangements have reduced barriers to effective collaboration.

Effectively leveraging technology can enable employees to work together, in turn enhancing organizational culture and climate. Instead of working in silos, employees are somewhat compelled to build networks and relationships to deliver organizational goals.

This represents a shift in organizational culture, referring to assumptions that often go unseen yet contribute to employment relationships, improving employees' way of life in the workplace. In line with the theoretical framework, increased workplace collaboration in the eyes of employees is an additional factor driving change.

Hybrid working increases opportunities for personal learning and individual development: Qualitative results indicate that personal learning has become increasingly relevant in the hybrid landscape. Individuals now have the ability to invest more time in learning new skills, partaking in hobbies, and venturing into business opportunities. Upskilling talent is a responsibility that lies with employers, yet hybrid working has allowed individuals to take the personal initiative to invest in themselves. Individual development does not necessarily need to take the form of classroom exercises—for instance, learning a new sport or hobby, or spending quality time alone can improve overall mental health. Employees are considered the greatest asset of organizations, and having a population that is mentally healthy and resilient enough to face changes is equally valuable. In essence, when viewed through the lens of the theoretical framework, increased individual learning and development represent a further positive impact of hybrid working.

Hybrid working increases well-being leading to talent retention and attraction strategies: As per feedback from the respondents, hybrid working is a promoter of well-being. Working from home has helped individuals to adopt healthy eating habits, sleeping patterns, exercise and meditation regimes, and approaches to manage pressures of work. (The challenges of working from home and other related issues, such as occupational and safety concerns, will be discussed in the next section.) While physical and mental well-being improvements are the most visible outcomes, unseen improvement areas include the employee's intention to stay, and the firm's greater retention of staff and ability to attract talent. Prioritizing employee well-being contributes to the overall effectiveness of the employment relationship and quality of employee way of life. Therefore, in summary, enhanced employee well-being is a positive driver of change.

Figure 29 theorizes how hybrid working has positively impacted employee way of life (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship), and how it can contribute to elevating the organizational EVP.

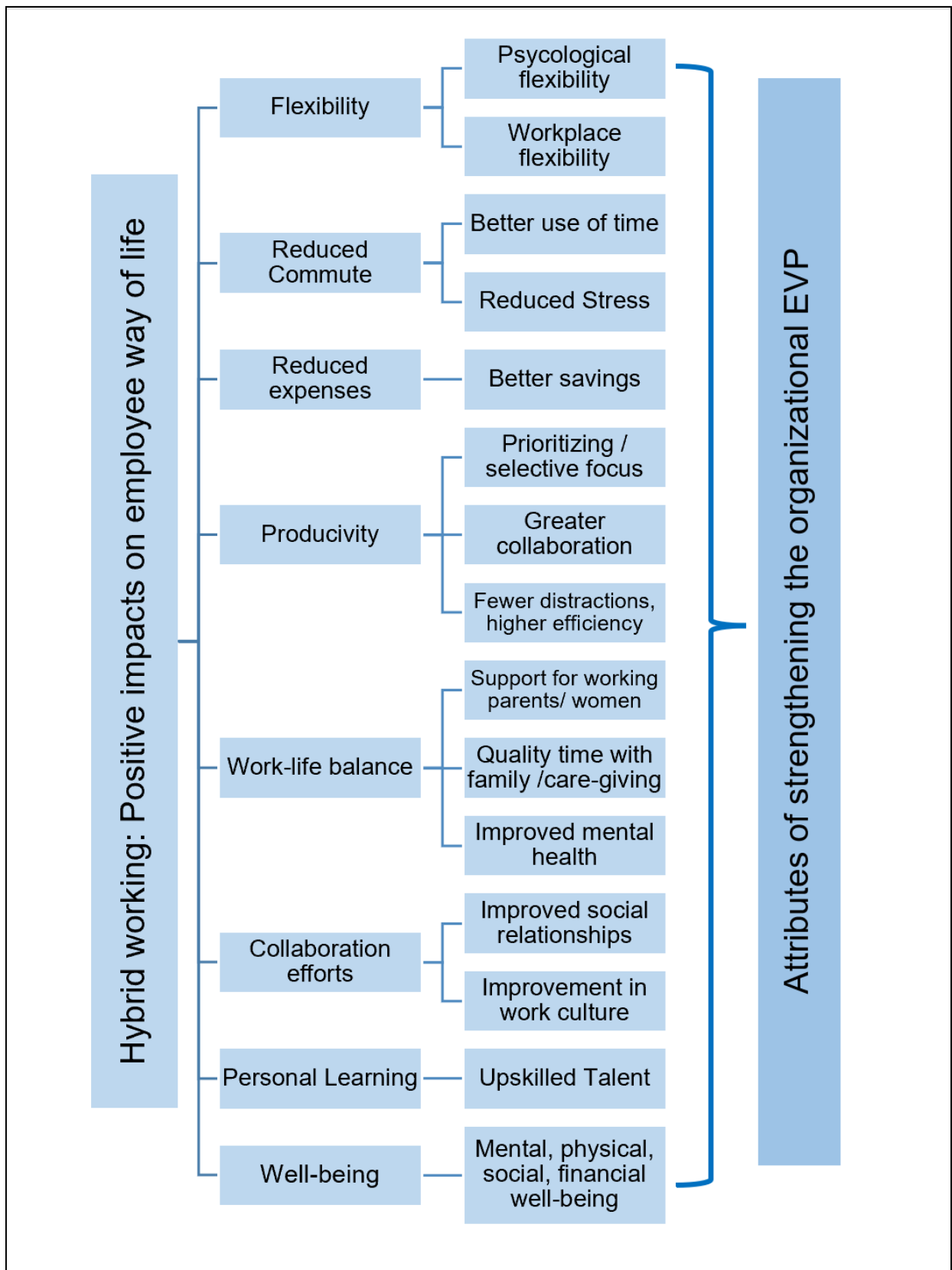


Figure 29: Positive Impacts on Employee Way of Life that Led to Strengthening the EVP

#### *4.1.2 The Negative Impacts on Employee Way of Life*

The following paragraphs discuss the themes around negative impacts experienced by employees regarding their way of life as a result of transitioning to hybrid working. According to the theoretical framework, negative impacts of hybrid arrangement can be categorized as restraining or inhibiting factors of change.

Extended working hours in the hybrid work environment can increase anxiety levels: The respondents described “always-on” culture as an emerging trend in the modern hybrid work environment. As experienced by the employees, it is the high workloads and tight deadlines that are driving the always-on culture. It is a phenomenon in which individuals are continuously connected to work and technological devices, blurring the boundaries between work and personal life. Individuals who struggle to disconnect from work and to find personal time can experience burnout, and increased stress levels, anxiety, and mental health issues (Sonnetag and Bayer, 2005). Notably, in some cultures working extended hours is viewed as sign of hard work (Pietersen, 2022). Therefore, the author’s observation is that in a hybrid environment where line managers are not necessarily available onsite, being constantly connected can lead to an unspoken rise in expectations in the workplace.

While individuals are personally accountable to ensure their health and well-being, organizations can promote organization-wide practices in this regard, such as not answering emails during unsociable hours or on weekends, allotting time for lunch breaks and for cognitive work and leading by example so that junior employees do not feel pressured to adopt unhealthy workplace practices. Remote working does support different business models and help to bring in talent from diverse locations; however, as elaborated by the respondents, it also brings challenges, as pointed out by the respondents. It is evident, the extent of unseen aspects are greater in remote working modalities, which naturally trigger unconscious biases and assumptions that lead to anxiety. One example of this is delays in responses creating a sense of uncertainty, which is exacerbated by an inability to walk up to the individual and have a direct conversation. In turn, this can lead to frustration. Fear of the unknown (Kanter, 1985) has been widely discussed in psychology and change management literature, as lack of predictability evokes fear and

anxiety. In essence, it is important for line managers and HR to introduce best practices to reduce the degree of uncertainty arising in a hybrid work environment. Such negative experiences can build up negative perceptions on the overall concept of hybrid working. Both employees and line managers need to set realistic expectations and goals when adopting hybrid arrangements. Therefore, based on research evidence, the extended hours and increased anxiety can be categorized as a negative impact on employees' way of life, and as an inhibiting or restraining force of change.

Hybrid working can cause conflicts between domestic and work responsibilities: The respondents' feedback resonates with a study conducted by Gorjifard and Crawford (2021), that women find it challenging to maintain a balance between work and personal responsibilities when they opt to WFH. Striking a balance between work and domestic responsibilities is a challenge faced, in particular, by female employees. The prevalence of such unmanageable expectations is detrimental to the individual's well-being. This brings us back to the research problem regarding a lack of awareness of the principles of hybrid working within society and among employers.

Everyone is responsible for setting their own boundaries regarding personal and professional accountabilities, but there is additional pressure on female workers that makes striking this balance difficult. In the present study, working mothers and married females commented that blurred lines between work and home life can create tensions. For example, young children causing interruptions during working hours and shared accommodation makes it challenging to find quiet corners in the home. On days spent working from home, as soon as working hours come to an end, some working mothers need to pick up household responsibilities, leaving them no time for a break (as outlined in employee quotes in the data analysis chapter). It is interesting to note that feedback on unrealistic domestic responsibilities was particularly pronounced among female participants compared to males. This could be due to personal situations and differences in marital status among male and female participants in the selected sample. Male participants did voice some challenges in balancing work responsibilities with childcare or caring for dependents while working from home. Such challenges may arise partially due to societal expectations, cultural dimensions such as masculinity versus femininity, or a lack of means to engage additional support.



According to reviewed literature, masculine cultures differ from feminine cultures in terms of gender roles (Hofstede, 2002). In masculine cultures competitiveness, assertiveness, ambition, and achievement are highly regarded, whereas in feminine cultures work–life balance, quality relationships, and social equality are valued. The UAE, which is in the Middle East, has a dominant Arab-Muslim culture. However, as most of the population are expats, there are multiple systems of values, beliefs, and cultural norms in homes. Therefore, Hofstede’s index may not be able to capture all cultures of the 200 diverse nationalities (The Official Portal of the UAE Government, 2003) living in the UAE to accurately determine the level of masculinity versus femininity within the society. These social challenges are real and lie beneath the obvious transcribed qualitative data therefore deep dives are crucial to gain a comprehensive perspective. However, organizations can create more awareness of such social issues by improving the emotional intelligence of line managers and coworkers. Accordingly, the conflict between domestic and work–life responsibilities can be classified as a negative impact on employees’ way of life, and as a restraining force of changing to hybrid setup.

Hybrid working entails a lack of routine and discipline, and the need for extra planning when working offsite: As apparent in qualitative analysis, lack of routine and discipline can lead to poor work–life balance, productivity challenges due to distractions, and lack of accountability. Productivity challenges emerge from a lack of discipline in teamwork and not having sufficient access to real-life examples on how teamwork can enhance efficiency. Respondents felt that it is essential to remind individuals that they are still accountable for delivering on their responsibilities even when working from home or another location. Productivity bottlenecks can potentially hinder development opportunities and employment relationships. The respondents stated that the lack of routine while working from home reduces motivation and engagement opportunities. Feelings of loneliness are another negative impact of remote working and applies to hybrid working in the post-pandemic environment. These findings parallel theoretical findings (Parry, 2020 and Gajendran and Harrison, 2007 and Choudhury and Foroughi, 2019). Those who maintain healthy boundaries and discipline between remote working and personal life experience higher levels of well-being. It is important to note remote working as a concept was in use prior to the outbreak of the pandemic but was limited to certain

industries and job roles. The literature review in the present study showed that there is a need to distinguish voluntary from involuntary work-from-home arrangements, as involuntary arrangements can give rise to negative experiences for employees (Saridakis et al., 2023). Therefore, lack of routine and discipline, and the need for additional planning, have a negative impact on employees' way of life, and act as a restraining force of change.

Hybrid working leads to excessive communication through virtual meetings, and lack of face-to-face interaction: The respondents confirmed that hybrid work has increased the number of virtual meetings they are involved in each week, and has extended the duration of meetings, leading to additional work pressures. The overuse of video meetings and lack of face-to-face interactions can make the working experience monotonous and socially disconnected. The employees' observations included the fact that senior leaders frequently make use of recorded or online video solutions to communicate with employees. The element of excitement is lost when listening to recorded videos or attending virtual meetings due to the frequency of such meetings throughout the working week. Excessive communication can lead to information overload, desensitizing employees to critical messages and reducing individuals' attention span.

Virtual-meeting fatigue (Shockley et al., 2021) was common during the pandemic, and respondents confirm that it is continuing even in a post pandemic hybrid setup. The respondents felt virtual experiences are more challenging and less appealing than in-person meetings, as they inhibit individuals from using nonverbal cues such as body language or facial expressions. Findings signify that working from home limits social connections and isolation can result in disengagement among individuals. This resonates with a recent post pandemic study.

Moreover, some of the employee examples indicate resolving technical glitches faced during remote work or working from home can increase frustration and fatigue. Therefore, the author sees instituting effective communication strategies is essential in a hybrid setup. Overall, excessive video-based communication can be classified as a negative impact on employees' way of life as a result of transitioning to hybrid working.

The home environment is not conducive for work: Out of the selected sample, 60% of respondents were married and settled with families while many individuals live in

shared accommodation. Due to the expat living and accommodation arrangements in the UAE, most respondents lived in two-bedroom apartments with families and had limited space for an office or study area. This was cited as one of the main reasons for respondents feeling uncomfortable on video-based meetings or discussing confidential matters.

In addition, an ergonomically sound workspace at home helps employees to maintain their health, well-being, and productivity levels. The organization under consideration in the present research has provided a one-time furniture allowance of AED 500 for employees to invest in an office desk and chair. However, limited space in individual homes remains a challenge for setting up an office area. The full spectrum of ergonomics includes a chair, desk, mouse, monitors, internet connectivity, lighting, and other IT equipment such as headsets, printers, etc. Further, the author discovered during pilot study interviews that employees at senior levels face fewer challenges with office setups at home compared to knowledge workers at junior levels with average pay scales. Thus, finances are a key contributing factor in making home office spaces ergonomic.

Another cultural aspect highlighted in the qualitative data is that both male and female respondents require personal space while working from home and are often inhibited or unable to have candid conversations on performance, work conflicts, personal challenges, etc., with peers, team members, or superiors. This represents an additional drawback when working from home or in any other remote working location.

The present study findings coincide with some of the secondary research that not all household setups are appropriate for work (Pass and Ridgway, 2022). The possibilities of cybercrime (Alsmadi & Prybutok, 2018) when working from home and lack of governance when “[working] from anywhere” (Gupta et al., 2022, pp.1861) can expose organizations to unforeseen risks. Therefore, possibilities of data privacy breaches, ergonomic challenges, and feelings of claustrophobia arising as a result of hybrid working are additional restraining forces of change.

There is a lack of allocated personal space at work: The employer under research scrutiny has reduced real estate space upon announcing hybrid working arrangements. Reductions in real-estate expenses and facility running costs is a key advantage of introducing hybrid working solutions for employers (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007 and

Katsande et al., 2022, and CIPD, 2021). Drawbacks of such long-term measures include the fact that employees must share work desks, inability to store personal belongings at their desks, and face a high occupancy rate on days on which onsite townhalls are held. For health and sanitation reasons, certain employees are apprehensive about sharing desks and seats. Respondents used to keep team and family photos, awards, plants, etc. at their desks, which contributed to enhancing the sense of belonging, “symbiotic relationship” (Binu Raj, 2002), and psychological contract between employer and employee. Being no longer able to do this has negatively impacted employee motivation and satisfaction with the employment relationship. To mitigate this, employers can introduce user-friendly seat-booking systems, agree on which days certain teams or departments will be present in the office, and introduce lockers to store employee belongings, since some respondents commented on the challenges they face when commuting to the office via public transport and having to carry IT equipment, stationery, lunch, water bottles, gym kits, etc., such that commuting to the office feels is more difficult in comparison to pre-pandemic days. Therefore, lack of allocated personal space at work triggers a negative experience for employees, and thus a restraining force of change.

In summary, Figure 30 shows how hybrid working has negatively impacted employee way of life (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship), and how it can contribute to weakening the organizational EVP.

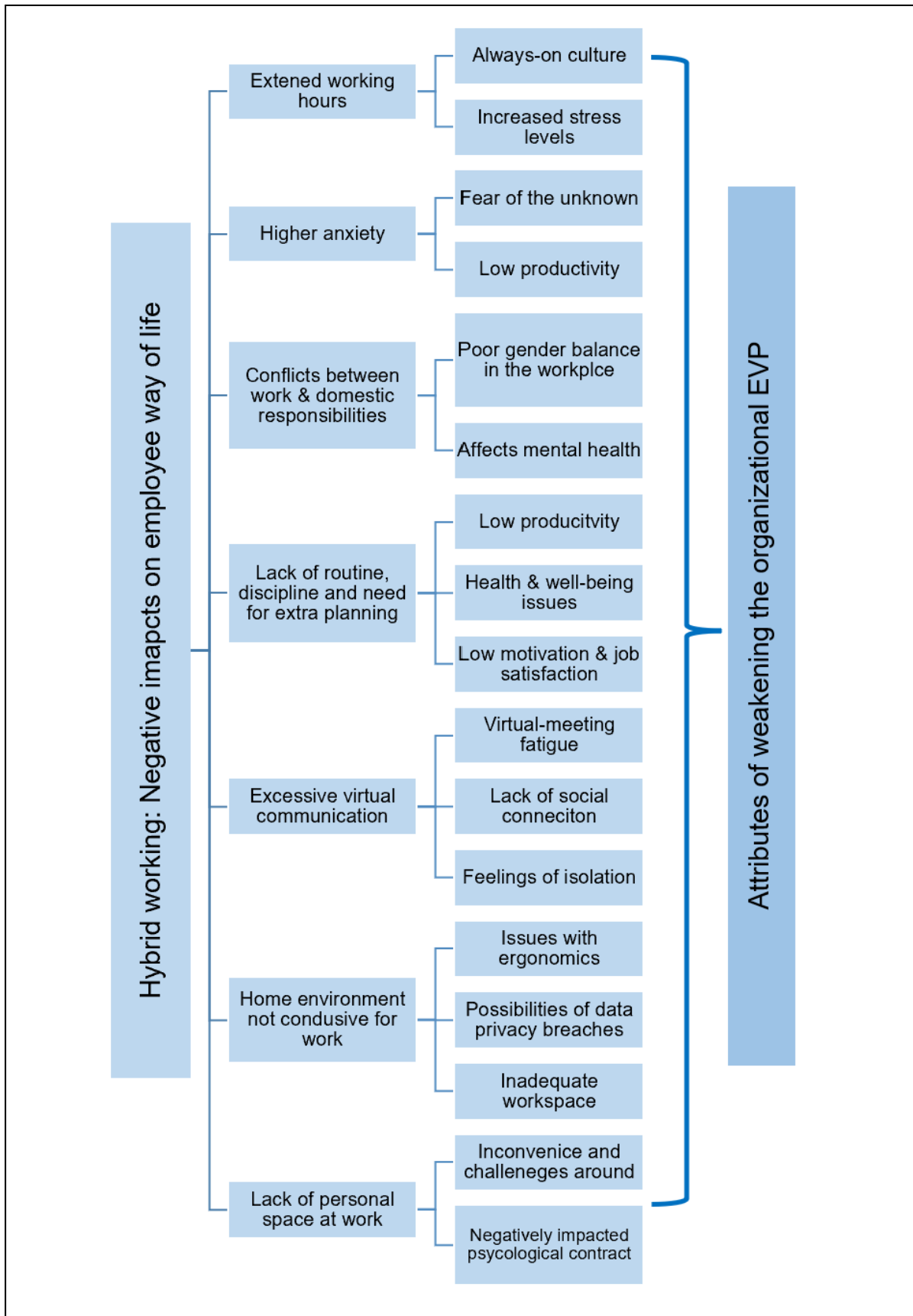


Figure 30: Negative Impacts on Employee Way of Life that Leads to Weakening the EVP

## 4.2 Investigating the Impact of Changes Caused by the Hybrid Experience, and the Need to Reshape the Organizational EVP

RQ2 of this study centers on identifying whether the organizational transition to hybrid working has given rise to a need to reevaluate the EVP. This need is defined and measured based on comparing employee lived experiences regarding hybrid working with EVP drivers defined in extant studies. EVP drivers comprise a combination of three elements—financial rewards, nonfinancial rewards, and the employment experience. Answering RQ2 aims to identify and theorize the relationship between the hybrid working experience and EVP drivers in the context of the post-pandemic era.

From an employee perspective, the EVP is what an organization offers in exchange for the employee’s efforts to make the company’s mission and vision a reality (see Table 4). According to Rosethorn (2009), the difference between the unique differentiating financial and nonfinancial benefits a business offers to employees (i.e., EVP drivers) and the actual delivery of those benefits (i.e., the employee experience) can determine the EVP gap. This negative impact or gap will determine the need to reshape the EVP. Figure 31 illustrates the approach used to address RQ2.

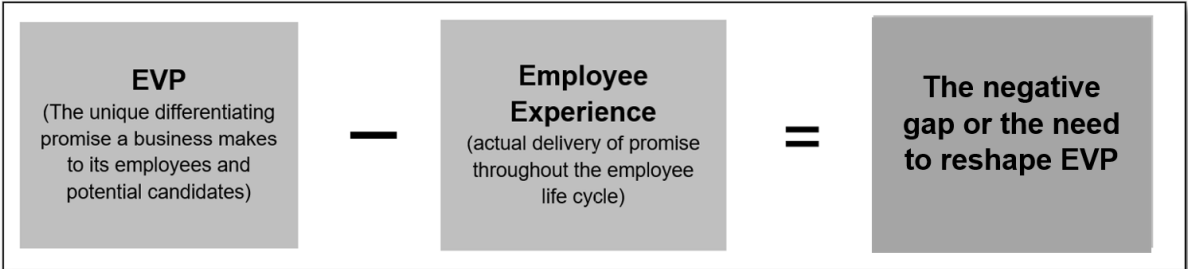


Figure 31: Based on Literature Review, Understanding the Need to Reshape the EVP

The following two research objectives were proposed in order to answer RQ2:

- Objective 3: Identify any gaps between the employee experience of hybrid working and EVP drivers to determine the need to reshape the EVP.
- Objective 4: Make suitable recommendations to enhance the employee hybrid experience and to reshape the EVP to ensure talent attraction and retention in the UAE health insurance sector.

While Objective 3 is fully addressed in the current chapter (Chapter 4), objective 4 will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5. The outcomes of the thematic analysis on the need to reshape EVP are categorized as negative and positive impacts in line with the theoretical model adapted from Lewin’s FFA theory (Figure 32). The employees were questioned on their hybrid experience pertaining to EVP drivers defined in extant studies (see Figure 13).

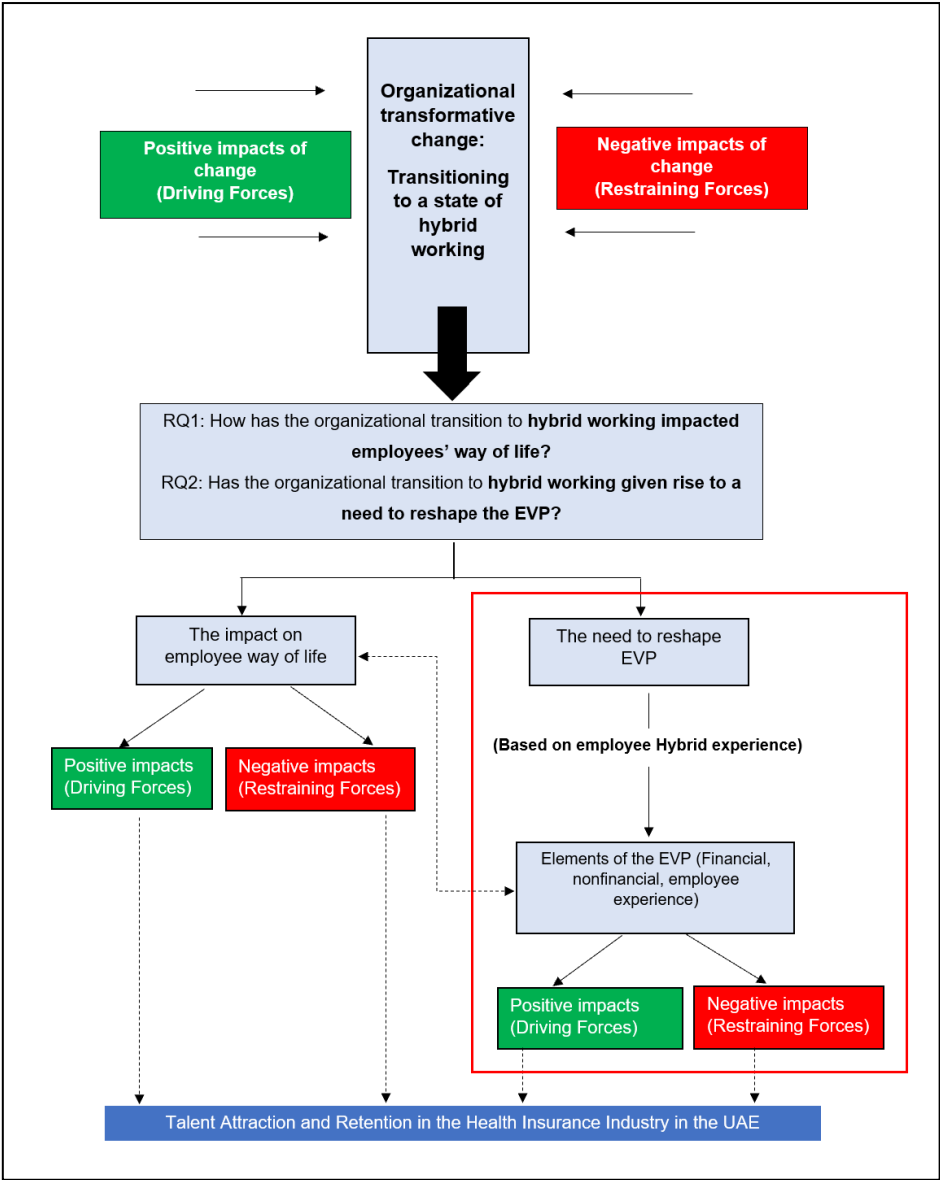


Figure 32: Addressing RQ2 through the Theoretical Framework

#### *4.2.1 The Impact of Hybrid Working on Nonfinancial Recognition and Rewards*

Bearing in mind the theoretical relationship between recognition and rewards and the EVP, respondents were asked about their experience in the hybrid working environment.

The positive impacts (driving forces of change) that strengthen the EVP include the following:

- Hybrid working requires individuals to multitask and work under less supervision. Therefore, demand for higher standards of quality and quicker delivery of work has allowed line managers to easily recognize high performers within teams.
- The frequency of appreciating team members through e-mails and e-cards has increased, which improves employee engagement and morale.
- In comparison to traditional ways of working, employees perceive that recognition is not linked to the number of days and hours spent physically present in the office but rather to the actual quality of work and exemplary efforts being appreciated and rewarded. This has the positive impact of enhancing the psychological contract between employer and employee.

The negative impacts (restraining forces of change) that weaken the EVP include the following:

- Considering that hybrid working involves a blend between onsite and remote working, employees felt a lack of public recognition. The mechanics of recognition have become limited to emails, e-cards, and gift vouchers, rather than in-person words of encouragement and appreciation. A personalized approach to employee recognition is lacking in the hybrid working environment.
- Misconceptions and misinterpretations arise around team recognition. This aligns with the disadvantages of hybrid working highlighted by Everett (2022), who stated that building relationships is becoming increasingly challenging in the hybrid working environment, which can give rise to toxic behaviors that are disrespectful, non-inclusive, unethical, cutthroat, or abusive in nature (Mortensen, 2023). Recognition within teams varies subject to line managers' leadership style, and the



lack of HR policies or guidelines on rewards and recognition within the hybrid culture can lead to inconsistencies.

- There is a lack of automated tools (e.g., attendance or time-tracking system) to identify or highlight employees working onsite versus remote, the number of hours invested in a week versus month, etc. This represents a missed opportunity to recognize hard-working employees. The bureaucracy around line manager decision-making processes is seen as a hindrance to empowering capable team members in the hybrid environment.
- The blended working environment tends to conceal team success stories or individual accomplishments that can lead to motivation and inspiration. This is linked to the lack of public recognition and has a negative impact on organizational culture.

#### *4.2.2 The Impact of Hybrid Working on Organizational Culture, Working Styles, Leadership Behavior, and Communication*

As emphasized in the discussion on components of the EVP (see Figures 12 and 13), working styles, leadership behavior, and communication are intertwined with organizational culture, which is a key driver of the EVP (Armstrong, 2014; Salau et al., 2018; SHRM, 2015). In this study, semi-structured questions were designed to unearth the impact of hybrid working on the organizational culture, which is intangible in nature (i.e., a nonfinancial reward), in the employment relationship.

The study results can be explained from two perspectives: positive and negative impacts of change.

The positive impacts (driving forces of change) of hybrid working that strengthen the EVP include the following:

- Frequent leadership communication with employees is observed in comparison to pre-hybrid era and it helps employees to keep abreast with organizational changes. In addition, it promotes building trust in times of change and making leadership presence more apparent even in a remote working culture.
- Hybrid working has opened new opportunities for employees to work in a global capacity. This correlates with recent research studies on hybrid working (Gratton,

2021; Gupta et al., 2022). Employees view exposure to global roles as a form of career development and an opportunity to acquire new skills, and knowledge about other regions. This has a positive impact on employee attitude, behavior, skill levels, overall engagement, and team collaboration within multinational conglomerates.

- There has been a visible change in interdepartmental interaction and collaboration even in the absence of extended onsite or in-person team meetings. Due to the acceptance of the hybrid working culture, employees feel they work with greater tolerance, flexibility, and understanding to achieve organizational goals. Onsite team meetings are preferred as opposed to virtual team meetings due to the efficiency gains they represent.

The negative impacts (restraining forces of change) of hybrid working that weaken the EVP include the following:

- While there is communication from leaders, it is limited to virtual townhalls, emails, and video messages. This is perceived as limiting employee opportunities to build rapport with senior stakeholders in the organization, while an open-door policy is nonexistent. Senior leaders tend to work more remotely than onsite given the travel needs and complexities in the regions that they manage. The lack of availability and onsite leadership presence is detrimental to the employer–employee relationship and widens the power distance and hierarchy. Hofstede (1980) explained that power distance as a cultural perception where those who are in junior roles see decision-making authority and ability to influence as unequally distributed. This aligns with Katsande et al.’s (2022) findings on inequality and exclusion in hybrid working culture, which weakens organizational EVP.
- The lack of personal interactions and increased correspondence via emails and virtual calls can lead to misinterpretations in the use of words and meaning. As stated by Shockley et al. (2021) the absence of nonverbal cues can trigger misconceptions, making the working environment fiercely competitive and unappealing (Mortensen, 2023).
- The flexible approach in the hybrid environment has created unrealistic expectations among external audiences on speed of delivery and response rate, even

on employees' days off. Unsustainable and unclear work practices generate additional stress on employees and impact the overall work–life balance.

- Organizing team meetings and team outings has become more complicated due to the blended working styles of team members. Not all members are present in the office at any given point in time, and advance planning is required. As mentioned by Zhang et al. (2015), this limits spontaneous celebrations or addressing urgent business topics with the wider team. On the other hand, team update meetings have become more formal, with listed agendas, leaving no room for socialization. The lack of a personal touch has impacted many areas in the employment relationship.
- As organizational communication has pivoted toward virtual modalities (e.g., seminars, video messages, e-announcements) employees experience an influx of emails in comparison to traditional ways of working (pre-hybrid era). An inability to cope with all email communications triggers a fear of missing out on important information. This coincides with the change trait, the fear of the unknown explained by Kanter (1985) that can cause resistance to change.
- There is a disconnect between employer and employee involvement and enthusiasm levels. This is exacerbated when the business rationale behind certain decisions (e.g., individual promotions or closing of a business unit) is unknown or unclear, leaving employees feeling less involved or surprised. Hybrid working has also created a void in participation levels. Employees are not enthusiastic about participating in organizational events in comparison to the pre-hybrid era due to low engagement levels and disconnectedness. The lack of social connection and isolation has resulting disengaged individuals, as shown in the literature (Chatha & Qayyum, 2022).

#### *4.2.3 The Impact of Hybrid Working on Career Progress, Performance Management, and Learning Needs*

Career progression, performance management, and learning opportunities are nonfinancial rewards that contribute to the EVP (see Figures 12 and 13). Employees were questioned about these areas to understand the related positive and negative impacts.

The positive impacts (driving forces of change) of hybrid working that strengthen the EVP include the following:

- Training opportunities are organized in consideration for hybrid work patterns; therefore, employees who work both onsite and remotely feel they are treated equally. Equality and inclusion contribute to strengthening the organizational EVP.
- Hybrid working has enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in working styles. Certain employees felt performance discussions have become more structured as opposed to the pre-hybrid era. Quality conversations between line managers and employees have improved perceptions of the performance management culture within an organization. In turn, it has boosted employee motivation levels and the intention to stay. These findings coincide with research conducted by Young et al. (2019), and Naden et al. (2023).
- Open discussions on team goals in the presence of all team members is viewed as efficient use of time in comparison to the pre-hybrid way of working. Greater transparency leads to less internal conflict, better coordination, and improved team camaraderie.

The negative impacts (restraining forces of change) of hybrid working that weaken the EVP include the following:

- The lack of routine and discipline causes issues around productivity and work–life balance. Such struggles have a negative impact on employee quality of life and the employment relationship. These themes are interrelated and have a negative impact on the individual capacity and interest level toward learning opportunities. During focus groups, respondents made the remark that interest towards learning and development “has gone into sleep mode”.
- It has become increasingly challenging for new joiners to learn about organizational policies, procedures, systems, and the organizational culture. Therefore, it is extremely important for line managers to decide whether onsite working is more appropriate during on-the-job learning or initial stages of employment. Buddy programs need to be revisited in line with hybrid working styles, and HR onboarding programs need to be reviewed based on present realities.

- Career-management discussions are viewed to be more biased in the hybrid working environment as they are subject to line managers' leadership style, working patterns, and characteristics. The stigma around performance and career discussions can be described as prejudice and is impacted by limited visibility to other stakeholders in comparison to the pre-hybrid era.
- Lack of transparency, employee involvement, and awareness on organization-wide projects can lead to duplication of efforts, inefficiencies, and frustrations. These emotional drivers can negatively impact individual and team performance and give rise to toxic work cultures. Similar findings were recorded by Melin & Correll (2022).
- Hybrid working has given rise to insecurities and a feeling of missing out on self-nomination programs, compared to traditional ways of working.
- Given the opportunity, employees prefer to learn together as a team in an onsite environment in comparison to undertaking virtual learning programs. Organizations are finding it more economical to host online training programs, though onsite (classroom) learning programs offer returns on investment via real-time interaction with instructors and peers, and hands-on practical experience, which are more valuable for full-time remote workers.
- A lack of visibility and context regarding selection criteria for internal promotions and salary increases can drive demotivation and disengagement among existing employees. This weakens the organizational EVP and thereby creates talent-retention risks.

#### *4.2.4 The Impact of Hybrid Working on Financial Aspects of Employee Benefits*

Financial rewards or aspects of employee benefits are a component or driver of the organizational EVP (see Figures 12 and 13). Thus, this study investigated how transitioning to hybrid working has impacted employee way of life in this regard (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship). The impact can again be categorized into positive and negative impacts of change that can strengthen or weaken the EVP.

The positive impacts (driving forces of change) of hybrid working that strengthen the EVP include the following:

- As per UAE employment law, transportation allowance makes up a component of monthly gross salary. Employers have the flexibility to curate employee benefits strategy within organizations and transportation allowance is provided for employees to travel to work five times a week. Despite implementation of hybrid working arrangements, the employer under research investigation has not deducted transportation allowance from the existing gross salary structure. According to respondent feedback this practice is positively perceived by the employees and has elevated the employer's image and reputation among the existing and potential employees.
- Investments have been made by the employer in mental health and first aid programs within the work environment. Work stress can lead to burnout, and having mental health coaches and first aiders who can support well-being within the organization is a stronger driver for being an employer of choice.
- Additional allowances provided for parking and for purchasing WFH office furniture have reduced the financial burden at employee levels.
- Investments have been made in annual gym memberships; sponsorship of onsite aerobics, yoga, and meditation classes; and the provision of flexibility for employees to focus on their well-being during (e.g., in the lunch hour). Similar to research findings highlighted in CIPD (2020c) respondents were of the opinion that healthcare organizations focusing on cost containment and medical management in a post pandemic environment tend to forget well-being priorities however such financial investments in well-being are magnets for talent (Mercer, 2021).

The negative impacts (restraining forces of change) of hybrid working that weaken the EVP include the following:

- There was an interesting debate among respondents as to whether the responsibility to invest in WFH data packages lies with the employer or employee. The lack of high-bandwidth internet packages seems to impair productivity levels when working from home. The author is of the opinion that data packages can be offered as a subsidized corporate plan while incorporating security controls.

- A lack of HR policies and well-defined guidelines on employee entitlements and employer liabilities or responsibilities can cause financial losses and employee disappointment. Moreover, this gap can expose the organization to reputational damage, data protection breaches, and lack of coverage for health and safety hazards of remote workers. Therefore, it is vital for policy-makers and HR practitioners to revise policy guidelines and employee benefit entitlements in view of hybrid working arrangements.

### **4.3 Summary of Key Findings**

All respondents were consulted on their opinion about the future of hybrid working. Employee feedback supports a permanent transition to hybrid working despite the negative impacts highlighted above. However, talent retention and attraction in the hybrid environment is achieved by strengthening driving forces or diminishing restraining forces. The theoretical framework developed by the author based on Lewin's (1951) FFA theory provides a clear diagnosis of the current reality of hybrid work within the organization and factors that positively and negatively impact employee way of life (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship) and organizational EVP.

The key areas of the investigation, and related findings, are as follows:

- Validating the interrelationship between the research questions based on the study results: As indicated in Chapter 1, the interrelationship between the research questions is validated by the findings (Figure 33). Specifically, findings demonstrate that the impact of hybrid working on employee way of life (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship) has a direct impact that strengthens (Figure 29) or weakens (Figure 30) the organizational EVP.

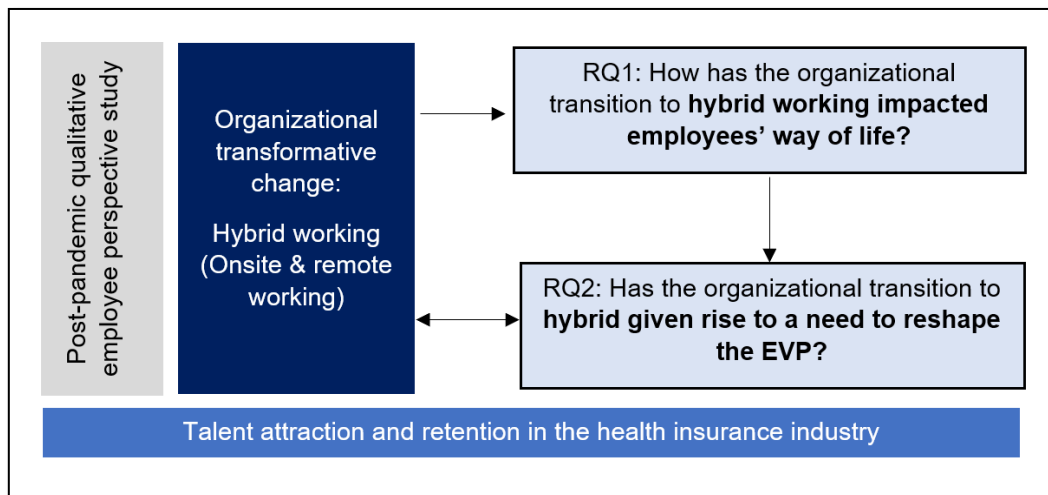


Figure 33: Validating the Interrelationship between the Research Questions Based on the Results

- Assessing the alignment between hybrid-working factors that impact employee way of life (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship) and elements of the EVP: Components of the organizational EVP (i.e., financial and nonfinancial rewards, and the employee experience) are shown to align with factors that shape employees' current way of life (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship), supporting the argument that the impact of hybrid working impacts employee way of life and that this indicates a need to reshape existing EVP drivers. Similarities can be noted, for example, between factors that impact employee way of life and nonfinancial rewards of the EVP (Figure 34).



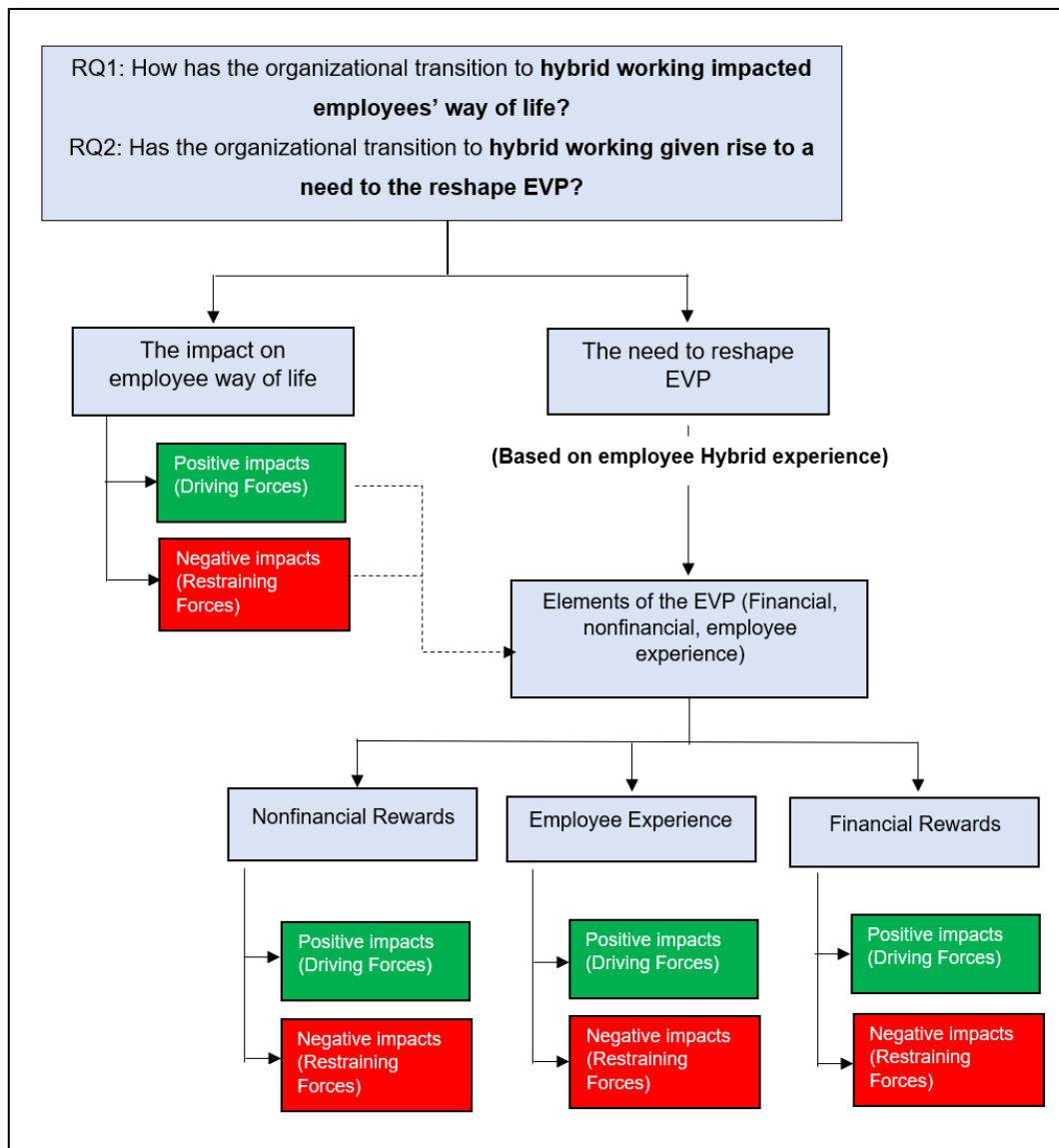


Figure 34: The Alignment between Factors that Impact Employee Way of Life and Elements of the EVP

- Delineating the negative impacts of hybrid working on employee way of life and components of the EVP that indicate a need to reshape the EVP: Based on the analysis of the results, hybrid-working experiences that negatively impact employee way of life, financial (tangible) and nonfinancial (intangible) rewards, and the employee experience indicate a need to reshape the organizational EVP (Figure 30 and 36). In essence, these factors weaken the EVP, which drives the need to reshape it.

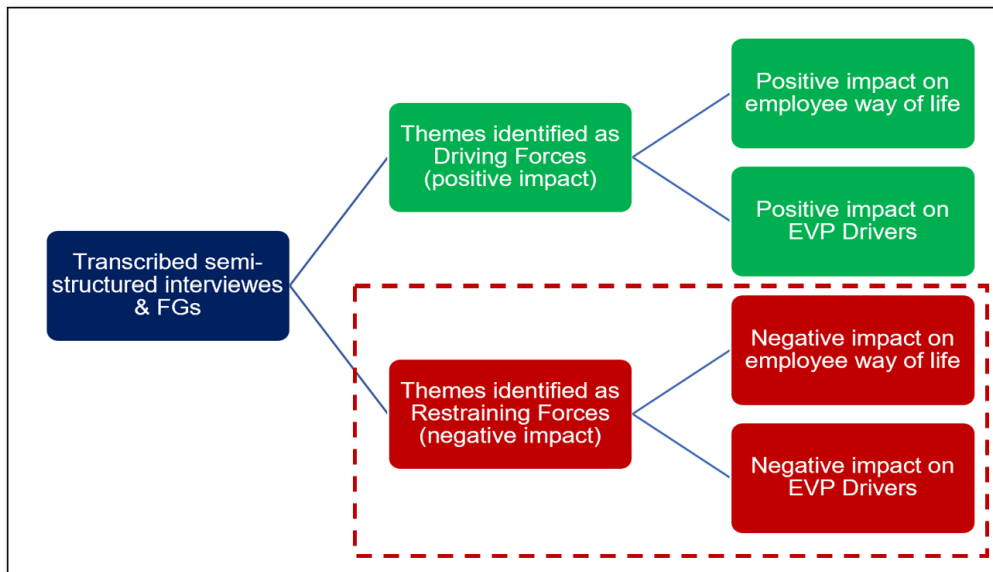


Figure 35: Themes or Negative Impacts (Restraining Forces) Giving Rise to a Need to Reshape the EVP

- Identifying the significant impact of hybrid working on nonfinancial rewards and the employee experience: Per the discussion in Chapter 4, transitioning to hybrid working has largely impacted nonfinancial rewards, or intangible elements of the EVP, and the employee experience. While financial rewards play an important role in the employment deal, based on the study results nonfinancial rewards and employee experiences can differentiate an employer. Therefore, capitalizing on positive drivers and eliminating negative drivers of the EVP will increase talent retention and attraction within the health insurance industry of the UAE.

Chapter 5 includes recommendations for mitigating the identified gaps in the existing EVP and negative employee experiences that uncovered during the data analysis & interpretation stages.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions & Recommendations**

This chapter summarizes the conclusions drawn based upon the qualitative findings presented in Chapter 4. Suitable recommendations are provided to capitalize on the positive EVP drivers, employee perceptions and hybrid experiences. In addition, author recommend ways to mitigate the identified negative impacts from an employee perspective of transitioning to hybrid working arrangements. These negative impacts relate to employees' way of life (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship) and the components of EVP drivers (financial rewards, nonfinancial rewards, and employee experience). In addition, health insurance industry-wide, organization-wide and individual centric recommendations to mitigate EVP drivers are illustrated in the chapter.

Managerial implications for policy-makers, limitations and related future research avenues, ethical considerations, and the significance of the study are discussed in detail. Finally, the author presents a conceptual framework that can be adopted for EVP gap analysis in the context of introducing hybrid working arrangements (Figure 37) in the health insurance industry of the UAE.

### **5.1 To Craft Employer Branding Strategies**

The positive EVP drivers and impacts on employees' way of life provide a basis on which the organization can develop its internal and external employer branding strategies. Since the organization is at a transitioning phase with respect to hybrid working, employer branding efforts are highly relevant to attract and retain top talent in this competitive market and industry. However, employer branding is an ongoing process that requires continuous improvement. Therefore, regular assessment and refining of the employer brand will facilitate strategic integration of the EVP drivers into branding campaigns. Positive EVP drivers can be capitalized on to develop employee advocacy programs, create an employer presence on social media, optimize careers websites, and curate timely, relevant, and engaging brand content. Successful change initiatives involve leveraging driving forces and mitigating restraining forces to effectively manage the overall transition.

## **5.2 The Negative Impacts of Hybrid Working on Employee Way of Life, and Recommendations to Mitigate these Drawbacks**

Some key recommendations to enhance the hybrid experience and mitigate negative impacts that impair the EVP (i.e., to reshape the EVP) are as follows:

Regarding extended working hours and increased anxiety levels:

- Provide clear policies and guidelines: Organizational policies should discourage the always-on culture. Providing clear guidelines on hybrid working arrangements and productivity measurement criteria will reduce ambiguity.
- Ensure that senior leadership lead by example: Unhealthy extended working hours should be minimized, and client queries on employee days off should be met with out-of-office notifications. Such measures will help manage the expectations of internal and external stakeholders.
- Provide education and training in areas related to hybrid working: educating and equipping managers with soft skills, emotional intelligence, and effective communication strategies, will facilitate the management of remote and hybrid teams. Line managers should create more awareness within teams of the challenges of hybrid working, and promote collaboration.
- Implement effective communication tools: The use of an internal communication system that can support online, real-time updates can help moderate anxiety around unseen or unknown factors behind tasks. Video-conferencing tools, chat apps, and project-management tools can support effective communication in the virtual environment.

Regarding conflicts between work and domestic responsibilities:

- Create a safe space: Employees should be encouraged to voice their domestic challenges in the workplace. Making employees feel that they are heard can have a significant impact on motivation levels. Creating a safe space reduces anxiety and stigma attached to speaking up about challenges.
- Provide referrals to employee assistance programs: Where necessary, refer employees to employee assistance programs with trained counsellors and psychologists.

- Promote flexible approaches to employee life issues: Flexible working approaches should be offered to working parents, caregivers, and employees with certain medical conditions. Flexi hours can be introduced, which would, for example, help individuals attend doctor's appointments or parent-teacher meetings. Formalizing such flexible approaches to working will strengthen employee loyalty and the overall employment relationship.

Regarding the lack of routine and discipline, and the need for extra planning when working offsite:

- Provide a structured approach to performance monitoring: Responsibility for maintaining a work routine, discipline, and planning lies with the employee; however, line managers can introduce a more structured approach to daily or weekly performance monitoring.
- Personalize performance discussions: Employee motivation levels and engagement drivers differ based on age, gender, and tenure within the organization. Therefore, a personalized approach toward performance management can make individuals feel valued and recognized.

Regarding excessive communication via virtual meetings, and lack of face-to-face interaction:

- Seek to avoid virtual fatigue: Face-to-face interaction can be encouraged by making onsite meetings fun and meaningful meetings, and planning one-on-one discussions with team members well in advance. The overuse of emails and e-cards to recognize employee efforts and achievements should be avoided. It is equally important to make the days in the office or working onsite more meaningful for individuals, as this can break down isolation barriers.
- Promote more team-based activities: Team activities that can bring both remote and geographically dispersed team members can enable them to engage and get to know each other. Such interactions enhance team communication and drive change, making employees feel valued and supported, which contributes to enhancing the psychological contract between employer and employee in a hybrid environment.

- Filtering information overload: Another way to improve communication in a hybrid setup is to avoid overwhelming employees with excessive information, and being mindful about the quality and quantity of communication channels to enhance the effectiveness of interactions.

Regarding the home environment not being conducive for work:

- Determine which jobs are suited to working from home: Unlike during pandemic times, WFH is now typically optional. Line managers and HR should undertake joint workforce planning to understand the nature of job roles, and determine which best suit hybrid working modalities. Employees living in shared accommodation or facing challenges in the home environment should have access to either onsite or an alternative office space.
- Conduct “pulse checks” on remote workers: Creating awareness regarding the options available and conducting pulse surveys will enable organizations to gather more tangible and timely information on remote working.
- Implement health and safety policies for working from home, and provide allowances for home-office arrangements: Employees at senior levels face fewer challenges with office setups at home compared to knowledge workers at junior levels. Therefore, increasing the employee allowance toward home-office arrangements and introducing health and safety policies that cover work hazards in remote locations can make employees feel secure and protected.

Regarding the lack of allocated personal space at work:

- Provide storage lockers for onsite employees: Dedicated lockers provide space and security to store employee belongings. This will reduce the burden on employees to bring in their IT equipment when working onsite.
- Implement a user-friendly seat-booking system: Organizations can introduce a seat-booking system that shows online the real-time occupancy status in the office. Such tools can support individuals and teams to plan their onsite team meetings and work efficiently and effectively.

### **5.3 The Negative Impacts of Hybrid Working on the EVP, and Recommendations to Mitigate these Drawbacks**

Latham and Locke (1979) pointed out that financial benefits are important in attracting and retaining talent, however they are not sufficient to motivate high performance as the effects of monetary benefits are short lived, whereas nonfinancial rewards have the ability to generate long-lasting intrinsic motivation among employees.

Some key recommendations to enhance the hybrid experience and reshape the EVP are as follows:

Regarding gaps in current approaches to nonfinancial recognition:

- Provide public recognition for achievements: Overall, employee engagement, participation, and involvement appear to be challenges in the hybrid environment. The lack of a “personal touch” was highlighted throughout the results of the study. Peer recognition, social media shoutouts, public celebrations, scholarships or grants, and spot-recognition tools can make public recognition more apparent among both remote and onsite employees.
- Demonstrate fairness and impartiality in team and individual recognition: Clear organization-wide announcements that explain the rationale behind certain appreciation, recognition, and promotion decisions will ensure the organizational culture incorporates transparency and impartiality.
- Provide engagement and rapport-building opportunities with senior leaders: Networking opportunities, coffee mornings, and mentoring and coaching exercises with senior leaders can mitigate the impact of individualism within work cultures and address biased opinions. Such forums foster inclusive and respectful dialogues between leaders and employees.
- Create awareness on what constitutes success, and celebrate milestones: Since hybrid working is relatively new to many employees, it is important to evaluate key performance indicators within departments, define what success means to the business or region, create more awareness by making information easily accessible and visible, and—most importantly—celebrate milestones by including both remote and onsite employees. Such an inclusive approach leads to employee retention, engagement and mitigate retention risks.

### Regarding gaps in the organizational culture:

- Regulate the tone and behavior enacted among leaders: Hybrid working has brought about significant changes to the organizational culture and work environment, including organizational policies and practices, communication, employee engagement, leadership behavior, organizational structure, and speed of decision-making. The ethical leadership and values demonstrated by the organization's highest-ranking individuals can guide the behaviors of the rest of the organization. Therefore, leadership presence and engagement at corporate events is more important now than before. Leaders should encourage feedback from all employees, actively listen to their concerns, set clear performance goals and expectations, and be transparent about company changes and updates. A flexible leadership style can be more effective in a hybrid environment, where remote employees may require more autonomy and others may require more direction and support, or vice versa. Understanding the overall health, vitality and current state of the organization can help leaders to determine suitable leadership approaches. These behaviors lead to perceptions and assumptions that form part of the organizational DNA.
- Minimize employee disconnect: Measures should be implemented to reduce employee disconnect in the hybrid environment, and thereby maintain cohesive and productive teams. Proactive team management approaches can also eliminate unhealthy and toxic competition within and outside of teams. The following recommended approaches can be adopted to connect employees:
  - a) Clearly communicate organizational goals, updates, changes, and challenges.
  - b) Create opportunities to bring remote and onsite workers together.
  - c) Invest in technological tools that can promote effective communication, such as file-sharing solutions, project status-tracking tools, and equal-access controls for remote and onsite employees.
  - d) Implement structured onboarding programs that help new joiners understand complex reporting lines and business segments in a hybrid world.



- e) Provide feedback channels where employees can easily offer suggestions and recommendations on the new ways of working.
- f) Promote well-being measures that address preventative care for virtual fatigue, anxiety, and burnout issues emerging in the hybrid environment.

Regarding education and awareness on regulatory requirements, data protection governance protocols, and taxation implications:

- Educate employees: All employees who WFH or via hybrid working arrangements need to be made aware of possibilities regarding data protection breaches, changes in the regulatory environment with respect to hybrid work, and any tax implications that can may impact their income through working remotely. Such awareness programs can help mitigate risk exposure and financial losses to employees and the organization.
- Provide customized learning programs for remote and hybrid employees: In the hybrid environment, personalized learning and development approaches are required to keep individuals engaged. It is important to equip line managers and single contributors to adapt to new working styles and thinking patterns, and to ensure that employees are aligned with organizational goals. Often, remote workers' learning investments can go unnoticed; therefore, proactive and transparent communication is needed.
- Evaluate retention risks and enact succession planning: Hybrid working has opened multiple opportunities for global roles, matrix reporting lines, and operating out of various locations and time zones. Therefore, organizations need to consider evaluating development needs, talent, and retention risks across hybrid, remote, and onsite workers, and put in place robust succession plans.

Regarding gaps in organization-wide performance management, career conversations, and team collaboration

- Set clear expectations and make data-driven decisions: With the introduction of hybrid working, the concept of performance management has become less formal. It is also largely influenced by the working styles and leadership behaviors of direct supervisors and employees. In some cases, informal conversations have contributed to strengthening employee–manager relationships. One could challenge this

observation as performance conversations were considered subjective even in the pre-Covid-19 environment; however, the perception gap and room for misinterpretation increase in a hybrid set-up. Therefore, it is important for line managers to set clear expectations, goals, and key performance indicators for remote and onsite working job roles. Data-driven performance analysis and decision-making will help line managers to differentiate productivity among remote and onsite employees.

- Provide manager leadership training for hybrid teams: Line manager education is required for leading remote and hybrid teams. Retraining managers can improve the performance-management approach and manage conflicts in hybrid teams. Traditional management styles do not cater to hybrid teams, whereas an adaptive leadership approach can minimize hierarchical gaps within new teams.
- Hybrid-proof onboarding programs for new joiners: New-joiner onboarding programs should be customized in view of hybrid arrangements within the organization. The results indicate that new joiners struggle to understand organization policies, procedures, systems, and culture in a hybrid set-up. Therefore, where possible, line managers can curate onsite or entirely remote onboarding programs that cater to individual preferences and contractual obligations.
- Revise HR policies on career conversations, eligibility for promotions, and rewards for contribution: In the transition to hybrid work, it is vital to revise HR policies and guidelines. Revised policies will serve as a reference point for employees and line managers for having productive career conversations between remote and hybrid employees. Such policies can help eliminate assumptions on how performance is rewarded in a hybrid culture.

Interestingly, the respondents cited more concerns regarding nonfinancial elements of the EVP, as opposed to financial elements such as salary, bonuses, and incentive pay. This indicates that nonfinancial elements of the EVP and the employee experience are the key factors driving or inhibiting the hybrid transition within organizations.

Based on the above conclusions and recommendations organizations need to carefully review and adjust their financial and nonfinancial elements of the EVP.

Employee experience is a primary attribute of the EVP, and the degree to which changes are required in organizational EVP will differ from one organization to another. A theoretical framework such as Lewin’s (1951) FFA enables the negative impacts on the EVP to be identified, and an adaptation plan to be formulated. As the results show, employee interests and concerns regarding hybrid working are primarily built on nonfinancial elements of the EVP (e.g., working environment, leadership behavior, performance management, career progression, succession planning, organizational culture, employee engagement, employee communication); therefore, revisiting these aspects according to current business demands will enable organizations to attract and retain talent, and at the same time build competitive advantage.

**5.4 Macro-Level, Meso-Level and Micro-Level Recommendations: UAE Health Insurance Industry Centric, Organization Centric and Employee Centric Actions to Enhance Hybrid Experience and Determine EVP Drivers to be Reshaped**

The lack of insights and critique regarding macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of hybrid arrangements has been highlighted as a limitation in academic literature. Therefore, the author presents research recommendations categorized into three levels.

Table 23: Macro-, Meso-, Micro-Level Recommendations for Enhancing the Employee Hybrid Experience and EVP Drivers that Need to be Reshaped

<b>Macro-Level View Industry-Centric Recommendations</b>	<b>Meso-Level View Organization-Centric Recommendations</b>	<b>Micro-Level View Employee- and Team-Centric Recommendations</b>
Provide education on UAE / health insurance regulatory requirements (e.g., central bank, Insurance Authority, DFSA) <b>EVP Driver:</b> Education and training	Define clear HR policies and guidelines on hybrid arrangements <b>EVP Driver:</b> HR governance policies and protocols	Make efforts to demonstrate fairness and equality within teams <b>EVP Driver:</b> Team culture
Identify and communicate UAE employment law requirements on hybrid working and contractual changes <b>EVP Driver:</b> Education and training	Ensure exemplary senior leadership behavior and tone at the top <b>EVP Driver:</b> Leadership culture	Implement effective communication tools <b>EVP Driver:</b> Employee engagement and communication

Table 24: Macro-, Meso-, Micro-Level Recommendations for Enhancing the Employee Hybrid Experience and EVP Drivers that Need to be Reshaped (Continued)

Macro-Level View Industry-Centric Recommendations	Meso-Level View Organization-Centric Recommendations	Micro-Level View Employee- and Team-Centric Recommendations
Create awareness of UAE data protection requirements for WFH and remote working <b>EVP Driver:</b> Education and training	Hybrid-proof line manager education and training <b>EVP Driver:</b> Education and training	Provide referrals to employee assistance programs and mental health programs <b>EVP Driver:</b> Employee well-being
Create awareness of tax implications of remote working <b>EVP Driver:</b> Employee benefits	Create a safe space for discussing employee challenges <b>EVP Driver:</b> Work environment	Promote flexible approaches to resolving employee-level issues <b>EVP Driver:</b> Work environment
	Introduce structured performance-monitoring approach <b>EVP Driver:</b> Performance culture	Introduce personalized performance discussions <b>EVP Driver:</b> Performance culture
	Introduce policies and practices to avoid virtual fatigue <b>EVP Driver:</b> Work environment	Encourage more team-based activities, as opposed to working in silos <b>EVP Driver:</b> Work environment
	Assess fit between WFH and job role <b>EVP Driver:</b> Performance culture	Conduct pulse checks on remote workers <b>EVP Driver:</b> Work environment
	Introduce health and safety policies that extend to WFH and remote working <b>EVP Driver:</b> HR governance policies and protocols	Introduce storage lockers for onsite workers <b>EVP Driver:</b> Work environment
	Provide an allowance to improve home-office ergonomics <b>EVP Driver:</b> Employee benefits	Implement user-friendly seat-booking system <b>EVP Driver:</b> Work environment
	Define business-centric success measures and celebrate milestones <b>EVP Driver:</b> Performance culture	Focus more on public recognition measures for hybrid teams <b>EVP Driver:</b> Performance culture
	Implement measures to minimize employee disconnect <b>EVP Driver:</b> Employee engagement	Provide networking and rapport-building opportunities with senior leaders <b>EVP Driver:</b> Employee engagement
	Evaluate retention risks and develop succession plans <b>EVP Driver:</b> Employee engagement	Customized learning programs for remote, onsite, and hybrid teams <b>EVP Driver:</b> Learning and development
	Set clear expectations and data-driven decisions <b>EVP Driver:</b> Performance culture	Hybrid-proof onboarding programs for new joiners <b>EVP Driver:</b> Learning and development
	Revise HR policies for career conversations, promotions, and rewards for contribution <b>EVP Driver:</b> HR governance policies and protocols	

Table 14 provides a clear overview on ways in which the hybrid experience can be enhanced and ways in which EVP gaps can be determined at an industry, organization and individual levels. This fills an identified gap in existing literature. From a theoretical standpoint, the approaches to improve employee experience are linked to organizational EVP drivers; from a practical perspective, strengthening organizational EVP will increase the employer's brand value and the psychological contract between employer and employee.

### **5.5 Mapping Elements of the EVP Based on Employee Hybrid Experience and Perception / Awareness Level**

Below illustration (Figure 36) developed by the writer demonstrate elements of the EVP (i.e., EVP drivers) that are positively and negatively influenced by hybrid working arrangements. The EVP elements are mapped against the level of employee experience (high and low) and employee perception / awareness level (high and low) discovered during the discussion of results and based on recommendations highlighted in the current chapter.

- EVP elements that are categorized into the quadrant of high employee experience and high awareness / perception promote the transformative change and the success of hybrid working arrangements within an organization. In other words, these drivers attract and retain talent.
- EVP elements that are categorized under the quadrant of low employee experience and low awareness / perception level discourage hybrid working arrangements and can cause talent attraction and retention risks.
- EPV elements that are high in employee experience level yet low in perception or awareness levels indicate the need for more education and participation within the organization. These are the EVP drivers that require to be reshaped.
- Lastly, EVP elements that are low in employee experience and high in employee perception or awareness level require policy-makers to review and reshape the EVP drivers.

Therefore, hybrid working arrangements are a driver of EVP that facilitates talent attraction and retention within the health insurance industry of UAE.

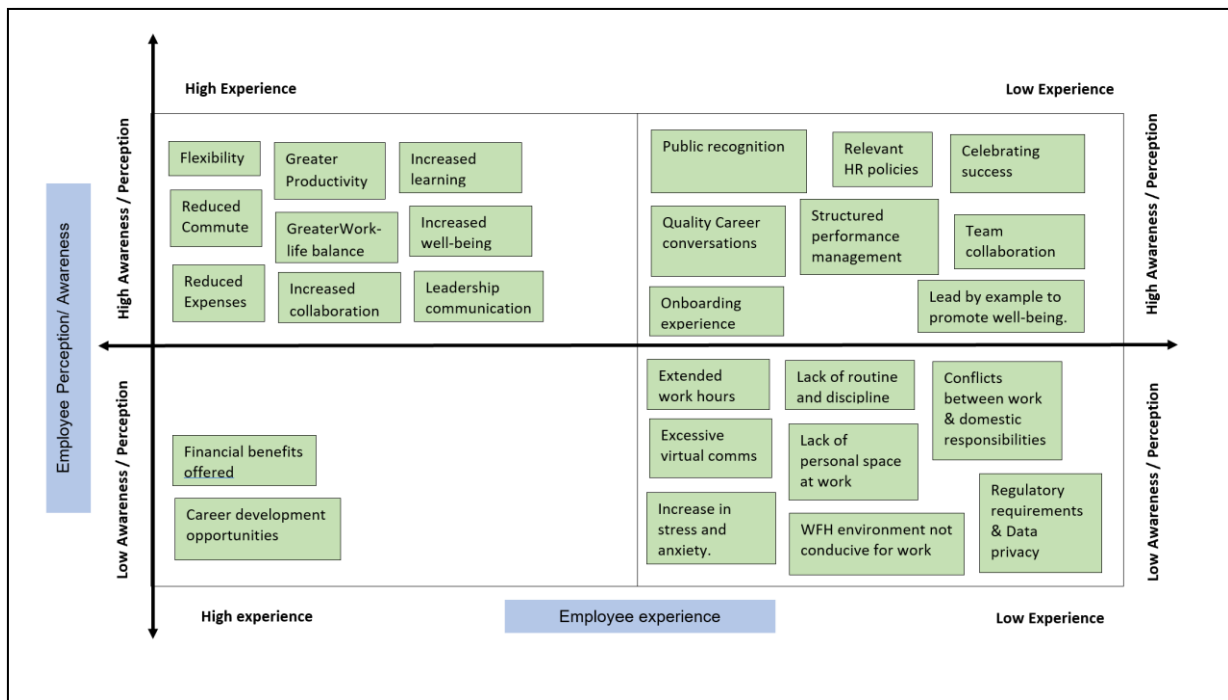


Figure 36: Mapping Elements of the EVP Based on Employee Hybrid Experience and Perception / Awareness Level

### 5.6 Conceptual Framework for Evaluating the Need to Reshape the EVP Based on the Impacts of Hybrid Working

Chapter 1 outlined the purpose behind the theoretical framework and conceptual framework of this qualitative research. A conceptual framework is developed following thematic analysis and defines the relationships between the qualitative variables being examined in the study (Garvey & Jones, 2021; Jabareen, 2009; Rolfe, 2006).

The framework shown in Figure 37 demonstrates the relationship between the impact of hybrid working on employee way of life (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship) and the approach used to conduct the EVP gap analysis. Further, the conceptual framework highlights how theory can be applied in practice to answer similar research problems in different industries.

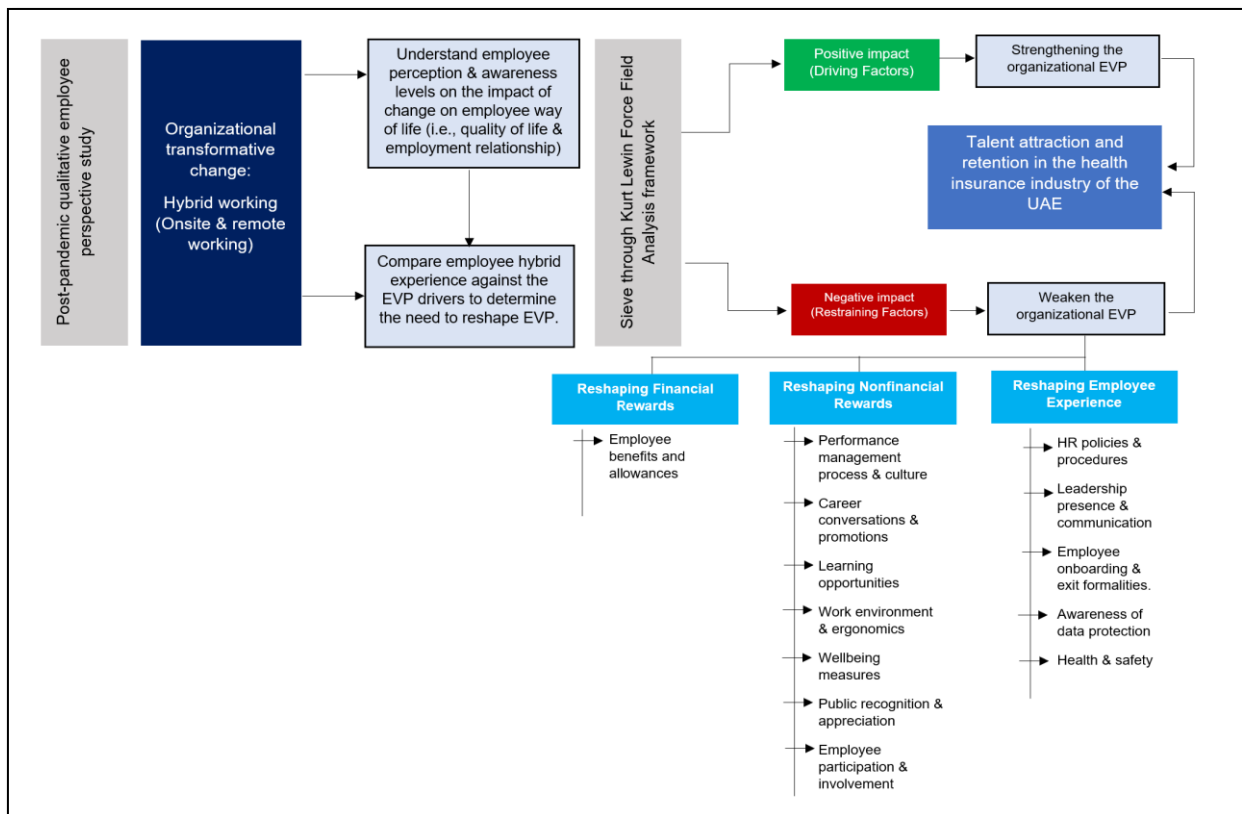


Figure 37: Conceptual Framework for EVP Gap Analysis in View of Transitioning to a Hybrid Working Environment

### 5.7 Key Highlights of the Final Chapter

Hybrid working combines onsite and remote work, allowing employees to choose their work location and schedule in line with business demands. Hybrid working has become a long-term arrangement in the post-pandemic era. Therefore, this study investigated the impact of hybrid working on employees’ way of life (i.e., quality of life and the employment relationship) and whether, as a result, a need has arisen for employers to consciously reshape their EVP. Simultaneously, the study investigated the employee experience with hybrid working and how it relates to the EVP (which comprises financial rewards, nonfinancial rewards, and the employee experience). Areas that give rise to a negative employee experience have been identified as triggers to reshape the EVP.

The qualitative results indicate that hybrid working has improved employee satisfaction, productivity, stress levels, work–life balance, expenditure, and use of personal and professional time. However, drawbacks were also noted as the model does not fit all job profiles. Therefore, the suitability of hybrid working must be reviewed based

on the nature of the job roles and the industry in question. Changing from a traditional to a hybrid model has given rise to various implementation challenges, as encapsulated in detail in this study as driving and inhibiting factors for change. The impact of change on employees' way of life has created new challenges and thus directly strengthens or weakens the organizational EVP. Nonfinancial elements of the EVP must be subject to greater scrutiny than financial aspects in curating the EVP for the current human capital market. Figure 37 provides an overview of a model that can be adopted to evaluate the need to reshape the EVP (i.e., EVP gap analysis). The conceptual framework can be used across industries.

### **5.8 Managerial Implications**

Hybrid working is a relatively a new concept for many organizations, and in the global landscape, the healthcare industry is currently undergoing various changes with respect to the adoption of artificial intelligence and digitization measures. Therefore, transitioning to a hybrid working model can add another layer of complexity, making the change process more unpredictable for policy-makers, senior leaders, and HR professionals.

A key objective of this study was to understand the awareness and perception levels of employees around the concept of hybrid working, and whether the change process is seen as positive or negative. Employee participation is important in a change process as the success of an organization-wide transformation depends upon when driving forces surpass the restraining forces for change. It is interesting that respondents used the word “cherry-picking” to describe the concept of hybrid working; this suggests that establishing clear guidelines and policies would limit any employee temptations toward overutilizing flexible approaches to work. Based on the evidence obtained in the study, employee education is required to convey that hybrid working does not necessarily cater to all departments and job roles. Department- or function-specific hybrid arrangements need to be thought through by line managers to ensure there are no misinterpretations, or feelings of being discriminated against, among team members. The findings reveal that hybrid arrangements have had more positive impacts on employees' way of life than negative impacts, and that employees value the flexibility offered by the employer. Additionally,



line managers must be trained to be more empathetic and create a sharing forum (e.g., a monthly coffee session to share unique challenges faced by team members and discuss solutions other managers have offered in similar instances).

The local and regional laws on data protection and hybrid working appear to be unclear. Having clarity on regulatory requirements and guidelines will support the HR policy-making process. Employers need to be mindful not to create unrealistic expectations with regard to hybrid working; in this vein, revisiting employment contracts would safeguard organizations from potential labor disputes. Employers must ensure they review existing health and safety protocols and workplace hazard coverage for employees and make sure that working from home or elsewhere will not cause problems in the event of an emergency or injury. If hybrid working is to be adopted as a permanent working solution, organizations need to consider whether employees have the right ICT setup and ergonomics to work offsite.

Theory and research have suggested that EVP drivers are a combination of financial and nonfinancial rewards and employment experience, and that these three factors have a significant impact on employee job satisfaction, intention to stay, and future talent attraction. Enhancing the employment experience with nonfinancial elements can generate benefits for organizations as it will strengthen the psychological contract between the employee and the organization. While the external environment is pivoting toward a hybrid, automated landscape, it is prudent for employers to review their existing financial rewards structure and adopt a flexible benefits architecture, as opposed to a traditional bouquet of benefits that were more relevant in the pre-pandemic era. A flexible benefits structure will allow employees working from various locations (across borders) and time zones, as well as diverse individuals (e.g., working parents, unmarried professionals, single parents, those from Generation Z, etc.) to select benefits that will best suit their needs, rather than having to take what is offered as standard.

The findings of the study reveal that employees often fear the unknown, which can lead to resistance to change. Managers can mitigate such uncertainties and fears by offering more clarity on business goals and changes in direction. Female employees cited particular struggles regarding working WFH and managing domestic responsibilities in

this study. People managers need to be mindful about the different roles of female workers in different cultures, as this would help female employees break down barriers to hybrid working.

## **5.9 Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This study is subject to the following limitations:

- Lack of theoretical frameworks to develop or reshape the EVP: Existing literature lacks clarity on how to develop or reshape the organizational EVP. Therefore, this study utilized Lewin's (1951) FFA theory (Figure 17) to diagnose positive and negative impacts of change on employee way of life and overall organizational EVP. The negative impacts of change provide the basis for determining areas that need to be reshaped in the organizational EVP. The results analysis and discussion stage revealed that Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions and Kanter's (1984) resistance to change theory can be used to further expand the research analysis and findings. Therefore, as a future research direction, the theoretical model posited in this study can be further expanded and refined with the use of six cultural categories (power distance index, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance index, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint).
- Lack of health insurance industry related academic research capturing hybrid implementation and its impact on the EVP: As highlighted in the limitations of the literature review, hybrid working as a research topic is still evolving, such that primary and secondary sources of information highlighting the interrelationship between hybrid implementation and the organizational EVP are limited. In addition, emerging trends of hybrid work have primarily been captured by consulting firms in the UAE, while academic research is still taking shape. Available academic research is also largely quantitative in nature; therefore, this qualitative investigation can bridge some of the gaps in academic research pertaining to the impact of hybrid working on the organizational EVP.
- Need to redefine theoretical definitions of EVP: When the results of the study are compared with theoretical definitions, it is evident that EVP is a combination of

financial rewards, nonfinancial rewards, and employee experience. However, available definitions do not make this categorical demarcation. Interestingly, employee experience has often not been mentioned as a component of the EVP, or has only been implied. Few post-pandemic studies on the EVP have included employee experience as a key element determining the strength of the EVP. The present study measured the need to reshape the EVP based on the employee hybrid experience. However, there is less clarity on whether hybrid working is an EVP driver or an enabler, as this has not been addressed in existing literature. Based on the findings of the study, hybrid working is a driver of the EVP and directly influences related outcomes (i.e., talent attraction and retention).

- Limitations in industry presence and target audience: For the purposes of this qualitative study, and taking time constraints into consideration, only one employer (accounting for 25% of the market share in the UAE's health insurance industry) was engaged in the research. Future research could compare hybrid arrangements and the impact on the EVP across the wider health insurance industry. Health insurance is one portion of the healthcare industry, and the challenges faced by healthcare organizations on the frontline of this industry (e.g., hospitals, clinics) could drastically differ from those who are at the supporting end. Conducting a similar study with a sample of frontline healthcare workers is an interesting future research opportunity. Recent research has indicated that hybrid working is most efficient when it is tailored to individual departmental needs. This suggestion is worthy of future investigation.
- Furthermore, the identified employer had adopted hybrid working on a permanent basis across various job roles; however, employer challenges and employee feedback could differ in organizations where hybrid working is yet to be implemented.
- The study also excluded HR professionals and the senior leadership team from the survey sample. It would be valuable to examine the challenges of implementing hybrid working from an employer and HR policy-maker perspective.
- Hybrid working and impact on well-being issues: Future research could investigate how hybrid working has contributed to improving social issues such as burnout and

poor mental health. Based on this qualitative study, hybrid working has had both positive and negative impacts on employee well-being.

- Further investigation of the EVP and CSR in the post-pandemic environment: CSR has been the subject of extensive research, and is a multifaceted concept. As the pandemic triggered multiple challenges that extensively tested many businesses, there is value in understanding the broader implications of CSR and employer behaviors during and following the pandemic. The focus of the present study has been on hybrid working and the effect on employee way of life and the organizational EVP, so it is important to further examine the relationship between CSR and the EVP. Recognizing this aspect as a limitation of the research study, the author recommends that CSR be explored as a key dependent or intervening variable in future research studies.

### **5.10 Ethical Considerations of the Study**

Ethical considerations were maintained throughout this qualitative study in the following ways:

- Anonymity, data-sharing, and storage: Initial approval was obtained from the UAEU ethics committee and the employer under consideration before the research was conducted. Relevant documents were provided to ensure transparency on the matter at hand, and for due assessment by the research committee and the employer. An ethical declaration was signed between the researcher and the organization to maintain the employer anonymity. Similarly, respondents were selected based on their tenure in the organization and their experience of both traditional and hybrid working arrangements post-year 2020 in the UAE. Participation was entirely voluntary and written consent was obtained. Participants were also ensured that no personal information would be shared with any third party or published in the research study unless written consent had been granted by the respondent in question. To prevent breaches of confidentiality, the interview and other data were kept in a password-protected folder on a digital cloud accessible only to the researcher.

- To reduce any ambiguity, bias, and additional stress on the respondents, the researcher excluded members of the senior leadership team and HR representatives from the focus group sessions. Guidelines on interview questions were shared with the selected populations in advance, leaving them time to agree to or withdraw from participation in the study.
- Researcher's connection to the organization: The researcher is associated with the international business of the group company, while the researched organization is attached to domestic, GCC business. This eliminated any conflict of interest and provided assurance that respondents could share their viewpoints candidly. Participant data and transcriptions were maintained as coded entries on NVivo and the employer's brand name, location strategy, and business statistics were not referenced in the research study so as to ensure anonymity (Nespor, 2000).
- Adler and Adler (1987) outlined several membership roles and factors that can influence the role adopted by the researcher. From a qualitative research membership perspective, there are three types of roles: peripheral member, active member, and complete member. In this research, the author was an active member as opposed to a peripheral member due to personal characteristics, direct involvement with the research audience, and facilitation of the focus group sessions in a setting independent of organizational influence. This built trust levels and increased enthusiasm among participants to contribute to the success of the study, but the researcher was careful not to blur the lines between research role and professional responsibilities.
- Debriefing and feedback note: The target audience was selected based on mixed job bands, job roles, and meeting purposeful sampling criteria. To ensure transparency, respondents were informed of the purpose and expectations of the study four weeks prior to being invited to the session, and the ethical guidelines were repeated prior to the commencement of each focus group session. A schedule of focus group questions was submitted for respondent review prior to being invited for interview. Respondents were able to see real-time research notes taken by the

researcher (the author) online, and hence had the opportunity to provide feedback during the session.

- **Permission for certain information and access:** Virtual sessions maintained confidentiality, similar to in-person sessions. The researcher took full responsibility for maintaining confidentiality.
- **Transparency in research findings:** The researcher obtained written consent to report back to respondents on the progress made during the data-collection stage and to inform them on how they had contributed to the research journey.
- **Credit to authors:** Throughout the research study, the researcher ensured that due credit was provided to authors quoted in the reviewed literature.
- **Values and norms:** Prior to conducting the interviews and focus groups, the researcher reminded participants of the research guidelines and the need to respect and acknowledge different viewpoints, values, cultures, social customs, and religious beliefs. The same standards and values were maintained by the author while writing the research.
- **Dissemination of findings:** Any publication or distribution of information is subject to the consent of respondents (employer and employee participants in the study).

### **5.11 Significance of the Study**

This research is intended to serve as guidance to health insurance leaders, employers, and HR professionals working in the UAE or at a regional or global level in attracting and retaining talent in an ever-changing business environment. The findings on the impacts of hybrid working on employee way of life in the post-pandemic environment align with those of studies by Madhavkumar (2023), Katsande et al. (2022), and Chafi et al. (2021); however, the need to shape the EVP has not been discussed at length to date. As highlighted with respect to the limitations of the literature review, there are no recommended theoretical frameworks to design or evaluate the strength of the organizational EVP. This study thus developed a theoretical framework leveraging Kurt Lewin's (1951) FFA theory. The qualitative investigation results are viewed through the framework to determine current realities of transitioning to hybrid working. The negative

impacts on employee way of life and negative employee experiences of the EVP trigger the need to reshape the EVP. Macro-, meso-, and micro-level hybrid strategies (see Figure 37 and Table 13 provide a holistic view on how to enhance the employee experience in a hybrid environment. An improved employee experience facilitates strengthening organizational EVP, which leads to employee retention and talent attraction in the UAE's health insurance industry. The proposed conceptual framework has been developed for the benefit of academic researchers investigating the relationship between the EVP and hybrid working arrangements in the post-pandemic environment. According to the RBV, employee hybrid experiences and arrangements that are rare, valuable, nonsubstitutable, and inimitable can strengthen EVP positioning and enable firms to become an employer of choice in the post-pandemic environment.

As explained in the research problem, this study aimed to enhance awareness on this crucial topic and fill a knowledge gap in the field of qualitative academic research. The limitations of the study outlined above provide several future research opportunities.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Employee Benefit Structure Offered to Existing and Prospective Employees

Benefit Category	Description
<b>Visa</b>	Employees and dependents—Band 3 and above sponsored by the company
<b>Medical Insurance</b>	All employees and dependents are covered under medical insurance. (See table of benefits.)
<b>Life Insurance</b>	Life insurance coverage up to three months' gross salary. (See life insurance policy info.)
<b>Payroll Release Date</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> of the month
<b>Annual Leave</b>	22 working days at all levels
<b>Annual Air Ticket</b>	Employees from Band 1 to Band 3: self only annual ticket. Employees from Band 4 and above eligible for self and family.
<b>Parking Cards</b>	All Band 4 employees are eligible by grade for a company sponsored parking card. For other bands, parking is applicable based on demands of the job role.
<b>Notice Period</b>	Band 1 to Band 3: one month notice. Band 4 and above: three months' notice.
<b>Performance Bonus (Short-Term Incentive Plan and Bonus Plan)</b>	The rewards for contribution policy applies, and all full-time employees as per job roles are eligible for either sales bonus or annual performance bonus and as merit increases based on their performance and contribution.  Bonus budget is discretionary. The bonus is based on gross salary. (See employment contract for long-term incentive eligibility; see bonus rules policy for sales commission policy.)
<b>Noncompete Clause</b>	Included in employment contract.
<b>Probation Period</b>	Six months
<b>Gratuity</b>	As per UAE labor law and paid at the end of service.
<b>Company-Sponsored Office Transportation</b>	Not provided.
<b>Usual Office Hours of Work</b>	Eight hours plus one-hour lunch break.
<b>Flexible Working Arrangements</b>	Applicable as per job role. The region follows two days working from onsite as current hybrid working arrangement.
<b>Recognition Award Program</b>	Employee recognition point perks system and spot bonuses are applicable.

<b>Benefit Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Maternity Leave</b>	Three months maternity break. Combining with annual leave is subject to line-manager approval.
<b>Paternity or adoption leave</b>	One month as per HR policy.
<b>Caregiver Leave</b>	One month as per HR policy.
<b>Sick Leave</b>	As per UAE labor law.
<b>Study Leave</b>	Approved maximum up to five days by line manager on case-to-case basis.
<b>Pilgrimage Leave</b>	As per UAE labor law.
<b>Educational Reimbursement</b>	As per internal evaluation and approval.
<b>Education Allowance</b>	Applicable to high Band 4 (max of AED 40,000 per child).
<b>Housing Rent Advance (HRA)</b>	Eligible employees are entitled to a HRA advance maximum up to 100% of annual HRA entitlement. Deductions are made over a period of 12 months from salary.
<b>Employee Referral Scheme</b>	Applicable as per recruitment policy.
<b>Related-Party Employment</b>	Related parties are allowed to be employed in the same organization upon disclosure provided there is no conflict of interest.
<b>Dress Code</b>	The Dress-for-your-day policy applies.



## Appendix 2. Preliminary List of Identified 40 Interviewees

Sr #	Respondent ID (anonymized)	Job Grade / Band	Date of Joining	Job Function	Employment Tenure	Experience in Health insurance	Single contributor or Team Manager (in current job role)	Countries covered in current job role	Cultural background	Gender
1	R1			Medical		25yrs	Team Manager	Middle East Region	South Asian	M
2	R2			Medical		20yrs	Team Manager	UAE & Oman	South Asian	F
3	R3			Medical		20yrs	Team Manager	UAE & Oman	Arab	F
4	R4			Business Dev		20yrs	Team Manager	UAE	South Asian	F
5	R5			Business Dev		15yrs	Single Contributor	UAE	South Asian	M
6	R6			Underwriting		7yrs	Single Contributor	UAE	South Asian	M
7	R7			Client Management		13yrs	Single Contributor	UAE	Arab	F
8	R8			Marketing		13yrs	Team Manager	UAE	Arab	F
9	R9			HR		15yrs	Team Manager	Middle East Region	European	F
10	R10			Anti-Fraud		10yrs	Single Contributor	UAE	Arab	M
11	R11			Commercial		20yrs	Team Manager	Middle East Region	South Asian	M
12	R12			HR		20yrs	Team Manager	UAE	Arab	F
13	R13			HR		5yrs	Team Manager	UAE	South Asian	F
14	R14			Medical		10yrs	Single Contributor	Middle East Region	Arab	F
15	R15			Finance		6yrs	Single Contributor	UAE	South Asian	F
16	R16			HR		12yrs	Single Contributor	UAE	European	F
17	R17			Underwriting		10yrs	Single Contributor	UAE	South Asian	M
18	R18			Business Dev		18yrs	Single Contributor	Middle East Region	Arab	M
19	R19			Business Dev		20yrs	Single Contributor	Middle East Region	South Asian	F
20	R20			HR		11yrs	Single Contributor	Middle East Region	South Asian	F
21	R21			HR		7yrs	Single Contributor	Middle East Region	Emarati	F
22	R22			HR		20yrs	Single Contributor	Middle East Region	South Asian	F
23	R23			HR		20yrs	Team Manager	Middle East Region	South Asian	F
24	R24			HR		20yrs	Team Manager	Middle East Region	South Asian	F
25	R25			Administration		2yrs	Single Contributor	Middle East Region	Emarati	M
26	R26			Medical		10yrs	Team Manager	Middle East Region	South Asian	F
27	R27			Medical		10yrs	Team Manager	Middle East Region	Arab	M
28	R28			Medical		10yrs	Team Manager	Middle East Region	South Asian	F
29	R29			Data Analytics		15yrs	Team Manager	Middle East Region	European	F
30	R30			Underwriting		10yrs	Team Manager	UAE	South Asian	M
31	R31			Anti-Fraud		5yrs	Single Contributor	UAE	Arab	F
32	R32			Business Dev		20yrs	Team Manager	Middle East Region	South Asian	F
33	R33			Compliance		13yrs	Single Contributor	Middle East Region	European	F
34	R34			Compliance		13yrs	Team Manager	Middle East Region	South Asian	F
35	R35			Underwriting		13yrs	Team Manager	UAE	South Asian	M
36	R36			Commercial		20yrs	Team Manager	Middle East Region	European	M
37	R37			Strategy		1yr	Single Contributor	UAE	Arab	M
38	R38			Strategy		1yr	Single Contributor	UAE	Arab	M
39	R39			Strategy		12yrs	Team Manager	Middle East Region	European	M
40	R40			Medical		18yrs	Single Contributor	UAE	South Asian	F

### **Appendix 3. Consent to Participate—Invitation Template for Preliminary List of Interviewees**

Dear XXXXX,

My name is Kanishka C. Athalage, and I am a student at United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), Abu Dhabi. I am conducting a research study titled “post-pandemic employee perspective study: A qualitative investigation on the impact of hybrid working on employee way of life and the need to reshape the employee value proposition in the health insurance industry of the UAE” as part of my course Doctorate in Business Administration. This study will help me to understand the changes needed to the employment deal—the give and the get due to the introduction of hybrid working models.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time from this study. Enclosed herewith are the interview questions that I will be asking you. The interview will take approximately 60–90 minutes of your time. Prior to commencement of the interview, I will remind you of the purpose of the research study and will seek your permission to voice- or video-record the interview and take down necessary notes. All information will remain confidential and anonymous.

In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact me on 201890067@uaeu.ac.ae or 00971509917827. If you do not have any questions, please respond back to this email on or before xx.02.2022 by completing the section below, and I will schedule an interview slot per your availability.

Thank you,

Digital Signature

Kanishka C. Athalage

---

#### **For Participant to complete:**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the above information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.
3. I understand that my data will be kept confidential and, if published, no data will be identifiable as mine.
4. I agree to take part in this study:

Insert Digital Signature or type in name and date
---

## **Appendix 4. Interview Script for Pilot Study: Semi-Structured Interviews (via Telephone, Video Conferencing or In-Person)**

### **Opening statement**

“I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me. The title of my research is **‘post-pandemic employee perspective study: a qualitative investigation on the impact of hybrid working on employee way of life and the need to reshape the employee value proposition in the health insurance industry of the UAE.’** Our interview will take approximately one hour to 90 minutes, and I will be recording the session to ensure I don’t miss any of your comments. I will also be taking down notes on my observations during the interview.

All responses will remain confidential, and information included in the report will maintain your anonymity. In case you are unable to share any information pertaining to a question, please feel free to let me know.

**Do you have any questions on what I have explained? Are you willing to proceed with the interview?”**

### **✓ Body of the interview**

**General Information:** “Please briefly say a few words about yourself, your job role, and your years of experience in healthcare. Please also state whether you manage a team.”

### **1. Background to hybrid working**

- 1.1 Is your organization currently following hybrid working?
- 1.2 In your opinion, how would you describe the segregation between remote and onsite working?
- 1.3 What are the positive outcomes of this change for yourself?
- 1.4 Did you face any challenges related to work or personal responsibilities since the move to hybrid working?
- 1.5 Do you prefer hybrid working to be a long-term solution and why?

## 2. Employee value proposition

- 2.1 With the introduction of hybrid working, were there any changes to your current pay or employee benefits?
- 2.2 In your opinion, what kind of employee benefits need to be revised specially while working remotely and onsite?
- 2.3 What are your thoughts on employee recognition in hybrid working environment? Any personal experience to share?
- 2.4 How do you find performance management with your direct manager or any subordinates at current times?
- 2.5 Are you able to identify your training needs and development opportunities as before?
- 2.6 What changes did you observe in organization culture or environment, post the implementation of hybrid working solutions?
- 2.7 With all the changes that has happened along with the pandemic, how do you perceive your employer brand?

## 3. Current and future HR readiness for hybrid working

- 3.1 How did HR colleagues prepare you for the concept of Hybrid working?
- 3.2 If you are moving jobs, what kind of information would you expect from the new employer or HR related to hybrid working?
- 3.3 As a new joiner or as existing employee, describe your employment journey or experience in the past one year in one sentence.

### ✓ Closing

**“We have come to the end of the interview. Do you have any questions for me? Thank you for your participation.”**

## Appendix 5. List of Probing Interview Questions for Focus Group Sessions

No.	Questions	Qualitative measurement criteria
1	<p>How would you describe “hybrid working”—what words resonate with the term?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— What do you understand by the term “hybrid work?”</li> <li>— How do you feel about transitioning to hybrid work?</li> <li>— What is “flexibility” in a hybrid setup? Can you share a few examples?</li> <li>— What is your general opinion and what observations can you make around transitioning to hybrid working set-up?</li> </ul>	<p>Understanding the concept of hybrid working from the perspective of employees. Positive outcomes are driving factors and negative outcomes are restraining factors of change.</p>
2	<p>What drove you to work in a hybrid structure/what changes have you encountered?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— What are your personal experiences with the hybrid working set up?</li> <li>— What positive changes have you experienced in your personal life as a result of hybrid working?</li> <li>— What positive changes have you experienced in your work life as a result of hybrid working?</li> <li>— What key advantages have you experienced as a result of transitioning to hybrid working, personally and professionally?</li> <li>— Do you see and feel improvement in the quality of your personal life and work life?</li> <li>— Have there been instances where you felt the organization did not support a healthy work life?</li> </ul>	<p>Employees’ perception and awareness of hybrid working and employee way of life. Positive outcomes are driving factors and negative outcomes are restraining factors of change.</p>
3	<p>In your opinion, what are the negative outcomes of hybrid working?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— What negative effects have you encountered as a result of hybrid work in your personal life?</li> <li>— What negative effects have you encountered as a result of hybrid work in your work life?</li> <li>— What key disadvantages have you experienced as a result of transitioning to hybrid working, personally and professionally?</li> <li>— Do you see challenges or hindrances to the quality of your personal life or work life?</li> <li>— How can the organization better meet the expectations of its employees?</li> </ul>	<p>Employees’ perception and awareness of hybrid working, and employee way of life and negative aspects related to hybrid working</p>

No.	Questions	Qualitative measurement criteria
4	<p>What is your experience of hybrid working in terms of the impact it has had on rewards or recognition?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How do relate to rewards and recognition in your work life? What does rewards and recognition mean to you?</li> <li>– How do you see rewards and recognition being enacted in a hybrid work culture? What are your observations and experiences in this regard?</li> <li>– How does the organization recognize individual and team efforts in a hybrid environment?</li> <li>– Can you provide examples of instances where you felt your efforts were acknowledged?</li> <li>– What are some areas for improvement?</li> <li>– What challenges need attention?</li> </ul>	<p>Employee needs, feelings, experiences, or observations that contribute to strengthening EVP. Positive outcomes are driving factors and negative outcomes are restraining factors of change.</p>
5	<p>What is your experience of hybrid working in terms of the impact it has had on the organizational culture, working styles, leadership behavior, or communication?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How would you describe the organizational culture?</li> <li>– Do you feel the organization is transparent in communicating about policies, goals, and future plans?</li> <li>– With the transition to hybrid work, what have you observed with respect to the team, work, and organization culture?</li> <li>– What are your experiences with working styles within the team and with your direct managers, or with senior leaders?</li> <li>– What experiences or observations can you share with respect to leadership behavior in a hybrid setup?</li> <li>– What experiences or observations can you share regarding overall communication (within teams and departments, and with external stakeholders)?</li> <li>– How do you think challenges can be converted to opportunities, and what improvements can the organization make?</li> </ul>	<p>Employee needs, feelings, experiences, or observations that contribute to the employment deal. Positive outcomes are driving factors and negative outcomes are restraining factors of change.</p>

No.	Questions	Qualitative measurement criteria
6	<p>What is your experience of hybrid working in terms of the impact it has had on career progress, performance management, or learning needs?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– How do you see career progression taking place in a post-Covid, hybrid set up? Can you share some of your experiences and observations in this regard?</li> <li>– What has your performance management experience been in the context of a hybrid set-up? Can you share some of your observations regarding present challenges and areas for improvement?</li> <li>– What has your experience been with regard to learning and development opportunities within the hybrid setup? Can you share some of your observations on present challenges and areas for improvement?</li> <li>– Do you feel the organization is fulfilling its promises regarding training and career growth within the hybrid setup?</li> </ul>	<p>Employee needs, feelings, experiences, or observations that contribute to the employment deal. Positive outcomes are driving factors and negative outcomes are restraining factors of change.</p>
7	<p>Under hybrid working, what kind of new employee benefits would be beneficial to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What financial benefits would be helpful to make the hybrid working setup more attractive for you?</li> <li>– What positive or negative changes have you experienced financially during the transition to hybrid working?</li> <li>– Do you have any recommendations or suggestions that would make employee benefits more attractive within a hybrid setup?</li> </ul>	<p>Employee needs, feelings, experiences, or observations that contribute to the employment deal. Positive outcomes are driving factors and negative outcomes are restraining factors of change.</p>
8	<p>Do you consider hybrid working a must-have option for future career opportunities or ways of working? If so, why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What are your thoughts or feelings on hybrid working becoming a permanent way of working?</li> <li>– If you think hybrid working is a must-have for the future, why do you feel this way?</li> <li>– What factors of hybrid working would influence you to remain with the organization in the long run?</li> </ul>	<p>Employee needs, feelings, experiences, or observations that contribute to the employment deal. Positive outcomes are driving factors and negative outcomes are restraining factors of change.</p>

## Appendix 6. Ethics Review Committee Approval

https://odvcrgs.uaeu.ac.ae/EASP/Submit/ViewSubmittedRequests.aspx

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## UAEU DOCTORATE DISSERTATION NO. 2024:1

Post-pandemic employee perspective study: A qualitative investigation on the impact of hybrid working on employee way of life and the need to reshape the employee value proposition.

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