Interpersonal Trust and Job Satisfaction in a Remote Working Environment

A quantitative study on the role employee relations plays in the Information Technology sector in Ireland.

Research Thesis

Course Title: MA in Human Resource Management

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Abstract

Since the commencement of Covid-19 organisations have implemented remote working environments, in the proceeding years companies have adopted either a fully remote or hybrid approach with their current employees as well as utilising it as a talent attraction benefit. This shift in working practices does raise questions in terms of employee relations and its impact on job satisfaction and trust in a remote working setting. As Ireland's technology sector is seen as the technology capital of Europe, this study seeks to expand on research conducted in the Polish Information Technology sector by asking an important question in relation to the technology professionals in Ireland and their job satisfaction and how much does trust play in the relationship between employee and manager. The research was conducted based on a mono method quantitative design, utilising an online survey as the data collection method. A sample of 123 Information Technology professionals working remotely in Ireland were surveyed to assess their job satisfaction and trust levels. The results revealed a strong correlation between employee relations and interpersonal trust in managers and colleagues which then has a relationship on employees job satisfaction. The results also reflect a similar study completed in Poland and the research proposes that Human Resources in organisations in the technology sector should firstly inform and partner with senior management. Human Resource personnels should then coordinate their own research by conducting a pulse survey to understand their employees' job satisfaction levels and enact policies and procedures that have been suggested in this research to allow an organisations' human capital to achieve high performance which in turn can allow the organisation to become competitive.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

One of the most significant shifts in working practices since the Covid-19 pandemic is the introduction of more flexible forms of working such as hybrid and remote working (RW) environments. Since 2021 and the easing of government restrictions (O'Loughlin, 2021), four out of ten workers have continued to work remotely while others have a more blended, hybrid working model (Central Statistics Office, 2022a).

Grant, Wallace and Spurgeon (2013) defines RW as working from a different location outside of an office at any time while Lukic and Vračar (2018) adds that it allows employees to interact with others in different geographical locations through technological advancements. CIPD (2022) conducted a survey on organisations specifically in Ireland and found that 56% of the respondents had remote/hybrid options implemented in their organisation and that 36% expect employees to work three days onsite with 36% expecting two days onsite. Only 4% of organisations expect their employees to work four days onsite. This gives a clear indication that remote and hybrid working is set to stay. With this new working environment this brings with it challenges in terms of employee engagement (EE) and an employee's job satisfaction (JS).

1.2 Identified Problem

A study from China indicates how the well-being and mental health of employees is important in their JS (Cao *et al.*, 2022). These RW settings involve increased technological use and as Ter Hoeven, van Zonnen and Fonner (2016) discovered that email, video conferencing and instant messaging in jobs that require intensive attention are related to increase stress which can affect employee well-being. As methods of communication change from traditional face-to-face interactions in the office environment it is important to note the positive aspects this can have on Employee Relations (ER). The importance of good ER practices is important to mitigate against negative employee well-being. ER relations has positive associations with employers and employees (Grant *et al.*, 2013). Keeping employees engaged in a virtual environment is extremely difficult and there is importance for efficient support and trust from managers in this environment to keep employees performing in their positions (Anand and Acharya, 2021). As such there is room for investigation of ER in a RW environment between managers and employees. The timing of this research will be important as it adds to the

knowledge organisations can use to make better decisions in terms of their ER strategies in a RW environment.

1.3 Proposed Research

The proposed research is looking to understand whether employee relations (ER) the independent variable has a positive effect on the dependent variable job satisfaction (JS) in a remote work (RW) setting. It will also look to investigate the thoughts on participants on Interpersonal Trust (IPT) with their colleagues and managers and the important aspect it plays in a RW environment. With the research conducted it will identify employees JS and levels of trust with their managers and as such help in identifying if there are issues with these relationships and if so, what can be accomplished by Human Resources (HR) to address any issues.

As this is a relatively new phenomenon in the industry research is only starting to become available. As such there has been no specific research on JS, IPT and ER in the technology sector in Ireland.

The proposed research seeks to expand on the work by Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) in Poland by looking at technology professionals in Ireland and their JS and how much does IPT play in the relationship between employee and manager. The research seeks to answer whether ER has a positive effect on JS in a RW environment. Four hypotheses will also be established to identify how trust and managers impact an employee's relationship in a RW environment. The study utilises quantitative primary research and data collection will be conducted via the use of an online survey across 146 companies in the Information Technology field in Ireland. The results and subsequent discussion will look to identify positive techniques from the literature that can be utilised by organisations in this area. It will also look to identify positive techniques from the literature that can be utilised by organisations in this area.

1.4 Study Outline

Chapter 1 – Introduction: Introduces the study and the background to the research is presented. It outlines the purpose and significance of the research and gives an overview of the research design and methodology.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review: A review and synthesis of the literature currently available. The areas of ER, EE, RW, JS and IPT are investigated and critically assessed. From the research an identified area of further investigation is outlined and empirical research in this area is critically reviewed.

Chapter 3 – Research Question: A research question and the authors thoughts are stated, this includes one hypothesis and four sub hypotheses.

Chapter 4 – Methodology: Detailing the methodology, data collection, ethical considerations and scales used in the quantitative approach of this research.

Chapter 5 – Findings and Analysis: The data collected is investigated and results and postulations of the data are considered.

Chapter 6 – Discussion: This is a summary review of the findings of the study in relation to the research questions. This chapter also mentions the limitations of the study and future research areas.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion and Recommendations: Final declarations are offered for the research question and sub objectives. The research concludes with recommendations for organisations and HR departments to operate a successful remote working environment in the context of their employees JS.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review is broken into ten sections covering Competitive Advantage, Employee Relations (ER), Job Satisfaction (JS), Trust as well as other areas that have an effect on these. The literature review has been created utilising a number of secondary research. The conclusion provides a summary of the chapter and details the research gap that the study will investigate.

2.2 Competitive Advantage as a Business Strategy

Companies are looking for a competitive advantage all the time and as such the business strategy and Human Resource (HR) policies are evidently linked. Porter (1985) who been an advocate for competitive advantage identified two main strategies, cost leadership and differentiation.

Cost leadership implies that a company position their product as a general "low cost" product with no additions or uniqueness. This type of product also requires the company to have tight management control with very low overheads to maintain competitive advantage next to other competitors offering a high standard product (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2017).

Differentiation strategy requires that the organisations product is fundamentally different in one or multiple aspects to their competitors. This may be in relation to customer service, the quality of the product or marketing the organization takes. This differentiation requires a higher premium compared to the cost leadership strategy (Knight *et al.*, 2020). Porter's work although criticised gives a basic view of the strategic landscape that companies can operate in. One aspect that permeates each strategy is the employee policy. In the differentiation strategy the culture of innovation and development should be championed and in cost leadership there is necessity for practicality, self-discipline and moderation (Knight *et al.*, 2020). The culture therefore underpins the employees recruited and the characteristics they need to achieve the competitive advantage the organisation is seeking.

Retaining employees in an organisation especially in emerging markets and markets where this is a shortage of talent allows for the development of individuals within that organisation which can help the organisation maintain a competitive advantage and limit the high costs involved in replacing that talent (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2017). In order to retain employees especially in the Information Technology (IT) sector it is important to utilise effective compensation, work-life balance and RW policies (Kumar and Jayesh, 2022). The organisations approach to how they do business has shaped employee policy

and engagement and since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic elements of RW outside of the traditional work environment have manifested causing a different approach to EE. The secondary research studied offers a view of both landscapes pre and post Covid-19 in relation to EE particularly Interpersonal Trust and JS in a remote working environment. The conclusion provides a general summary and analysis to end the chapter.

2.3 Employee Relations and Human Resource Management

Human Resource Management (HRM) aims to improve the organisations competitive effectiveness through its people while also building relationships with employees through trust, openness, and role gratification (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). For HRM to achieve this it operates employee policies which demonstrate the standards that are expected of employees and the employee can understand the standards, ethics, and culture of the company. HRM achieves this through employee relations (ER), which is how management and employees work together and they do this through employee engagement (EE). EE focuses on the motivation and commitment of employees (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020) usually enacted through policies and management engagement with the employees. Employee policies since the late 1980's have generally concentrated on Talent Management. Michaels *et al.* (2001) created three categories for talent. Employees in category 'A' are the star performers in the organisation and investing in developing them is paramount (Michaels *et al.,* 2001). Category 'B' are the foundation of the company and keep process' moving while also enabling Category A employees to achieve their ambitions (Michaels *et al.,* 2001). Category 'C' are defined as low performing employees who require performance improvement through intervention or development in order to become category 'A' of 'B' performers in the future (Michaels *et al.,* 2001). Zuboff (1998) gives a different view which focuses on the value of an employee. Their skills on the external market might be low but their value to the organisation is high (Zuboff, 1998). Keeping employees engaged is key to an organisation's success. Both views show the necessity of the employee in the organisation and how an employee can be developed or adapted to the requirements the organisation has.

2.4 Employee Engagement:

Employee Engagement (EE) has a number of dimensions when viewed from either the organisations or employees perspective. Alfes *et al.* (2010) finds employees function in three dimensions of EE, intellectual, social, and affective. Alfes *et al.* (2010) adds that when workers are engrossed in their work and are looking to be more productive in their contribution, they are in intellectual engagement.

When employees are feeling positive about their contributions in a working setting, they are in affective engagement (Alfes *et al.,* 2010). The relationships that employees have with co-workers and their ability to speak to other co-workers on improving and changing how they operate is in the social engagement dimension (Alfes *et al.,* 2010). Further research by Gourlay *et al.* (2012) distinguished two forms of engagement, emotional and transactional. Employees can be motivated by the enjoyment of their role, the values of a company, the working relationships with colleagues. This will then exhibit an emotional engagement (Gourlay *et al.,* 2012). Transactional engagement is when an employee works in a role for monetary rewards with the consequences being if they do not perform, they may be let go from a role or do not receive promotions in the future to better facilitate their current or future standard of living demands (Gourlay *et al.,* 2012). This dichotomy between the emotional and transactional is important to note as it has different needs to the employees who fall in each part. From the research of Alfes *et al.* (2010) and Gourlay *et al.* (2012) it should be considered that there are a number of ways employees can be engaged in and between organisations.

Purcell (2014) disagrees with the notion of EE with the view it gives a distorted view of a workers experience in their employment. Truss (2014) also adds that EE is only a construct by an organisation to manage their employees and not the psychological state the employee experiences while performing their job responsibilities. With a lens on EE and although there are a number of aspects to it evidently it is important to say that each employee is different, where one is motivated monetarily another can be motivated by a fulfilling role and job responsibility. An organisation having an awareness of EE is a good first step regardless.

2.4.1 Types of Engagement

In understanding the concept of engagement, Rothbard (2001) explains that engagement in employees covers two parts: attention and absorption. Attention refers to the cognitive availability and the amount of time committed to the persons role, while absorption refers to being totally engaged and focussed on that role.

Figure 2.1 Hierarchy of the types of work-related employee engagement (Source: Wilkinson *et al.*, 2017, p.366)

Most engagement types are only focussed on an employee's engagement with their job and organisation, but employees can also be engaged with their manager, their team, and their profession. Guest (2014) stated that there is a delineation of employee and organisation engagement where EE is seen as related to well-being, employee specific issues and organisational engagement which is linked to the overall organisation performance. Budriene and Diskiene (2020) also added that to ensure full organisational engagement all stakeholders should be involved such as leaders, employees, and customers. The research shows there are differences between employee and organisational engagement, but one can also affect the other. Wilkinson *et al.* (2017, p. 366) avowed that employees can be engaged with their co-workers but also not be happy about the company they are working for. Wilkinson *et al.* (2017, p.366) created a hierarchy of engagement to show that one level of engagement can affect another (see Figure 2.1) with work engagement at the foundation level and profession engagement at the top.

Understanding the more detailed hierarchy can add a triage to issues that may show up at the work and team engagement levels on any survey carried out. Any effect on these levels can have a ripple effect on the levels above. Although Guest (2014) was generally sceptical of EE, he argues that having a separation of employee and organisational engagement allows for more specific organisational and EE policies to be developed.

2.4.2 Benefits of Employee Engagement

From a behavioural standpoint engaged employees operate with more intensity, work longer hours, and focus on the organisational goals than less engaged workers (MacCormick *et al.*, 2012). With the

world becoming more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) it is even more important for an organisation to understand its effectiveness and, how it can be competitive in this environment and perform to its optimal. Organisations used to view the customers and shareholders as the most important part of the business in order to be successful but there has been a recognition that the employees of the company determine the customers experience (Peters, 2019). With every employee contributing to the product in some way either developing the product, recruiting the employees, the maintenance of an office etc., they all impact on the product or the experience of the customer in some way (Peters, 2019). The experience of employees therefore is an important topic for leadership in organisations. Yoopetch *et al.* (2021) carried out a study on employee learning and employee performance on 608 employees in the service industry, which evidenced that employee learning, knowledge and JS correlated with better employee performance. Organisations view EE as a way to improve their own competitiveness and performance in the market. Having engaged employees in an organisation can be perceived as a good issue for organisations and their employees. High levels of engagement also reduces burnout and increases retention in employees (Santhanam and Srinivas, 2020).

2.4.3 Employees Behaviour - Engaged and Disengaged

Engaged employees are viewed as been more optimistic, enthusiastic in relation to their role, lower absenteeism, decreased attrition and even taking on extra responsibilities for the benefit of the organisations success (Jose and Mampilly, 2021). Signs of high engagement are important to note including the extent employees commit to achieving results, their emotional engagement that what they are doing matters. Employees taking initiative also demonstrates high engagement as well as efforts to be more innovative in their role or to support colleagues in their endeavours as well.

Identifying engaged behaviours is important for any organisation but critically identifying the disengaged behaviours is equally if not more important. Poor EE can manifest itself in a lack of employee motivation and enthusiasm in their role or the organisations ambitions. High absenteeism and increased turnover especially over a short period of time is a sign of low engagement (Reissová and Papay, 2021). Other behaviours to be aware of include poor customer engagement and resistance to change. Engaged employees are more likely to consider and adapt new ideas whereas disengaged employees are resistant to new processes or workforce change (Peters, 2019). Although these may be behaviours, they may be caused by other symptoms outside of the working environment but having a number of these behaviours present in an organisation is an indication that there may be an issue that needs to be dealt with. The consequences of not treating or even preventing these behaviours

can ultimately cost an organisation from a competitive and performance standpoint especially in the VUCA world.

2.4.4 Measuring the Impact of Employee Engagement

The most common measurement for employee engagement (EE) is the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). It has 17 items to identify an employee's vigour, cynicism, and efficacy in their role (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2022). The issue with this scale is it only focussed on the specific role and not the employees thoughts on the organisation. Measuring of organisation engagement only started with Saks (2006) which focussed on questions on an employee's vigor, how dedicated an employee feels working for an organisation and the employees ability to absorb into their working role. The Gallup organisation has also been measuring EE worldwide and from their 12-item questionnaire (the Q12) they can benchmark results against other organisations. More recently organisations have utilised third party companies that specialise in EE such as Great Pace to Work, Gartner, Korn Ferry Group or Willis Towers Watson to perform these surveys (Peters, 2019). These surveys are referred to as 'Pulse Surveys' within organisations and are carried out biannually. The results of the survey are communicated to management and actions are agreed upon to be delivered before the next survey is initiated in order to track progress. For any organisation measuring EE this is a great way to identify what they are good at and what they need to improve to keep their competitive advantage.

2.5 Factors Affecting Employee Engagement

With the importance of EE identified it is necessary to understand the drivers of EE. Chaudhary *et al.* (2011) mentions the precursors of EE require more immediate action by organisations, as such it is important for an organisation to be aware of the factors that can affect EE.

2.5.1 Well-being:

A person's well-being can be seen through many lenses, it is a multidimensional construct impacting the social, physical, and mental elements of a person (Grant *et al.*, 2007). Kowalski and Loretto (2017) consider that to understand a person's well-being you need to be aware of the different working environments and sectors as well as professions and the level the job is in an organisation. Grant *et al.* (2007) understood employee well-being as an employee's overall quality of their experience at work. The psychological contract which is the implicit relationship between employee and

organisation concerning the treatment of fairness, equity and security of employment is also noteworthy in employee well-being. Pattanayak (2021) articulates that when the psychological contract is fulfilled, employees have stronger work satisfaction and trust in the organisation which increases their intent to stay in their job. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) notes a number of factors that affect wellbeing including the employees relationships with managers and colleagues, work-life balance, financial wellbeing, stress, the working environment, and job design. Employers have a duty of care and HRM has recently focussed on employee well-being by looking at three aspects of the employee, happiness, health and social (Salas *et al.*, 2021). Happiness concentrates on an employee's commitment to an organisation as well as their JS. Health focuses on physical and mental health and social considers how an employee engages with their coworkers and superiors and how they view trust and fairness (Salas *et al.*, 2021). Understanding the factors that affect well-being and the lens to identify potential remedies can promote employee well-being.

2.5.2 Work-life Balance:

An area that has gained further attention is work-life balance. Voydanoff (2004) describes work-life balance as managing to satisfy work and family demands so as the person involved shows effective involvement in both areas. Having time for family and hobbies coupled with work commitments are important to employees worldwide. Hybrid working and flexible working hours have been offered by some organisations to cater for work-life balance. A flexible work arrangement (FWA) is a type of working practice implemented by an employer that allows the employee to decide when and/or where to work outside of general working practices which have a stipulated work location and general times to start and finish work (Kossek and Kelliher, 2023). Companies like IBM and Dell UK have brought in FWA policies into their organisation in an effort to improve employees work-life balance and JS (Azar *et al.*, 2018). Covid-19 caused work-life balance and RW to come together very quickly. A study of note by Weerarathna *et al.* (2022) on employee well-being in a work from home environment found that since the Covid-19 pandemic the lines between work, and life outside of work have blended, the study on software engineers noted that support and trust extended by supervisors and a distraction free work environment can help mitigate negative feelings of work-life imbalance.

2.5.3 Line Management:

As organisations look to measure EE, the types of questions asked to the employee such as how effective the organisation communication is, how employees view management, how satisfied an

employee is, are directly related to the line managers. How a manager deals with conflict or driving teamwork and performance can affect these types of questions which can impact an organisation positively or negatively on how an employee views their managers and the leadership team in an organisation (Whiting and Martin, 2020). Leadership and management is an important factor in EE. Mazzetti and Schaufeli (2022) found that appropriate training of leaders to inspire and connect their subordinates can improve the motivation of employees and their performance to achieve organisation goals.

2.5.4 Job Satisfaction:

JS is one of the most important areas tackled by research in HR (Wnuk, 2017). Spector (2022) defines JS as how people feel about their jobs, to the extent that they are satisfied or dissatisfied with their jobs. JS and satisfaction outside of a job are viewed as two unique constructs that describe work-life balance (Casper *et al.*, 2018).

JS has been seen through two divergent approaches: Global and Facet Satisfaction. Global satisfaction which is the affective reaction to an employee's role and facet satisfaction to the particulars of the role such as positive or negative attitudes of the employee to specific parts of their role, their team, their manager or the renumeration they receive etc (Shuck *et al.*, 2021). As noted, there are many factors and variables involved in JS. Wnuk (2017) postulates further on this with the ease of breaking the links with an organisation if there is a change of location as an employee will consider the community they are working in and the environment their work takes place in. The facet aspect of satisfaction therefore limits an employee's intentions to move from a job as Tanova and Holtman (2008) also adds that a positive work and community environment can have a positive response on JS. For IT professionals JS has been identified as an important driver for IT professionals in a severe work pressure environment (Diedericks and Rothmann, 2014). The outcomes to JS can include organisational commitment, role performance and lower turnover intention (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2020). Luthans (2021) adds that the work a person does, renumeration, opportunities for promotion, the supervision they receive from supervisors and working with fellow co-workers are factors which can affect JS. Fettouh (2022) adds that JS was intrinsically linked to organisational loyalty especially on the positive effect of the employees and their superiors.

2.6 Post Pandemic Employee Engagement

As noted, EE in the post pandemic era has become increasingly important in the workforce. RW challenges since the onset of the pandemic have made it difficult for employees to work collaboratively (Moretti *et al.*, 2022). A global workforce study carried out by Hayes *et al.* (2022) across 27,193 participants found that global engagement and workplace resilience remains low at 16% compared to their 2020 study, which reported 15% (Hayes *et al.*, 2020) Only 15.5% of those surveyed are fully engaged (Hayes *et al.,* 2022). Their results also found that there was no correlation between a country's level of impact of Covid-19 and workplace resilience (Hayes *et al.,* 2020). On the macro level there was a difference with the results exhibiting much higher levels of workplace resilience when an individual has a high level of personal experience with Covid-19 (Hayes *et al.,* 2020). The amount of change also varied by industry with Technology, Real Estate and Construction and related trade sectors reporting the most changes (Hayes *et al.,* 2022). The key result which used the data from the United States of America (USA) only and was not reported on in their most recent research was that individuals who indicated they loved their work demonstrated much higher levels of workplace resilience than those who did not (Hayes *et al.,* 2020). This is only one data set and as such cannot be inferred as a global trait, it would be optimal for more concrete data to be presented from other countries to compare to the USA dataset, which calls for this research to fill this literature gap. The virtual employee only lacks the physical office presence, but a study carried out by Eckhardt *et al.* (2019) finds that some employers do not understand the subtle differences of remote and office-based employees and the employees' mental, technological, and social requirements needed to be accounted for when they are working in a virtual setting. The lack of resources to support remote working is further noted. Research on organisations middle management who would generally be the conduit between senior management and the employee base as Spagnoli *et al.* (2021) finds that middle managers who operate between senior management and the employee level in a virtual environment struggle without organisational resources especially when working remotely was brought on abruptly as was the case during the pandemic.

2.7 Job Satisfaction in Remote Working

In the post Covid era RW is an increasing part in most employees working either fully remote or a hybrid blend. As we have identified the importance of JS in EE earlier it is evident to look at it through a RW environment. The positive influence on remote workers JS can be attributed to work-life balance and job effectiveness (Gashi *et al.,* 2022). Contrary to this there are similar studies that have shown that there are negative effects with RW including social isolation (Ruiller *et al.,* 2019), professional

isolation (Franken *et al.,* 2021), increase in technostress (Singh, *et al.*, 2022), financial impact of working remotely (Battisti *et al.*, 2022) an increase in family conflicts (Tsen *et al.,* 2021) and work-life balance being negatively affected (Fuller and Hirsh, 2019). As noted, Ter Hoeven *et al.* (2016) found that email, video conferencing and instant messaging in jobs that require intensive attention are related to increased stress. From a business benefit RW is associated with higher organisational commitment and JS but can come at the cost of increased workload and an inability to 'switch off' (Felstead and Henseke, 2017).

Having employees demonstrating low JS shows that there are problems with the organisation structure or management in the organisation. There is an ethical perspective for an employer to increase JS for their employees based on the psychological contract and mental health benefits so supporting JS is an important practice in ER and HRM.

2.8 Job Satisfaction Outcomes

JS ideally should be seen as a positive outcome in a working environment. But what are the outcomes of high or low JS in an organisation. Looking at each attribute can give an indication of the JS.

2.8.1 Satisfaction and Motivation

Having companies understand the motivations of employees can ensure they achieve their targets (Amos, 2004). A study on motivation without the use of monetary motivation was conducted on physicians by Postolov and Postolov (2021). Their findings noted that employees are motivated in different ways, some can be motivated with promotions while others can be motivated better with flexibility and training in their roles (Postolov and Postolov, 2021). A different study in the health sector this time looking at 74 hospital employees in Greece pinpointed positive relationships between workers and work recognition by senior management as powerful motivators for JS and ultimately job performance (Kitsios and Kamariotou, 2021). Bakker (2022) theorized that employees performance can differ on certain days they are more engaged. The old adage goes that a happy worker is a more productive worker. A study of 280 female employees in the banking sector found that there is a positive impact of JS and motivation on their performance (Raju and Shruthi, 2022). Having high JS does influence motivation and accordingly performance in the role.

2.8.2 Satisfaction and Burnout

Burnout can be viewed as acute fatigue in a role after a hard day's work which can be relieved through a short rest period or can be a more severe form of exhaustion over a longer period of time in a role which can result in mental distancing and diminished mood due to elevated job demands that is only negated with a longer rest period (Bakker and de Vries, 2021). Burnout can be caused by increased job pressures, hinderance on the job and a lack of support and training. Employees experiencing burnout are not able to provide the impactful contributions in their role (Schaufeli, Leiter and Maslach, 2009). As such individuals experiencing burnout can suffer symptoms such as fatigue and stress. Recent studies have also showed that depression, anxiety, and alcohol dependence can also occur (Frone, 2016) and the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has also brought high levels of work stress and burnout to employees particularly in hospital settings (Beiter *et al.*, 2022). A study by Matthews and Rutherford (2021) observed in relation to salespeople that skill discretion and emotional exhaustion can cause burnout which can lead to a decrease in JS and intentions to leave a role. Looking from a RW perspective a study by Bakarich *et al.* (2022) on 159 public accountants found burnout had increased and also that accountants viewed as senior reported higher intentions to leave. This study also found the gender differences with the onset of RW with males experiencing high volumes of work and reification, while females noted potential attrition intentions and emotional fatigue (Bakarich, *et al.,* 2022). The same research also reported that the impact of large expectations and an intense role can cause high demands on JS and can result in burnout (Bakarich, *et al.,* 2022). Burnout can bring on attrition with empirical evidence showing that organisational commitment can reduce employees intentions to leave an organisation (Bakarich, *et al.,* 2022). Job autonomy and motivating responsibilities in an employees work (Galletta, Portoghese and Battistelli, 2011; Tsen *et al.,* 2021) can help reduce employee burnout.

2.8.3 Satisfaction and Leadership

Leaders are effective when they can motivate and supervise subordinates and enable them to achieve specific tasks (Bennett, 2020). Measures of effective and successful leadership include establishing performance and reward standards and creating effective communication channels among teams and employees (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). In relation to the supervision aspect a study carried out by Hulme and Wood (2021) on early career support in the teaching profession found that of the 382 teachers surveyed that having access to a mentor was not enough to lower the attrition rates for teachers in their first year but the mentors' individual ability to support and develop them was more important in reducing attrition rates within the first year of teaching. There is, of course, a delicate act

of balancing supervision and self-efficacy. Ensuring an employee's ability to reach their own potential and not managing them too much that they lose satisfaction in their role. Self-efficacy in employment brings motivation to the person and increases their contribution in their work (Liu and Huang, 2019). Occupational self-efficacy also increases JS with employees gaining confidence in completing their work (Rhew *et al.* 2018; Lestari, 2022). A study on abusive supervision on subordinates' JS and their mental wellbeing found that of the 235 employees surveyed in the hospitality industry abusive supervision undermines an employee's JS (Wang *et al.* 2022). These studies show the dichotomy of good leadership and self-efficacy and the negative aspects of abusive supervision, aspects which should be noted by organisations.

2.9 Trust

Trust is a psychological state with the objective to accept vulnerability built on expected positive intentions or behaviours of someone else (Schoorman *et al.*, 1997; Rousseau *et al.,* 1998).

In organisations, there are two types of identified trust, interorganisational trust and interpersonal trust (IPT). Interorganisational trust where employees of one company would trust or distrust the employees of another company, which differs from IPT where a person trusts or does not trust another person (Vanneste, 2014; Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone, 1998). Brandl (2021) found that mutual trust from the employee and management sides can enhance performance and it should be considered in the organizational structure. Brown *et al.* (2015) also adds to these findings that there is a positive relationship between employee trust and an organisation's performance. The presence of mutual trust more so than unilateral trust can create effective communication channels, discussion of ideas, knowledge sharing and agreements on responsibilities (Brandl, 2021). With IPT this can allow knowledge sharing to occur and thus improving other team members contribution and impacting on the global and facet satisfaction of an employee. Having a senior member of the team share information with another team member can be seen as weakening their position of power in the group but having strong trust levels allows employees to engage in knowledge sharing exercises (Vera-Muñoz *et al.,* 2006). Trust in an organisation can also bring in characteristics such as entrepreneurship and innovation into the organisation (Hughes *et al.,* 2018). Another benefit is on task conflict where groups that experience task conflict tend to make better decisions (Simons and Peterson, 2000). Simons and Peterson (2000) researched 70 senior management teams and found that trust moderates task conflict which is linked with successful decisions as opposed to relationship conflict which is associated more with personal acrimonies and can result in ineffective decisions. Low trust in an organisation can also be brought on by outsourcing of jobs to third parties which can lead to low trust

with employees who worry about the security of their own position (Wilkinson *et al.,* 2017). Having a culture of trust can ensure the employee feels the employers' future actions will be beneficial to their or own interests and as such trust should be regarded as a social capital by an organisation (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). Incorporating a culture of trust is deemed important from research but how does IPT affect an organisation?

2.9.1 Interpersonal Trust

Interpersonal Trust (IPT) has had positive effects in many organisations with better communication, information sharing and enhanced employee performance (Gillespie and Mann, 2004). A specific study by Ndlovu *et al.* (2022) on trust between managers and line workers in the financial services sector in South Africa found that communication between both managers and line workers positively affected employee trust which caused longer term organisational commitment. IPT can of course develop by itself but with trust-based HR practices implemented into an organisation, employees are more attached to the company (Taborosi *et al.,* 2020). IPT takes time to develop through regular interactions with team members (Usman *et al.*, 2022). From this research it is important to note that IPT does not occur overnight. Having HR policies in place can of course help with identifying IPT through training, knowledge sharing practices and performance reviews. With IPT, trust is exhibited through confiding one's thoughts and feelings, seeking help or challenging issues despite the risk of rejection or disloyalty by the other individual (Qiu *et al.*, 2022). Having managers bring an open communication environment to their teams can help with establishing IPT knowledge sharing and overcoming conflict.

2.9.2 Interpersonal Trust and Remote Working

A thought-provoking study on IPT and team effectiveness by Neelam *et al.* (2016) looked at manufacturing and IT sectors. A sample of 528 respondents with 256 in manufacturing and 263 in the IT sector was collected. The results found that IPT was lower in the IT sector than in manufacturing (Neelam *et al.*, 2016). These researchers postulate that this is down to the virtual working nature of these teams and the stronger need for managers to develop team working without face-to-face interactions (Neelam *et al.*, 2016). Lower levels of IPT have also been found by Kirkman *et al.* (2002) on their examination of the company Sabre, where it was observed that the selection of leaders of virtual teams is more challenging as they need the balance of technical skills and interpersonal abilities. This brings the need of appropriate identification leaders and correct training for them. In terms of working with peers, Jaakson *et al.* (2018) carried out a study on 71 virtual student teams and

attests that trust had a small mediating affect between group performance. The limitation with this study is that it was carried out in an academic environment unlike a professional working setting with compensation and career performance as different underlying variables, but the research did cover a number of countries which highlights that trust in teams is not purely confined to one particular country or area. One key study by Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) looked at 220 IT professionals in Poland and found ER contributed to JS and that trust is a principal factor in these relationships including with managers. This key study although isolated in Poland and in the IT sector gives a grounding in the area and also leaves the area open to further exploration. The research indicates that trust is an important aspect in teams but also the need for skilled managers to foster IPT and incorporate strong communication between themselves and between team members especially in a RW environment.

2.10 Research Gap and Conclusion

After reviewing the extant literature, EE therefore can be viewed as an emotional connection between the employee and the organisation which is different to JS which is a more rational connection. EE has come to the fore for organisations as a happy employee is a productive employee and research has shown this correlates to higher performance for an organisation. With RW having been in place in some shape or form since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a different facade of worker now employed in an organisation. The virtual employee only lacks the physical office presence, but a study carried out by Eckhardt *et al.* (2019) finds that some employers do not understand the subtle differences of remote and office-based employees and the employees' mental, technological and social requirements needed to be accounted for when they are working in a virtual setting.

We are now in a new era of working and there is an influx of new research in the EE area as such, hence the healthy number of studies from the last three years in this research. One paper mentioned is Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) study of IT professionals in Poland which identified two factors of research. Firstly, the relationship between the employees and their role in the organisation and secondly the factors which contribute to mental well-being. The results highlighted the importance of IPT and mental well-being in the dynamic group processes and the importance of ER in promoting JS. This study tackles the importance of ER and EE but it is confined to Poland only as mentioned in the limitations of their study. As the IT sector accounts for 9.8% of the working population in Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2022b) with 21.3% of corporation tax coming from this area and foreign firms making up to 74% of the wage bill (Collins, 2023), focussing a study on IT professionals in Ireland can bring more data to this area and would be a benefit to HR professionals

working in this important sector and to the Irish economy. Widening the research to another country can also help understand if the results from the Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) study are similar or different from the proposed study. Ireland also has a different culture and norms to Poland and Ireland is also seen as the tech capital of Europe as it is home to the largest number of IT companies per capita in Europe (Shehadi, 2020). As such the results of this research will be very interesting in a country with a strong IT community for its size and the importance of identifying if there is an immediate need for competent ER and IPT for the Irish IT employee in a RW setting.

Chapter 3 – Research Question

3.1 Introduction

As the previous chapter highlighted the shift of employee relations remote working policies since the Covid-19 pandemic and the benefits of having the right employee relations policies in this new working environment, organisations can help retain talent and grow competitive advantage. This study is looking to explore the relationship between employee relations and interpersonal trust between colleagues and managers and the role interpersonal trust has between colleagues and managers in terms of job satisfaction specifically in Information Technology (IT) organisations in Ireland.

3.2 Research Objectives

The main purpose of this paper will aim to understand whether ER influences employees JS while in a RW environment. Previous research from Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) examined these elements, but one of the limitations of that study was that it was only conducted in the IT sector in Poland. To help validate their results future research was recommended to be conducted in other countries. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, the focus will be on the Irish IT sector.

3.3 Research Question and Objectives

Research Question: Does employee relations have a positive effect on job satisfaction through interpersonal trust in a remote working environment?

This study aims to understand whether employee relations techniques can be utilised in a remote work setting to increase job satisfaction amongst workers. With any successful strategy it is essential to understand if there are perceived issues in an organisation. This study proposes to build on the research by Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) and sample IT professionals in Ireland on their thoughts in this regard.

Additionally, this study will investigate the impact interpersonal trust has on employee relations and job satisfaction with remote workers in the IT sector in Ireland. The literature suggests that with remote working challenges since the onset of the pandemic it has been difficult for employees to work collaboratively (Moretti *et al.*, 2022) which can impact on interpersonal trust between colleagues and managers. Gillespie and Mann (2004) note the positive effects interpersonal trust can have in terms of increased communication and job performance. This study will look at the participants opinions to

interpersonal trust with their colleagues and their opinions of interpersonal trust with their managers in relation to their job satisfaction.

A conceptual model is presented (see Figure 3.1) to conceptualise how the research question will be answered with the hypotheses.
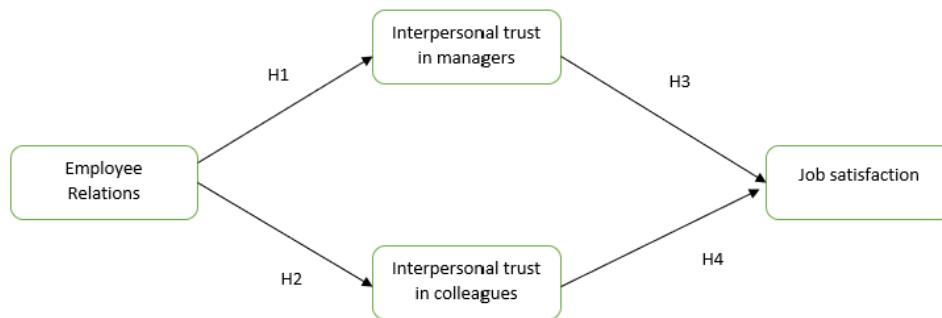
Figure 3.1: Conceptual Framework

H1 - There is a relationship between employee relations and interpersonal trust in managers. This hypothesis notes the importance of employee relations and interpersonal trust in managers in terms of employee engagement and commitment to the organisation.

H2 - There is a relationship between employee relations and interpersonal trust in colleagues. This hypothesis looks to determine that employee relations between colleagues is linked with interpersonal trust and thus promotes collaboration and communication which is important in a healthy working environment.

H3 - There is a relationship between interpersonal trust in managers and job satisfaction. This hypothesis comes from the secondary research noting the positive effects interpersonal trust with managers can have in terms of asking for help or challenging issues without the fear of repercussions which promotes positive job satisfaction.

H4 - There is a relationship between interpersonal trust in colleagues and job satisfaction. This hypothesis comes from the secondary research noting the positive effects interpersonal trust with colleagues can have in terms of increased communication and job performance which encourages positive job satisfaction.

Chapter 4 – Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The Methodology chapter defines the theory and the methods utilised in this research study. It stipulates the research philosophy, the research approach, how the research is designed, the participant sample, how the data was collected and analysed, and the ethical issues associated with the study.

4.2 Research Philosophy

There are a number of research philosophies that exist, and it is important to understand which philosophy is appropriate for each form of research. Saunders *et al.* (2009) created a framework called the 'Research Onion' (Figure 4.1).
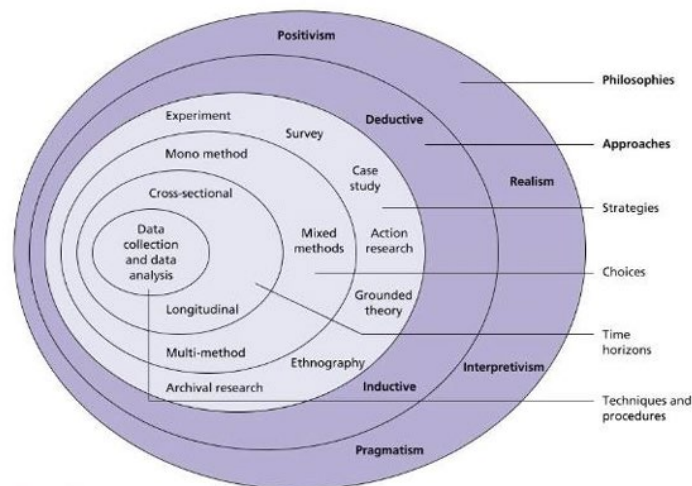
Figure 4.1: Research Onion (Source: Saunders *et al.*, 2009)

The first layer of the 'onion' is philosophies. It is important for a researcher to understand the research philosophy before proceeding to the next layers of strategies, choices and procedures. Research philosophy is an indication of the researchers view of the world and the selected philosophy will depend on how the researcher views knowledge and the process to which knowledge is developed (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). There are two research philosophies: epistemology and ontology (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

Ontology is associated with assumptions of reality and how one sees the world and what one decides to research (Saunders *et al*., 2009). With epistemology which looks at how knowledge is created, obtained and developed (Horn, 2012) facts are either true or false from data. Epistemology has a number of approaches including positivism, interpretivism, realism and pragmatism (Walle, 2015). Placing trust in the knowledge that can be observed and validated from data is the positivism approach (Walle, 2015). Critical Realism focuses on understanding what we can perceive and experience in terms of how certain configurations can have an effect on visible situations (Saunders *et al*., 2009). Interpretivism stands on the assumption that humans are different to physical experiences because they can construct meanings and as such they need to be studied differently as diverse people from unalike aspects can experience things in divergent ways and as such are critical of the positivism approach to a universal law for everyone (Saunders *et al*., 2009). Finally, pragmatism asserts that ideas are only relevant where they support action, as such pragmatism research starts with a problem and it is supportive that different types of knowledge or methods can be used to solve a problem (Saunders *et al*., 2009). In selecting the research philosophy, after taking considerations of the research objective which is to explain the impact on the variables based on hypotheses testing, the positivism approach has been chosen. As compared to alternative approaches, the positivism approach is deemed to be the most suitable since it allows unambiguous and pure data to be garnered and removes human interpretation. The credible data gathered would allow for the creation of generalisations that will allow the researcher to explain and also predict behaviour.

4.3 Research Approach

As the research philosophy has been chosen it is important that the next layer of the Saunders *et al.* (2009) 'Research Onion' is selected. The deductive layer consists of inductive and deductive approaches (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). With inductive, data is gathered and through the analysis of the data a theory is developed. For the deductive approach a researcher will firstly develop a theory and hypothesis which is tested to divulge if the theory is true or false (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The deductive approach has been selected as it is generally used with the positivism approach (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Following this selection, the next step is selecting a research strategy. Qualitative research typically involves focus groups, in depth interviews or observing participants and can take longer and cost more than quantitative approaches (Walle, 2015; Holden and Lynch, 2004). Qualitative research can yield further insight from a participant but would be open to researcher bias when extracting opinions from the data collected (Walle, 2015). Quantitative research on the other hand is generally deductive, objective and general, whereas qualitative research is inductive, subjective and contextual (Morgan,

2014). Quantitative research therefore values data and factual results over qualitative research which is associated with opinions and interpretations (Morgan, 2014). Having the observer being independent from what is being observed is an important point for the research perspective as the more subjectivist perspective of having interaction can bring in more researcher bias into what is being observed (Holden and Lynch, 2004). The quantitative approach will have higher participation rates especially over a smaller time frame which will allow the researcher to work with a larger data set (Walle, 2015). Mansoor and Hassan (2016) adds that research incorporating a questionnaire and a five-point Likert scale often utilises a quantitative method. From examining the study by Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) they utilised a quantitative research approach also so based on this and the time constraints and the need for a large data set for this study, a quantitative approach will be utilised. This will also allow the research collected to provide empirical evidence to solidify the theories from the Irish Information Technology sector perspective.

4.4. Research Design and Instrument

The research design is based on a mono-method, quantitative methodology. The purpose of the study is to assess how employee relations (ER) affects interpersonal trust (IPT) in managers and colleagues and also how IPT in colleagues and managers affect job satisfaction (JS) in a remote working environment in the technology industry in Ireland as there is no specific research in this area currently.

The research instrument incorporated a survey to collect the data required through a Google Forms questionnaire. The research followed competent research methods from the literature of Saunders *et al.* (2019). As the participants self-completed the questionnaire it limited socially desirable responses to certain questions (Dillman *et al.*, 2016).

4.5 Data Collection Method and Process

The scales and variables for this study were selected from exiting literature particularly the study by Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021). Primary data was collected for this study. For the sample method, the convenience sampling method was used in identifying participants. As the demographics of the study are looking at employees in the IT field in Ireland who work remotely, the survey was addressed to people working in organisations that are on the most up to date list of 146 companies on the TOP 1000 technology companies in Ireland (TOP 1000, 2022). In terms of sampling method, the convenience sampling approach which is a non-probability sampling method was employed. Convenience sampling was utilised as it allowed the researcher to get access to a large group of

participants as it does not distinguish characteristics between the participants whereas probability sampling would require the researcher to select participants based on certain characteristics (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The sample size aim was 100 participants, but this number was standardised for quantitative data collection methods. Quota sampling was investigated but the premise that the assumptions on which the population quota and groups are based and the ability to achieve high quality data Saunders *et al.* (2009) was a risk the researcher decided not to take. The total respondents was 123 which gave a large dataset, and the data was taken between February 27th – March 6th, 2023. To avoid uninformed responses the questionnaire was not incentivised.

Twenty-five questions were used for the survey. Some questions involved simple yes or no answers to make sure the specific participants were identified for this study (for example, 'Do you work in the Information Technology sector in Ireland?'). The questionnaire also asked personal information such as gender, position level in current company etc. Eighteen questions were asked using a Likert five-point scale, with 1 representing a participant "strongly disagreeing" and 5 signifying the participant "strongly agreeing" with the statement. This type of scale referred to as a construct allows these research attributes to be assessed which would generally not be observable (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). The study incorporates the instruments that have been empirically validated from the previous Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) study. The independent variable is "employee relations" which contained six question items. The dependent variable is "job satisfaction" contained three items. The mediating variables used are "trust in colleagues" which contained five items and "trust in managers" which contained four items. All measurement scales are presented in Table 5.1 (p.42) and the survey is presented in Appendix 3.

The internet questionnaire was designed and distributed on Google Forms. The main advantages was that it allows the research to be conducted promptly over a short period of time across a large sample size and costs are kept to a minimum (O'Leary, 2017). The data was collected in a standard and systematic way. As this was a volunteer sampling, participants were sent email enquires through the LinkedIn social network and a link to the questionnaire was shared on Irish developer specific forums on Reddit.com. To ensure that the participants of the survey are of the target population, two filter questions were asked: (i) Do you work in the IT sector in Ireland? And (ii) Do you work remotely? Respondents who responded 'no' to either one of the filter questions were not allowed to continue to participate in the survey, as they were deemed not to represent the target population.

4.6 Data Analysis Method

To answer the research questions the data will be statistically analysed using SPSS (V.28). The data will be analysed firstly through descriptive analysis which include demographic statistics of gender, the respondents position level in the company, their tenure in the company and finally the type of remote working that is applicable to them. The second part of the analysis will focus on reliability and validity of the measurement scales used and finally the researcher will test all four research hypotheses using Pearson's correlations test.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

In upholding and fulfilling integrity in this research, a strategy of 'informed consent' was adopted (see Appendix 1) with the aims and methods of the research being made clear to the participants before they began the study (see Appendix 2), and that participation was voluntary. Participants were able to withdraw their consent at any time via email and their data would be deleted as outlined by Saunders *et al.* (2019). The confidentiality and anonymity including details such as gender, email, role position and company size were kept confidential as directed by General, Data Protection Regulation EU 2016/679 (Official Journal of the European Union, 2016). The data was stored securely on a password protected USB flash drive and all data will only be held for the purpose of this research paper and will be disposed of based on NCI's research ethics guidelines. A copy of the consent form and the actual survey can be found in the Appendices.

Chapter 5 – Findings and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide descriptive results about the sample and will also detail the statical tests used in garnering results for the hypothesis. It will be broken into four parts, firstly a summary of the descriptive results including gender, years of working, position level and working style. The second part will cover the scale reliability and variance results. Part three will offer the outcomes of the statistical tests conducted for the hypothesis. The chapter will end with a summary of the outcomes.

5.2. Descriptive Results Overview

There was a total of 123 respondents across twenty-five questions in the survey, which comprised of eighteen questions utilising the Likert Scale and five other demographic questions which can be found in Appendix 3. The results and figures below provide an overview of the demographics on the sample collected.

5.2.1 Gender

Figure 5.1 shows the split of the survey respondents by gender. From the 123 respondents, 80% were male, 19% were female and 1% described themselves as other. This would suggest that the Information Technology (IT) industry in Ireland is more male dominant. There was no significant mean differences between genders on employee relations (ER) see Appendix 4, job satisfaction (JS) see Appendix 5, trust in managers (TIM) see Appendix 6 and trust in colleagues (TIC) see Appendix 7.

Gender		
Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	99	80%
Female	23	19%
Other	1	1%
Total	123	100%
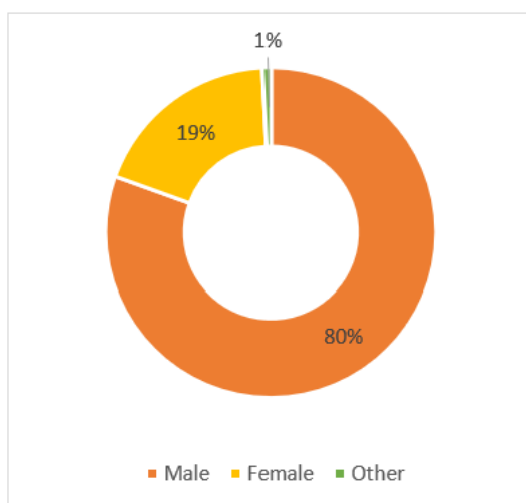
Figure 5.1: Survey respondents by gender   Figure 5.2: Gender frequencies

5.2.2 Years of Working

Figure 5.3 reveals the breakdown of the tenure of each employee in their current company. Respondents were asked to select the range appropriate to them before the survey began. There were five ranges to select from: less than a year, 1 – 2 years, 2 – 5 years, 5 – 10 years and greater than ten years. There was a good spread between the participants surveyed in terms of tenure in their company with the slight majority in 1 – 2 years at 32.52% and the minority in the greater than ten years at 8.94%. 81.86% of the candidates surveyed have been with their current company for less than five years. There was no significant mean differences between the position level of the respondents on ER see Appendix 8, JS see Appendix 9, TIM see Appendix 10 and TIC see Appendix 11.
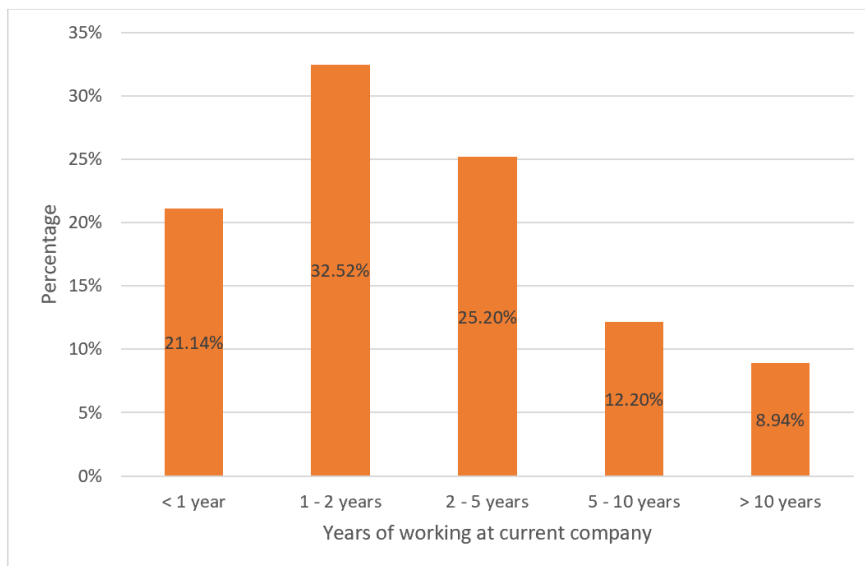
Figure 5.3: Survey respondents by years of working

Years of Working		
Years of Working	Frequency	Percent
< 1 year	26	21.14%
1 - 2 years	40	32.52%
2 - 5 years	31	25.20%
5 - 10 years	15	12.20%
> 10 years	11	8.94%
Total	123	100.00%

Figure 5.4: Years of working frequencies

5.2.3 Position Level

Figure 5.5 reflects the position level the employees surveyed are operating in within their organisation. Respondents could select between one of six groups: entry level, individual contributor, senior contributor, manager, director and vice president/executive. There was a good spread of levels in the results with the majority of respondents at a senior contributor level representing 36.21%. The vice president/executive level was in the minority at 1.63%. There was no significant differences between the years of working on ER see Appendix 12, TIM see Appendix 14 and TIC see Appendix 15 but there was a difference between JS see Appendix 13 with the mean scores for Entry level (3.50), Individual Contributors (3.47) and VP/Executive (3.50) showing lower scores to Senior Contributor (4.13), Manager (4.00) and Director (4.50).
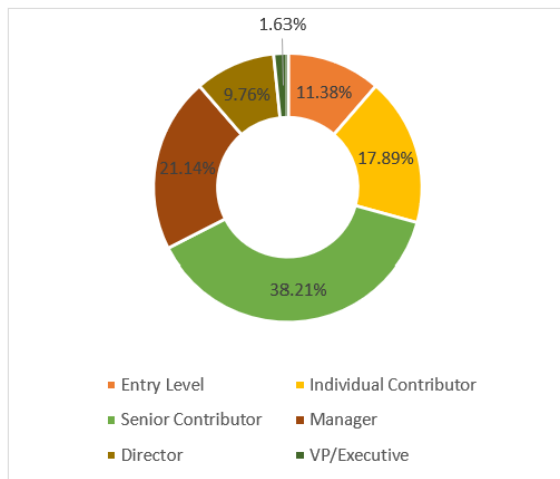
Figure 5.5: Survey respondents for position level

Position Level		
Position Level	Frequency	Percent
Entry Level	14	11.38%
Individual Contributor	22	17.89%
Senior Contributor	47	38.21%
Manager	26	21.14%
Director	12	9.76%
VP/Executive	2	1.63%
Total	123	100.00%

Figure 5.6: Position level frequencies

5.2.4 Remote Working Style

Figure 5.7 shows the type of remote working that the respondents have in their current company. The options included: Hybrid (3 – 4 days a week in the office), Hybrid (1 – 2 days a week in the office), Fully remote but occasional time spent in the office (1 – 2 times per month) and Fully Remote. The majority of the respondents are in a fully remote role but with occasional time spent in the office (1 – 2 times per month). The minority of those surveyed are working in a hybrid setup with 3 – 4 days in the office. There was no significant mean differences between the position level of the respondents on ER see Appendix 16, JS see Appendix 17, TIM see Appendix 18, but there was a slight difference in TIC see Appendix 19, specifically in 'Hybrid (3 - 4 days a week in the office)' with a slightly lower TIC mean of

3.63 than with the other three options of 'Hybrid (1 – 2 days a week in the office)' (4.22), 'Fully remote but occasional time spent in the office (1 – 2 times per month)' (4.18) and 'Fully Remote' (4.15).
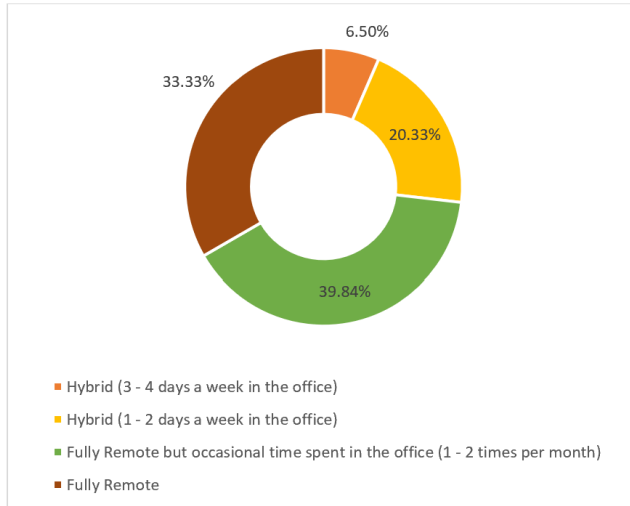
Figure 5.7: Survey respondents for remote working style

Remote Working Style		
Remote Working Style	Frequency	Percent
Hybrid (3 - 4 days a week in the office)	8	6.50%
Hybrid (1 - 2 days a week in the office)	25	20.33%
Fully Remote but occasional time spent in the office (1 - 2 times per month)	49	39.84%
Fully Remote	41	33.33%
Total	123	100.00%

Figure 5.8: Remote working style frequencies

5.3 Scale Reliability and Validity Results

This section shows the results for the reliability test for the four scales used. There was 123 valid responses across the eighteen items. Using SPSS (V.28) the Cronbach's Alpha reliability value from ER is 0.856, JS is 0.796, TIM is 0.856 and TIC is 0.884. These results are reported in Table 5.1. A Cronbach Alpha (α) score of 0.7 or above indicates that the questions combined in the scale are internally coherent in their measurement and are generally accepted as good (Saunders *et al.,* 2019). For convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) scores are evaluated, wherein the AVE scores for ER is 0.607, JS is 0.713, TIM 0.700 and TIC 0.687 as reported in Table 5.1. All are accepted as their scores are above the threshold of 0.5 for AVE (Saunders, *et al.,* 2019).

Latent Variable	Indicators	Measurement Items	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Mean	Standard Deviation
ER	ER1 ER2 ER3 ER4 ER5 ER6	I have a good relationship with my co-workers. I have a sense of mutual support in my organization. I perceive my organization as a community. In my organization, regardless of the position in the structure, there are friendly relations between employees. There are good relations between employees in my organization. I consider the relationship between employees in my organization to be definitely positive.	0.607	0.901	0.856	4.001	4.149
JS	JS1 JS2 JS3	I am satisfied with my position in the team. My work is satisfactory. I feel satisfied with my role in the organization.	0.713	0.881	0.796	3.938	2.316
TIM	TIM1 TIM2 TIM3 TIM4	I have trust in the management of my organization. I could allow the management to have full control over my future of this organization. I trust that the decisions taken by the management are beneficial to the organization. I would feel comfortable giving the management a task or problem that is critical to me, even if I could not monitor their actions.	0.700	0.902	0.856	3.398	3.810
TIC	TIC1 TIC2 TIC3 TIC4 TIC5	If I got into difficulties/complications at work, I know that my colleagues would try to help me. I can trust the people I work with to help me when I need it. I am convinced that my colleagues will always try to treat me fairly. Most of my colleagues can be relied upon to do as they say. I have full trust in the skills of my colleagues.	0.687	0.916	0.884	4.143	3.332

Table 5.1: Reliability and Validity results for the Measurement Scales

5.4 Research Hypotheses Testing Outcomes

5.4.1 Hypothesis One

To establish if there is a relationship between employee relations (ER) and Interpersonal Trust in managers (TIM) a Pearson Correlation, parametric test was selected. The relationship between variable one, ER and variable two IPT in managers were assessed. Table 5.2 provides an output for the test. As we can see there is a significant correlation between ER and TIM variables [r =0.695, n=123, p<0.01). The H1 is therefore supported.

Correlations		ER	JS	TIM	TIC
ER	Pearson Correlation	1	.690**	.695**	.830**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	123	123	123	123
JS	Pearson Correlation	.690**	1	.648**	.550**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	123	123	123	123
TIM	Pearson Correlation	.695**	.648**	1	.490**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	123	123	123	123
TIC	Pearson Correlation	.830**	.550**	.490**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	123	123	123	123
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Table 5.2: Correlation Results

5.4.2 Hypothesis Two

To establish if there is a relationship between ER and IPT in colleagues (TIC) a Pearson Correlation, parametric test was also selected. The relationship between variable one, ER and variable two IPT in colleagues were assessed. Table 5.2 provides an output for the test. As we can see there is a significant correlation between ER and JS variables [r =0.830, n=123, p<0.01). The H2 is therefore supported.

5.4.3 Hypothesis Three

To establish if there is a relationship between IPT in managers and JS a Pearson Correlation, parametric test was also selected. The relationship between variable one, ITP in managers and variable two JS were assessed. Table 5.2 provides an output for the test. As we can see there is a significant correlation between TIM and JS variables [r =0.648, n=123, p<0.01). The H3 is therefore supported.

5.4.4 Hypothesis Four

To establish if there is a correlation between IPT in colleagues and JS a Pearson Correlation, parametric test was also selected. The relationship between variable one, IPT in colleagues and variable two JS were assessed. Table 5.2 provides an output for the test. As we can see there is a significant correlation between TIC and JS variables [r =0.550, n=123, p<0.01). The H4 is therefore supported.

5.5 Findings Summary

The results for the four hypothesis show a clear correlation between each of the four hypothesis as represented in Figure 5.9.
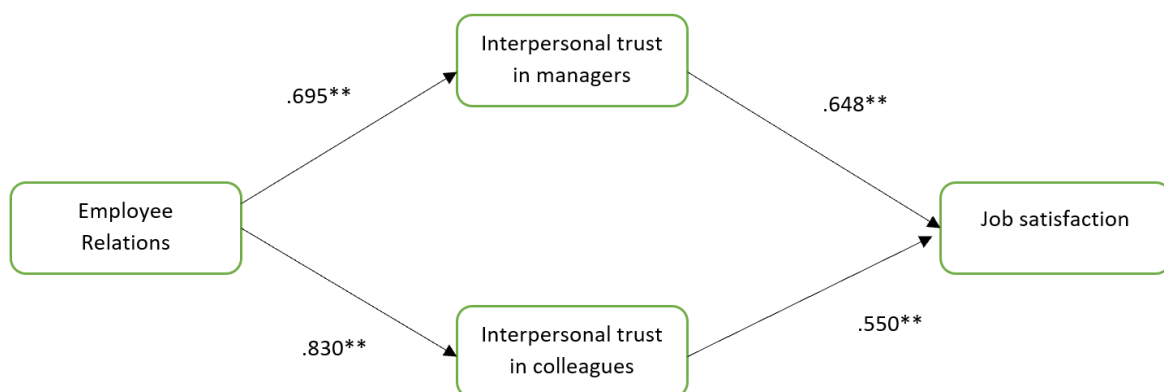
Figure 5.9 Parallel mediation model (n = 123)

The aforementioned results show that there is a relationship between ER and IPT in managers and colleagues which then has a relationship on respondents JS. Upon further analysis of the data, it was found there was no differences by gender between ER, JS, TIM and TIC, In terms of position level there was no differences between ER, TIM and TIC although there were slight differences between JS with

Entry level, Individual Contributors and VP/Executive showing lower scores to Senior Contributor, Manager and Director. In regard to 'years of working' there was no difference in ER, JS, TIM and TIC. In terms of remote working there was no differences between ER, JS, TIM but a slight difference in TIC specifically with 'Hybrid (3 - 4 days a week in the office)' with a slightly lower mean of 3.63 than with the other three options which is interesting in terms of working relationships within a more face-to-face environment but could be potentially down to the sample size having been smaller than the other options selected. These findings will be discussed apropos the current literature in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss in more depth the Findings and Analysis chapter. The chapter will consider the research aims and objectives with reference to the literature before proceeding with the research.

The response rate to the survey was 123 respondents with a good representation across gender, position level, years of working and remote working style. The discussion focuses on the topics of employee relations and job satisfaction in remote working, the importance of trust in job satisfaction, the demographic nuances, the differences in Employee Relations between Poland and Ireland and finally the practical implications of the research.

6.2 Employee Relations and Job Satisfaction in Remote Working

The research question looked to answer whether employee relations (ER) has a positive effect on job satisfaction (JS) through interpersonal trust (IPT) in a remote working (RW) environment. With the importance of positive JS in ER it was crucial for the researcher to look through the lens of RW to see if ER in a RW environment can affect JS. From the results there is a strong correlation and verification of the four hypotheses which demonstrates that ER has a positive impact on JS in the Information Technology (IT) sector in Ireland. These findings extend the research by Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) which also found a strong correlation between ER and JS in the Polish IT sector. These findings cannot and should not be underestimated as organisations are looking for ways in which to be more competitive and one of the most practical ways is through their human resource (Wilkinson *et al*., 2017). Employees who love their work demonstrate much more higher levels of workplace resilience (Hayes *et al.,* 2020). In order to achieve this an organisation should strive to have productive employees which comes from Human Resource Management (HRM) techniques through employee engagement (EE) which is strategically used to motivate and improve commitment of its employees (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020) which in turn helps the employees global and facet JS (Shuck *et al*., 2021).

As employees are working remotely, the usual ER policies Human Resources (HR) have implemented for onsite working may not have the same impact for employees working remotely. As such the importance to investigate this was important for the researcher as the cost to an organisation in terms of revenue can be large with the loss of talent but also the impact on employees who can suffer from social and professional isolation (Ruiller *et al.*, 2019; Franken *et al.*, 2021) working remotely. One of

the main challenges noted in this regard is that organisations need to be cognisant of RW being a benefit but there is also a cost of increased workload for employees as well as the inability to 'switch off' (Felstead and Henseke, 2017). Having HR as well as senior management conversant in this area can help with the implementation of these new ideas through vertical and horizontal alignment (Martinson and De Leon, 2018). Further discussion of techniques is presented in Section 6.6.

6.3 Importance of Trust in Job Satisfaction

As the literature exhibited, having leaders that are effective and can motivate and support subordinates can allow them to achieve specific tasks but also lower attrition levels (Bennett, 2020; Hulme and Wood, 2021). The research objective of this study focused on trust in this context and its potential impact in this relationship. From the findings there is a significant impact of trust between managers and employees which does mediate the relationship between ER and JS. Having identified this, it also highlights similar results of the mediating relationship between IPT in managers and the impact on an employee's JS in the Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) study of IT professionals in Poland and aligns with the Jaakson *et al.* (2018) study in the academic sector. As such having the same sectors in two European Union countries displaying this backs up the argument that training and support in managers especially early in the relationship between both is important for the development of a positive relationship. This can then support JS for the employees especially in the IT environment where it is a strong driver particularly in a severe work pressure setting (Diedericks and Rothmann, 2014). Unfortunately, as the literature has suggested that managers, especially those operating between senior management and employee level do not have the supports needed when working remotely (Spagnoli *et al.*, 2021). This is a challenge especially with the findings from Taborosi *et al.* (2020) that developing IPT in organisations enables employees to feel more attached to an organisation should be noted by companies. The results of the importance of managers in developing IPT can create a positive influence of employees JS, which can bring greater work-life balance and working effectiveness (Gashi *et al.*, 2022).

Brown *et al.* (2015) notes the importance of employee trust and the organisations performance. This underlines the need for organisations to take note of trust in the relationship between candidates from their first year of joining the workforce (Hulme and Wood, 2021) where support and mentoring from managers is important to lower attrition rates. This may be a reason as to why the results of this research noted only 81.86% of respondents have only been with their current company for less than five years. As managers are leaders within the organisation it is imperative for successful leadership to be based on the creation of mutual trust (Brandl, 2021) which in turn can create effective

communication channels. In a RW world, the channels that communication ensues is of course important so it is positioned that having technology that can allow video calling between colleagues and managers as well as methods of direct messaging as important features in producing an environment where communication can grow.

For trust in colleagues there was a significant correlation with JS. It is noted therefore IPT with colleagues is a strong proponent of JS in the participants in this survey. From the literature it is evident that a positive work and community environment for an employee can bring positive JS (Tanova and Holtman, 2008). Although from the research presented there are negative effects from RW including social isolation (Ruiller *et al.,* 2019), professional isolation (Franken *et al.,* 2021), increase in technostress (Singh, *et al.*, 2022), financial impact of working remotely (Battisti *et al.*, 2022) an increase in family conflicts (Tsen *et al.,* 2021) and work-life balance being negatively affected (Fuller and Hirsh, 2019). The results are also consistent with the Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) study and also support the findings that interpersonal associations between employees can have an effect on JS. The benefits of trust with colleagues can lead to knowledge sharing (Brandl, 2021) and thus improving team members contributions as well as assistance during conflict as trust moderates the task conflict and allows for more successful decisions to be made as opposed to relationship conflict which is more prone to inferior decisions been made by groups (Simons and Peterson, 2000). This study overall provides support that the better the trust between colleagues the higher the job satisfaction.

In summary, trust can shape the foundation of cooperation between the virtual teams. Having employees working and interacting remotely an organisation needs to take account of the use of trust to bridge the consequences that RW brings. Having IPT between managers and colleagues can lead to a healthy RW environment for an employee which in turn can allow them to perform to their optimal which should bring greater competitive advantage and ultimately revenue generation to the organisation that focuses its ER policies and procedures on this area.

6.4 Additional Observations – Demographics

6.4.1 Gender

Bakarich *et al.* (2022) noted that there are gender differences of the 159 accountants surveyed in their study from the onset of remote working with males experiencing higher volumes of work and ambiguity while females stated they had higher attrition intentions and emotional fatigue. The results from this research of IT workers in Ireland found no significant differences between genders on employee relations (ER).

From the results obtained of the 123 respondents, 80% were male, 19% were female and 1% described themselves as other. There was no significant mean differences between genders on ER see Appendix 4, job satisfaction (JS) see Appendix 5, trust in managers (TIM) see Appendix 6 and trust in colleagues (TIC) see Appendix 7. The high percentage of males would indeed show the IT industry is more male dominant but the reflections of male, female and other suggest that gender does not play an important factor in variables tested.

6.4.2 Years of Working

An interesting point to note is that 81.86% of those surveyed in this study have been with their current companies for less than five years with only 8.94% having been employed by their current company for more than ten years. The high satisfaction levels observed indicates that the tenure levels does not affect satisfaction levels. There is a small increase with satisfaction levels post 5 years which may indicate the longer an employee worked with a company the more satisfied they are in a role which adds to the notion of smaller attrition levels and organisational loyalty when job satisfaction is high (Fettouh, 2022; Tanova and Holtman, 2008).

6.4.3 Position Level

There is a difference between position level and job satisfaction with participants who had selected Entry level, Individual Contributor and VP/Executive showing lower satisfaction scores on average than Senior Contributor, Manager and Director. This sandwich of different satisfaction levels indicates that the mid management roles have stronger satisfaction levels than the lower-level roles. The results also plays into the entry level and especially individual contributor level scores for Trust In Managers

(see Appendix 14) being lower which could identify that less trust in managers is causing lower satisfaction responses. With the small number of respondents for the VP/Executive level it is difficult to draw conclusions based on this, but it is something to note for future research in this area especially if a larger data set is gathered.

6.4.4 Remote Working Style

From the results there is one piece of research to note which is the trust in colleagues (TIC). There is high satisfaction scores recorded for 'Hybrid (3 - 4 days a week in the office)' with a slightly lower TIC mean of 3.63 than with the other three options of 'Hybrid (1 – 2 days a week in the office)' (4.22), 'Fully remote but occasional time spent in the office (1 – 2 times per month)' (4.18) and 'Fully Remote' (4.15). This may suggest that more face-to-face contact with colleagues might lower satisfaction levels in this regard or we could postulate further than these respondents who are in the office 3 – 4 days a week might be adjusting to this new way of working having operated in a virtual setting before being asked to return to the office in such high numbers. Unfortunately, this is a limitation in the research that it is unable to explore further.

6.5 Differences in Employee Relations between Poland and Ireland

The study by Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) was conducted in Poland. Poland who operate under similar EU laws as to Ireland do differentiate in terms of policies and government legislation such as maximum number of hours worked with 40 in Poland (Dudkowiak, 2023) and 39 in Ireland (Citizens Information, 2023) and the maximum overtime of 48 hours per week averaged over a week in Ireland (Citizens Information, 2023) and 150 hours per year in Poland (Dudkowiak, 2023). The results collected by Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) are similar to the results presented by this research paper with ER having an effect on JS in a RW setting. It adds to the thoughts and the potential for further studies across other IT sectors in future studies to bring a broader view to the subject as there are differences in regulations as noted between Poland and Ireland and other European countries to see if there are countries that produce opposing results to Ireland and Poland in this regard.

6.6 Practical Implications and Contributions to Literature

The research question asked whether employee relations (ER) has a positive effect on job satisfaction (JS) through interpersonal trust (IPT) in a remote working (RW) environment. Based on the findings from this research and the empirical evidence gathered it has answered this and also added to the existing literature in this area. Firstly, it adds to the research of the polish study conducted by Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) as ER facilitated by IPT between managers and colleagues was a mitigating variable in JS in employees in the IT sector in Poland. This was also evident in the research from this study which is based in the IT sector in Ireland. This shows that it is not a country specific effect but does in fact exist in Ireland and potentially in other countries. These two pieces of research add to the evidence that interactions between employees and their managers and colleagues can have a positive or negative effect on their JS in an organisation. It is also taken that although this study focuses on just the IT sector it opens the possibility of other organisations in different sectors that may require investigation.

For managers the implication of this research and verification of the hypotheses firstly highlights that ER policies around managers and direct reports is extremely important in gaining trust but also developing it. Secondly, the research has identified the importance of IPT as a mitigating variable between managers and employees JS in a RW setting. Low IPT can have a negative effect on JS which can have a serious impact on employees JS which ultimately can lead to increased attrition levels of employees which will have an impact on an organisations performance. With this insight it is important for managers to look at ways to improve IPT between direct reports through utilising IPT related policies or developing their skillsets in this area. For the colleagues of employees, the evidence highlights the importance of having strong IPT with colleagues in the IT sector in Ireland, which justifies bringing in ER policies and practices to build and improve an employee's JS in a RW setting. Overall, from the empirical evidence gathered form this research there is a significant impact on IPT between managers and employees which does mediate the relationship between ER and JS.

With the implications of this research, it suggests managers and colleagues have an impact in an employees JS which is mitigated by IPT. As HR departments are the custodians of bringing in an insuring the performance of employees in an organisation the research has highlighted the importance of positive ER for managers and colleagues of RW employees in the IT sector in Ireland but also the need for competent and specific ER policies and practices to develop and also improve IPT which will ultimately have an impact on the JS for employees working remotely.

The next chapter will offer a conclusion and recommendations to organisations on ways they can tackle the challenges with JS in a RW context through ER policies and practices.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This research was undertaken to extend the previous study conducted by Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) in Poland but strategically around the Information Technology (IT) sector in Ireland due to it been viewed as the tech capital of Europe (Shehadi, 2020). The underlying theme was to understand whether employee relations (ER) had an effect on job satisfaction (JS) through the mediating variables of interpersonal trust (IPT) with managers and colleagues. The results of hypotheses testing showed a strong correlation between ER and IPT in managers and colleagues which then has a relationship on employees JS. Not identifying the importance of ER and IPT can have a detrimental impact on an organisation by causing employees well-being to be negatively affected. Having ER policies which incorporate IPT can help create a positive relationship between colleagues and managers and decrease determinants to employees JS in a remote working (RW) environment in the IT sector.

Eckhardt *et al.* (2019) findings in relation to some employers not understanding the subtle differences of remote and office-based employees and also the employees' mental, technological and social requirements needed to be accounted for when they are working in a virtual setting. It is important then to take this aspect into consideration and the research discussed that Human Resources (HR) should focus on the need to highlight the issue before tackling the specifics of emotional and transactional employee engagement (EE) in the RW relationship with their organisation. Having employees obtain high levels of affective and social engagement can cause higher levels of job performance and positive intentions for employees organisational commitment and help the employee achieve profession engagement. The impact EE specifically IPT has on JS and the global and facet elements of satisfaction shows the need for strong foundations to be developed either through hiring and training leaders or allowing the right environment for trust to grow between employees. Having trained leaders who can support while also maintaining an employee's self-efficacy is a delicate balancing act, but the research shows it does help in lowering intentions to leave an organisation. The mitigating circumstance is of course the RW world we are now in and that the training to prepare for RW ironically will need to be offered in a RW setting for a number of organisations.

7.2 Recommendations

Following the summation of the literature review and research findings of this study it is important that the researcher gives some recommendations to organisations who are interested in investigating JS in their own RW employees. As such four recommendations have been chosen which are pitched towards HR teams to lead with.

1. **Senior Management Agreement and Data Gathering**

   The research looked at the IT industry in Ireland as a whole. As the literature states that some organisations do not know there is even a difference between employees JS working remotely or in the office. It is paramount therefore that an organisation's HR department gets senior manager agreement to investigate this area (Martinson and De Leon, 2018). Without this agreement it can be difficult to enact changes or recommendations. Gathering data is a great way to understand how an organisation is perceived by the employee base from a JS perspective and it is recommended to run a survey first to understand the current state of the employees' levels of JS. It is advised that HR run their own JS survey of their employees across all functions of the business to understand the levels of JS at entry level all the way up to the senior management level of the business. Only after gaining and understanding the data can a HR department adopt certain ER policies and practices to improve IPT as well as JS in its employees which will in turn help employees commitment to the organisation as well as negate the effects of social and professional isolation that an employee can experience working remotely. It is proposed that HR departments run these surveys bi-annually and after policies and practices have been implemented to investigate their effects. HR should show the findings to senior management to keep them aware of the impact the policies are having and to aid future decisions to be taken in relation to positive JS policies and practices.

   Timeframe and Cost Considerations:

   Carrying out a survey takes time to create especially if it is a bespoke survey. It is recommended to utilise an off the shelf solution such as Qualtrics or Culture Amp who compare the results of an organisation's JS and company culture against other companies in the same industry/country. This gives an organisation a better understanding of how it is perceived next to industry peers. These organisations also offer support in terms of marketing the survey internally and also interpretation of the results. These surveys can take 2 – 6 weeks to create and launch within an organisation. The cost of these solutions can range between €2000 – €5000 annually depending on how large the employee base is.

2. **Training**

This research noted the importance of IPT with managers and colleagues as a mediating factor in employees JS. Running regular manager training on areas such as coaching and developing talent, conflict resolution and team collaboration can help a manager understand their role in the manager and employee relationship and what the organisation expects of them. HR is there to assist the employee population, so this is a great opportunity for HR to build relationships with these individuals working remotely and to demonstrate that there is further support in the organisation if needed. Having managers attend training once a year after the initial training will help with engraining the principles of the training and it can also be utilised as a way to get qualitative feedback from managers about how well the training is helping them.

Timeframe and Cost Considerations:

It is recommended that HR creates their own bespoke training either by themselves or working with a third-party consultant which is recommended. Crafting a bespoke training programme run over a number of modules over the course of a month can give managers and colleagues a good foundation and also having the training in a live environment which removes them from other work distractions can keep them focussed on the training. The cost can depend on the time working with a consultant who generally operate on a daily rate between €350 - €500. It is recommended to work with a consultant for a minimum of a fortnight on planning of the training. Added expenses include if the consultant creates the training material which can cost between €4000 - €10000 for a number of modules. It is noted that HR departments should take more time with crafting the training and running a small focus group initially to see if there are thoughts on the training programme before it is rolled out to the manager population, this allows for any changes that need to be made. It is noted that changes after the initial rollout can incur additional costs.

3. **Employee Resource Groups**

An Employee Resource Group (ERG) is a fantastic way to engage people with similar characteristics. One characteristic is RW. Having a fortnightly or monthly meeting with employees who can get together for an hour virtually to discuss set topics related to RW can help with building social outlets with colleagues from different areas, allow for ideas to be shared on how others manage their time or the techniques they employ to reduce burnout

and build well-being. Having a specific ERG in place can also showcase that the organisation takes employees working remotely very seriously and that it utilises these meetings during the working day as opposed to after hours.

Timeframe and Cost Considerations:

ERGs are employee driven but gathering support and creating it should start with HR. Identifying individuals who have an interest in a particular ERG and inviting them to a small meeting to garner support is the best recommendation and it can take 1 - 3 weeks to set up an ERG. It is recommended to put a budget in place controlled by the ERG for external speakers or social events etc. A budget between €1000 - €3000 is recommended for this. This removes constraints for the ERG members in what they want to achieve over the year and also shows the organisations commitment to allowing an ERG to develop within an organisation. As more members are added budgets can be revised and increased on an annual basis.

4. **Technology and Remote Working Hubs**

Technology is the key for any communication between workers operating remotely. Solutions such as Slack and Google Meet are cost effective and can allow instant messaging and video calls between members while specific groups and interests can be created on these platforms in a less formal setting which can aid in more relaxed conversations. An organisation should identify how they want remote employees to communicate with each other and then investigate technologies that can support this while also staying within an agreed budget. Remote office hubs are becoming popular with companies that have disparate groups of workers. It allows the workers to travel albeit a shorter distance to meet colleagues in locations closer to them than the office. Remote working hubs are found in most county towns around Ireland and are priced on a monthly basis so there is no long-term commitment to the company in terms of budget. The benefit for the employee is they can meet their coworkers when it suits them but also share the space with other people working remotely which also allows for social connections to be created and can then in turn create a positive impression for the employee that the company is looking after them by giving them options as opposed to RW or the office.

Timeframe and Cost Considerations:

Instant Messaging technology is generally priced on users. The cost of Slack can range between €10000 - €60000 for a large multinational organisation. If an organisation is utilising Google Workspace then they will have access to Google Meet. The cost of Google Workspace is between €1000 - €50000 depending on the number of users. Implementing this technology can take time as it will need the support of the Information Technology department and also a timeline for implementation as well as updates to the employee population that this technology is been implemented and the reasons why it is been brought in. In terms of remote working hubs, garnering interest from employees near a remote working hub is the first step. Once identified the cost of a 5-day coworking pass with a designated area for your employees can start at €280 - €1000 depending on the number of employees and days they are looking to use it. As the pricing model for these remote working hubs is based on a short-term agreement it allows the organisation to test this solution for a month and see if there is an interest in extending it for a longer term which will give a reduction in the per day cost due to a longer-term commitment by the organisation.

Overall, the benefit of these recommendations to the organisation should be employees who are more engrossed in their work but are also highly committed to their organisation which in turn should allow the organisation to become competitive in a new RW world by retaining their high performing workforce. The organisations that do not focus on this will be at a disadvantage and may struggle to retain employees which in turn can bring its own competitive disadvantage next to a competitor that focuses on this issue.

7.3 Limitations and Future Research

Future studies post the Covid-19 era and implementation of organisation RW policies, it would be interesting to investigate if people actually have longer tenure in organisations, as there was a minority of the respondents (21.24%) working in companies post 5 years. With the time constraints of the study the data collection period was short. As such a longitudinal study should be suggested for future research particularly in the IT sector in Ireland to support or not support the findings in this research. A further limitation was the small number of respondents from the VP/Executive level (n = 2). It would be good to get a stronger data set for this cohort to compare against other position levels. Another limitation is in the RW style and identifying respondents who had operated at a different type

of RW style, and then had moved to a new working style more recently, this could give guidance on whether their satisfaction scores are lower or higher because of their organisations most recent RW policy change. With regards to the research approach and due to time constraints a quantitative method was selected but to have better triangulation of results having a quantitative and qualitative methodological approach can help with convergent validation of research results (Holden and Lynch, 2004).

The research of course is only concentrated in the IT sector Ireland, this narrowing means that there is opportunities to explore how ER affects JS through the mediating variables of IPT in managers and colleagues in other sectors as well as other countries which will add to the research conducted in Poland and now in Ireland.

7.4 Personal Learning Statement

With my Master of Arts in Human Resource Management and in order to obtain my qualification a research study was required. As I have worked remotely since the onset of Covid-19 in 2020 I have seen the quite rapid movement to remote working and then present day with the adoption of remote working by employers. This new environment for organisations has of course given them opportunities to attract talent that these organisations may not have been able to hire before. It of course also brings with it challenges in terms of collaboration, building trust, performance, etc. Human Resource functions who have policies and practices for onsite working need to address or enhance these initiatives for the remote working environment their organisation is now in. I've had a curiosity in this area since the move to remote working and felt I can give insight in this new era of working and how Human Resources can help shape it to be productive for the organisation but also to support employees who can benefit from a work life balance perspective.

In terms of learnings from the existing research and my own research study I have been able to bring knowledge and empirical evidence specifically on the Information Technology function in Ireland which has built on research carried out in Poland. I have learnt the need for prudent and specific employee relations practices on building trust between employees managers and colleagues which is an important foundation in establishing positive job satisfaction. From the knowledge gained I have been lucky enough to talk to peers in Ireland and abroad who operate in a similar environment. I have been able to share and discuss recommendations with them and I have also got to understand what practices they are implementing in their organisation in order to grow my own skillset further. This

really brings me confidence that the research has had an impact on me and my peers who also see the value with it.

My learnings from my first year of the course really gave me an opportunity to think about the areas I have an interest in which allowed me in my second year to look at ways that my intended research could have a benefit in. I was fortunate enough that I could utilise my learnings from a number of my modules into parts of my research study. I always feel learning is very good but utilising your learnings practically is better as I was able to achieve this in the planning, launch and drawing up of my conclusion and recommendations for this research study.

I only foresee remote working in different forms either hybrid or fully remote in organisations continuing in the future. My learnings from this research will allow me to utilise empirical data in the Human Resources functions in the future to help influence and guide organisations to adopt approaches that can have benefits for their performance and that will also benefit employees.

If I was to undertake this study again I would look to have a longer time span for the study. The data collection time period was very short, this would certainly be something I would look to change, and I would also suggest for future researchers to look at this if deciding to replicate the study. Having a longer time period could garner more research participants and give greater weight to the results that can be collected.

In terms of professional skills, I feel I demonstrated the core behaviours such as commercial drive, insights focused and a passion for learning which has been built up during my professional career but also during these last two years during my academic experience. It has given me the grounding to investigate this area and to gain evidence-based knowledge and insight that I can take and utilise in the future, in order to adopt employee relations practices which can benefit organisations and employees that offer remote working environments. In my research I was able to utilise learnings from employee relations, employment law, talent development techniques as well as strategic human resource management practices particularly in the conclusion and recommendations section.

Overall, this study has been a fulfilling experience as I have been able to study literature from research academics which has allowed me to find an area that can benefit with further study and the conclusions of which can help organisations in the future. This is certainly something I am immensely proud of, and it has only given me greater impetus to talk to peers in Human Resources and the CIPD community further on this topic.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Informed Consent

Informed Consent   ⌄   ⋮

Consent to take part in research:

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data at any time, in which case the material will be deleted.
- If I want to withdraw my consent I will need to include my email address at the end of the survey which will be used as my unique identifier.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me.
- I understand that participation involves investigation my feelings of employees relations and interpersonal trust on job satisfaction in a remote working environment.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my questionnaire which may reveal my identity.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms will be retained in a password protected USB Flash Drive with Richard Snowden (*The Researcher*) the only person who will have access to it until the exam board confirms the results of the dissertation.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above but I will need to include my email address in this survey as the unique identifier.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information. Names, degrees, affiliations and contact details of the researcher (and academic supervisors when relevant).

Do you wish to participate? *

○ Yes

○ No

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

Participation Information Sheet

Interpersonal Trust and Job Satisfaction in a Remote Working Environment: A quantitative study on the role employee relations plays in the Information Technology sector in Ireland

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions via email if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT

- My name is Richard Snowden and I'm a postgraduate student currently completing my MA in Human Resource Management. I am conducting research on employees in the IT sector in Ireland and their thoughts on employees relations and how it affects job satisfaction in a remote working environment. I am also looking for their thoughts on interpersonal trust between colleagues and managers and the role it plays in job satisfaction in a remote working environment. Upon successful completion of this study and submission of my dissertation I will receive an MA in Human Resource Management.

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?

- Participation will involve completing an online questionnaire in your own time.
- This questionnaire will only take 5 - 10 minutes to complete.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?

- You have been selected as you work in an IT company in Ireland that operates a remote working model.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?

- Participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to refuse participation and withdraw at any time without any consequence whatsoever.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

- This research will look to add to similar research conducted in Poland. It will give a greater understating of the thoughts of employees in the IT sector and whether employee relations plays a part in job satisfaction in a remote working environment. It will also look at interpersonal trust between colleagues and managers and how it affects job satisfaction also in a remote working environment.

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?

- Your data will be anonymised and stored on a password protected USB Flash Drive. Non-anonymised data in the form of consent forms are collected and retained as part of the research process.
- This research is conducted based on GDPR regulations and NCI research ethics considerations

HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?

- Your data will be anonymised and stored on a password protected USB Flash Drive. Signed consent forms will also be retained in a password protected USB Flash Drive that can only be accessed by the researcher Richard Snowden until after my degree has been conferred. Under freedom of information legalisation, you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

- The results of the study will be submitted in my dissertation for consideration for my MA in Human Resource Management.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

- If you have any questions at all, please contact me through the following details.
- Richard Snowden
- Student in National College of Ireland
- Researcher Email: x21125384@student.ncirl.ie
- Supervisor Details: Eileen Tan

# Appendix 3: Research Study Questions

Questionnaire

Participant Background

1. Gender
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Other
    d. Prefer not to say
2. Do you work remotely?
    a. Yes
    b. No
3. Do you work in the Information Technology sector in Ireland
    a. Yes
    b. No
4. What is your position level at your company
    a. Entry Level
    b. Individual Contributor
    c. Senior Contributor
    d. Manager
    e. Director
5. What is your position level at your company?
    a. Entry Level
    b. Individual Contributor
    c. Senior Contributor
    d. Manager
    e. Director
    f. VP/Executive
6. What is your annual income range in Euro?
    a. < 39999
    b. 40000 – 59999
    c. 60000 – 79999
    d. 80000 – 100000
    e. > 100000
7. What form of remote working do you associate with your current employment?
    a. Fully remote
    b. Fully Remote but occasional time spent in the office (1 - 2 times per month)
    c. Hybrid (1 - 2 days a week minimum in the office)
    d. Hybrid (3 - 4 days in the office)

Questionnaire (Likert Scale)

1. "I have a good relationship with my co-workers".

2. "I have a sense of mutual support in my organization".

3. "I perceive my organization as a community".

4. "In my organization, regardless of the position in the structure, there are friendly relations between employees".

5. "There are good relations between employees in my organization".

6. "I consider the relationship between employees in my organization to be definitely positive".

7. "I am satisfied with my position in the team".

8. "My work is satisfactory".

9. "I feel satisfied with my role in the organization".

10. "I have trust in the management of my organization".

11. "I could allow the management to have full control over my future of this organization".

12. "I trust that the decisions taken by the management are beneficial to the organization".

13. "I would feel comfortable giving the management a task or problem that is critical to me, even if I could not monitor their actions".

14. "If I got into difficulties/complications at work, I know that my colleagues would try to help me".

15. "I can trust the people I work with to help me when I need it".

16. "I am convinced that my colleagues will always try to treat me fairly".

17. "Most of my colleagues can be relied upon to do as they say".

18. "I have full trust in the skills of my colleagues".

Appendix 4: Gender - Employee Relations Boxplot
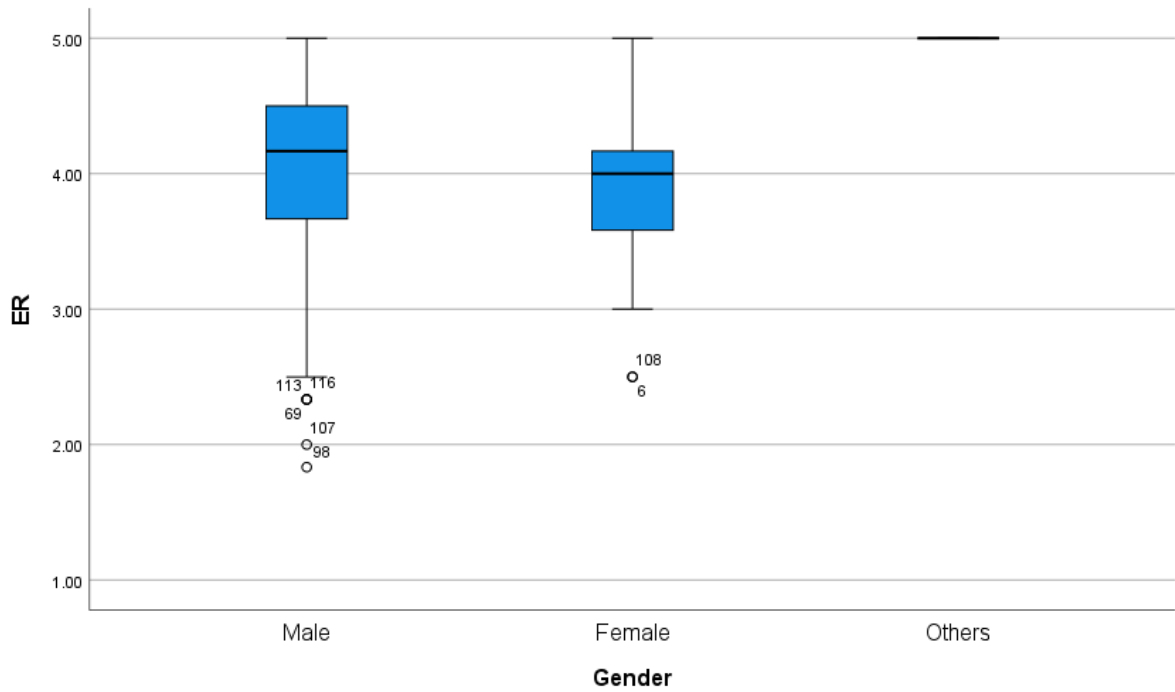
Appendix 5: Gender - Job Satisfaction Boxplot
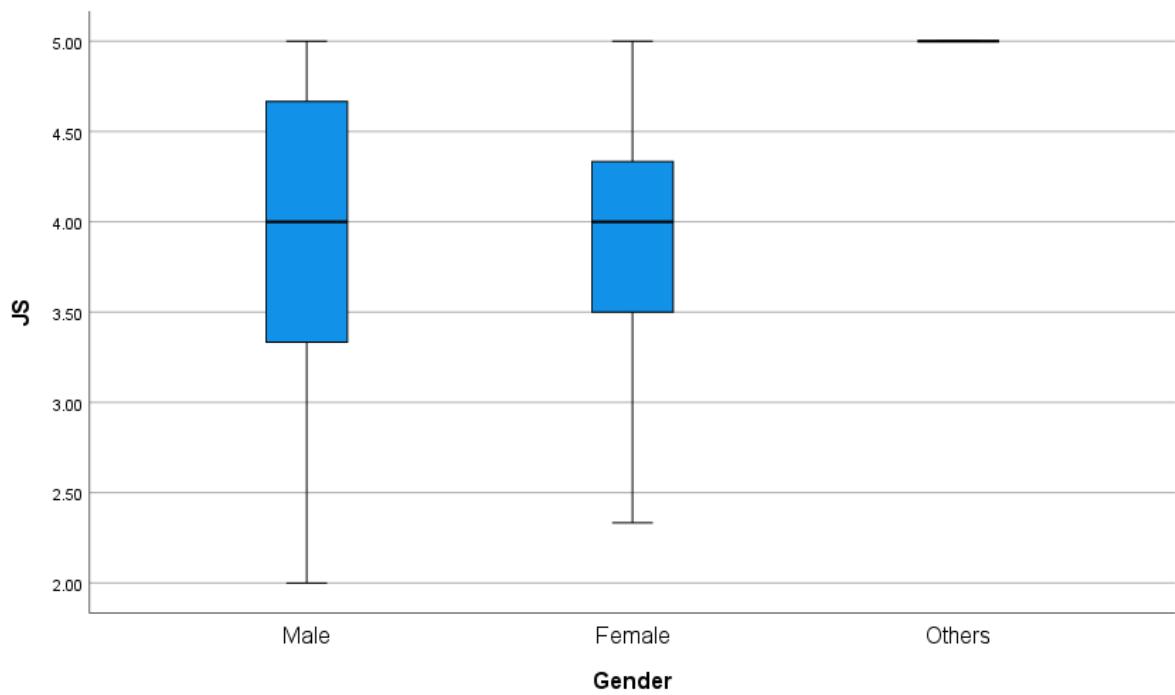
Appendix 6: Gender - Trust In Managers Boxplot
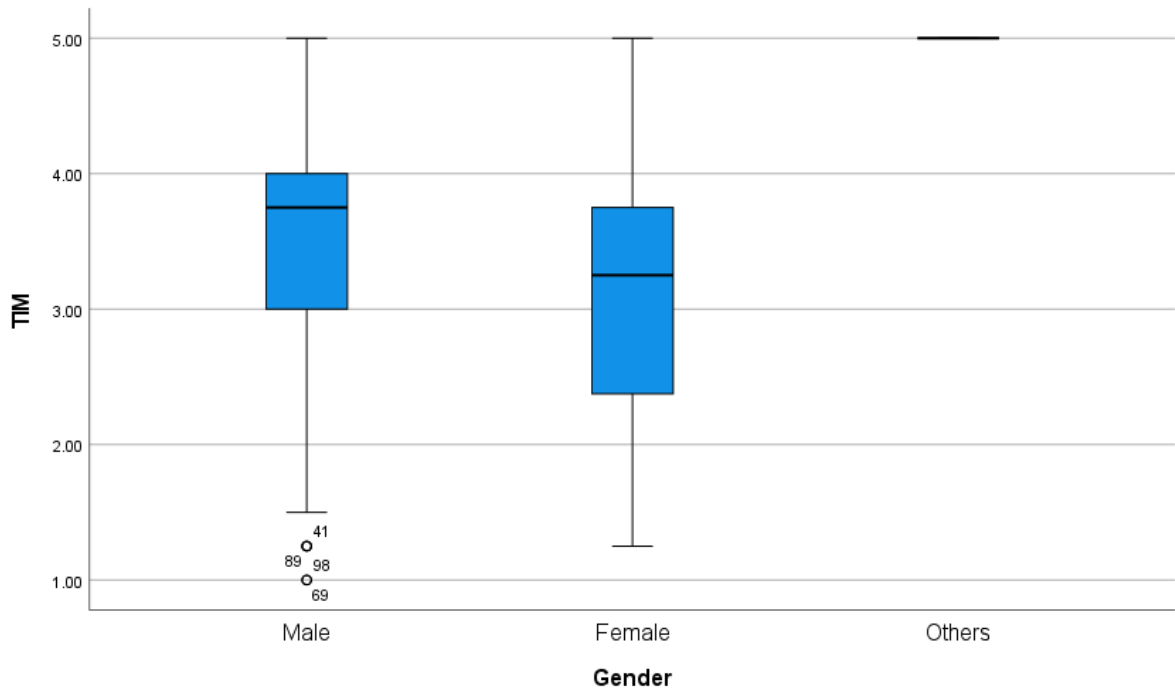
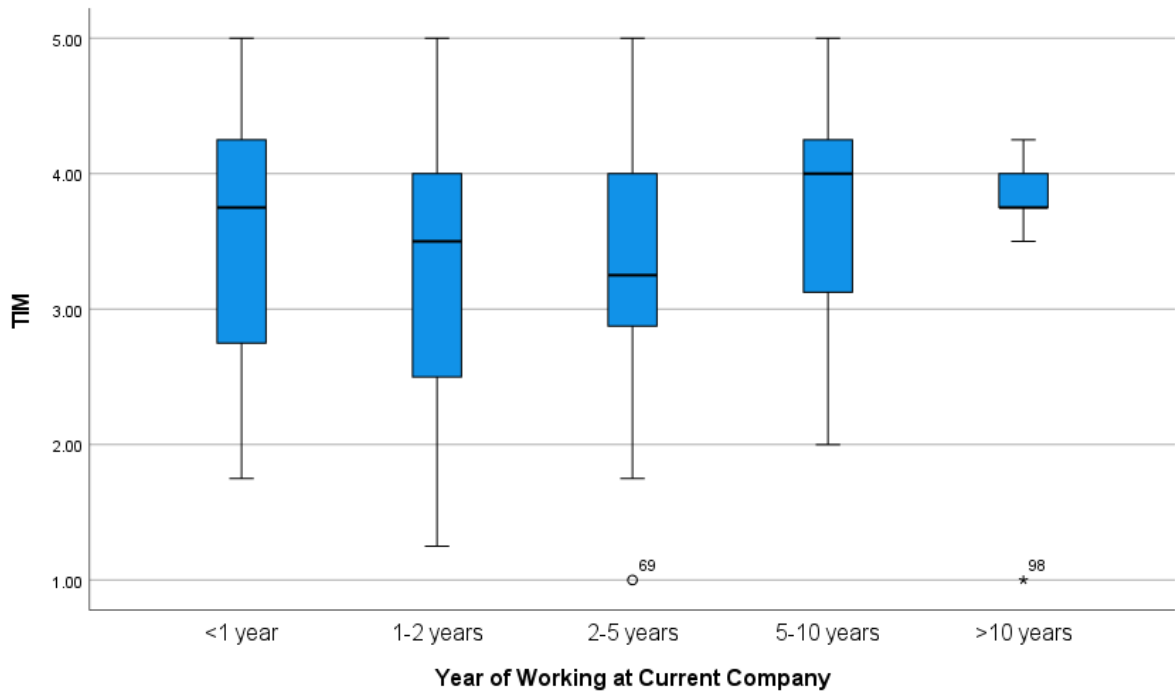## Appendix 7: Gender - Trust in Colleagues Boxplot
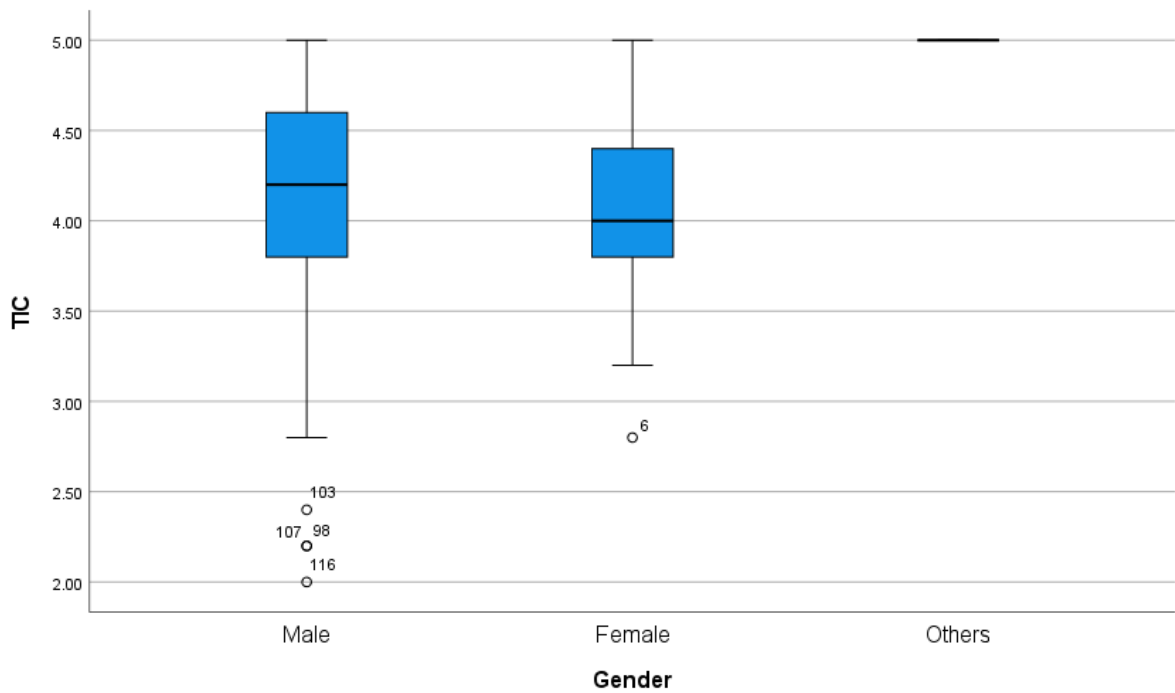
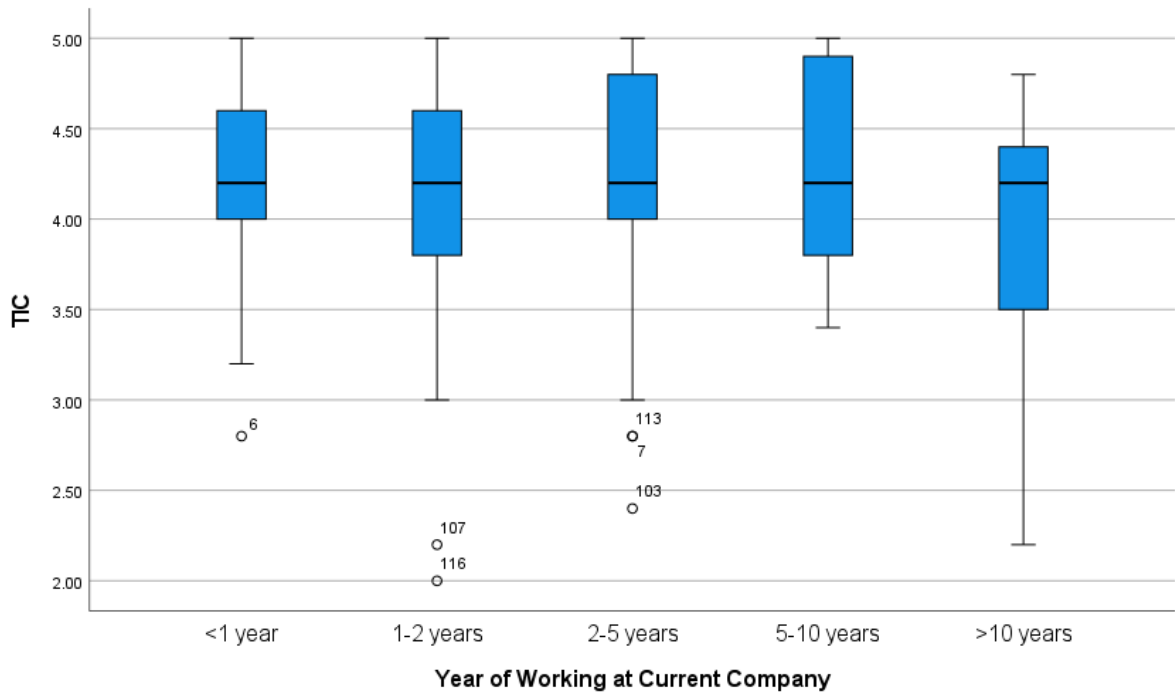**Appendix 8: Years of Working - Employee Relations Boxplot**
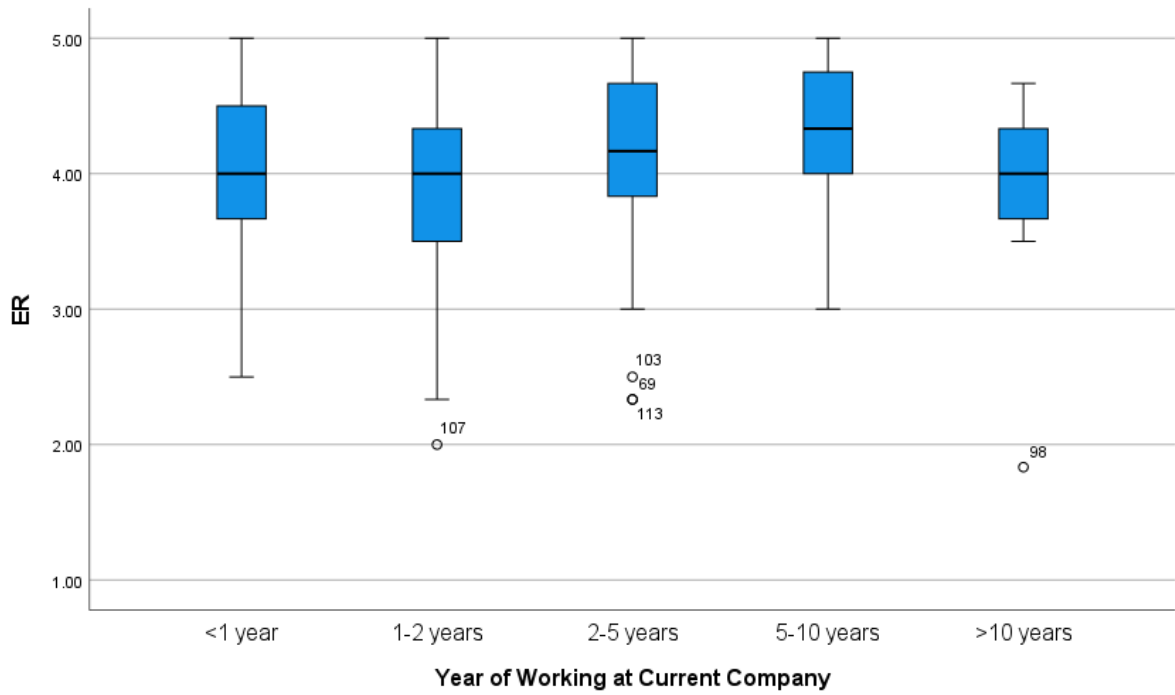
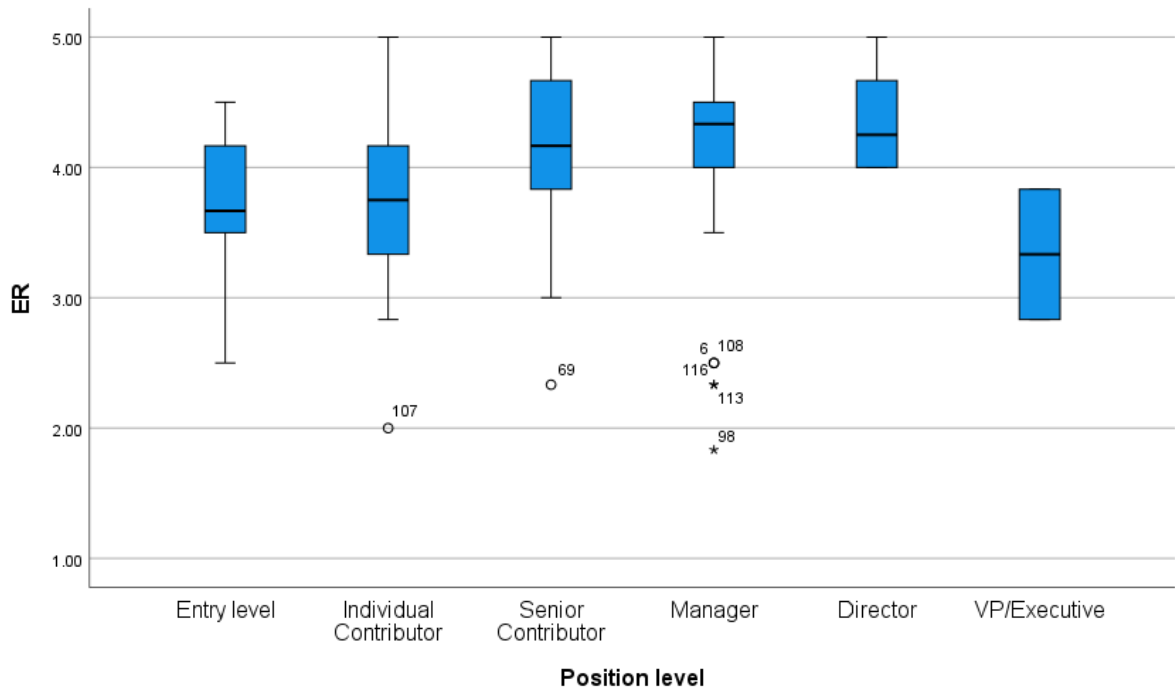**Appendix 9: Years of Working - Job Satisfaction Boxplot**
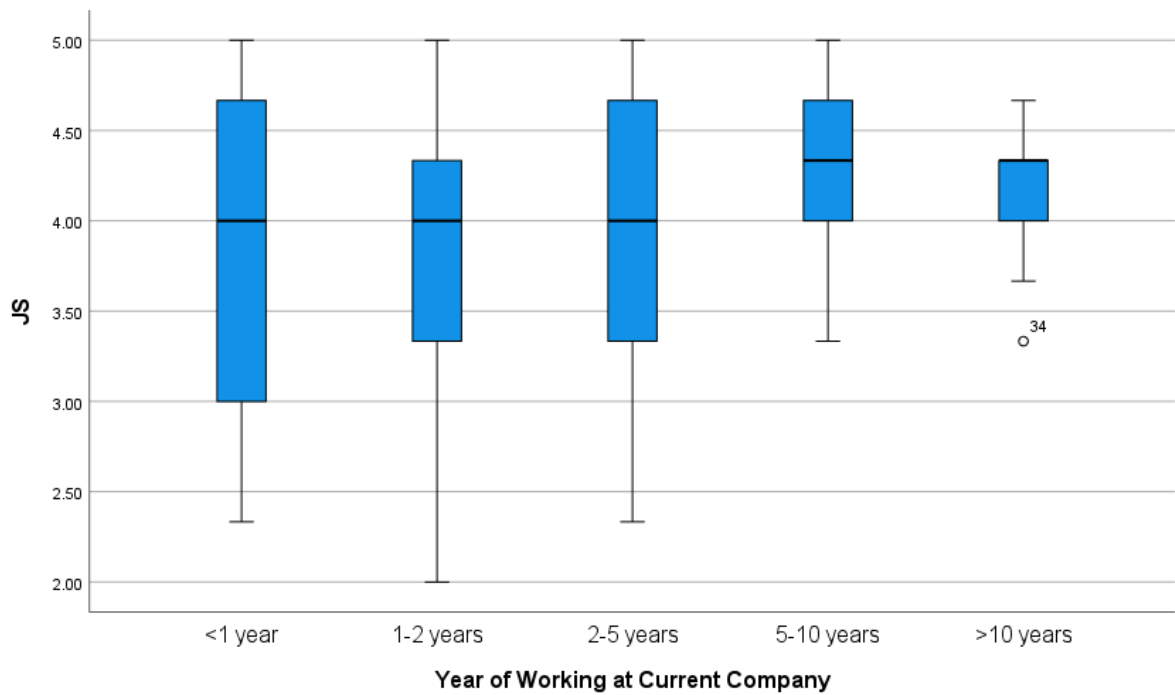
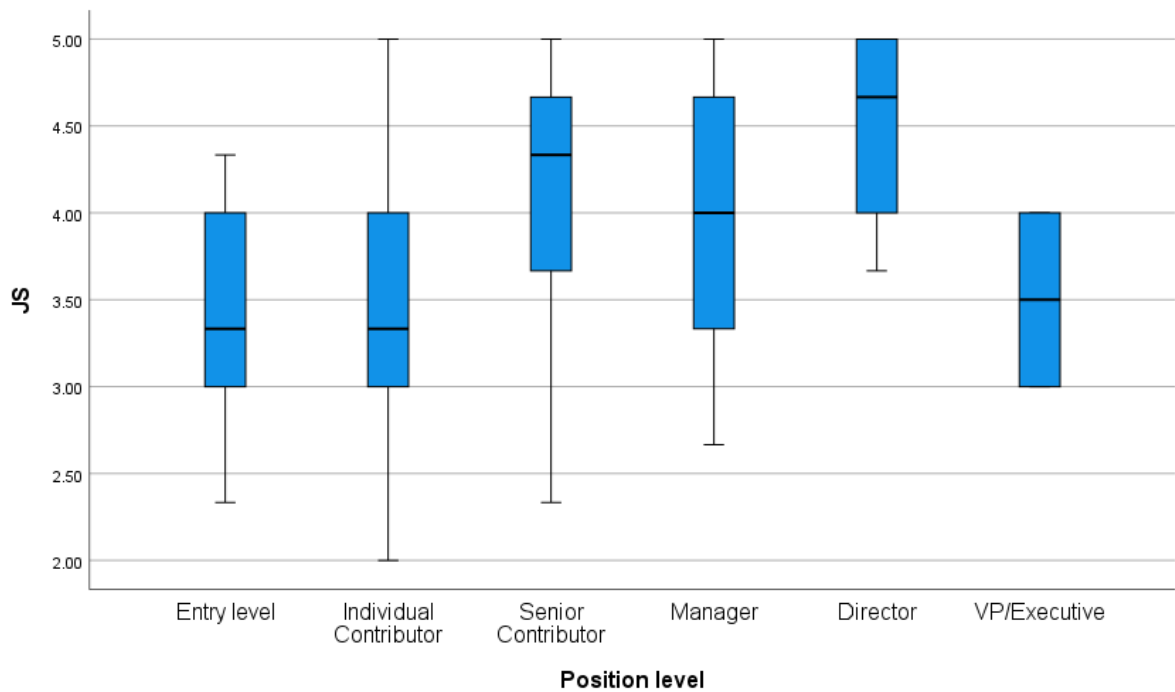**Appendix 10: Years of Working - Trust in Managers Boxplot**
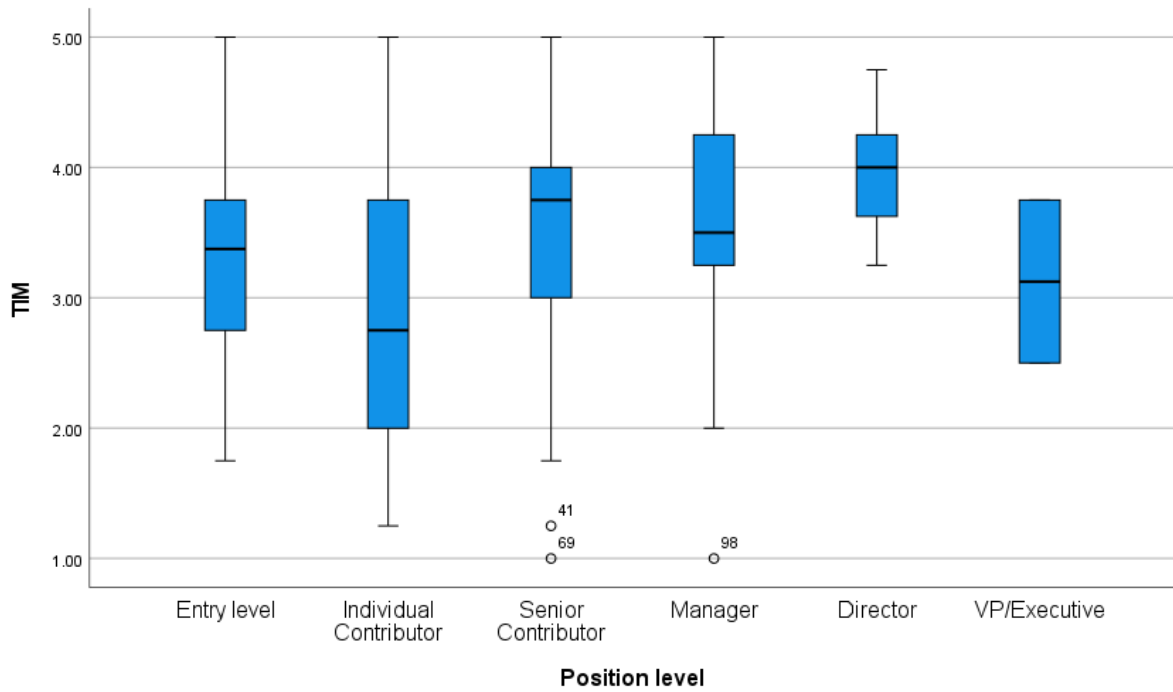

Appendix 11: Years of Working - Trust in Colleagues Boxplot

Appendix 12: Position - Employee Relations Boxplot
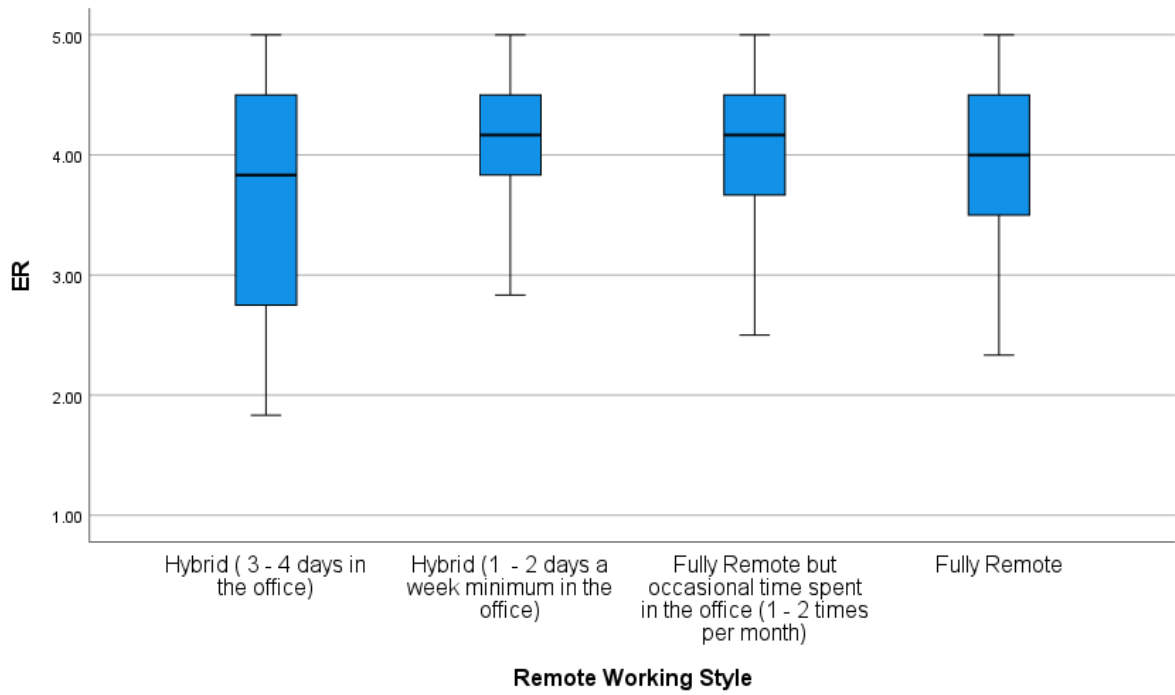

Appendix 13: Position - Job Satisfaction Boxplot

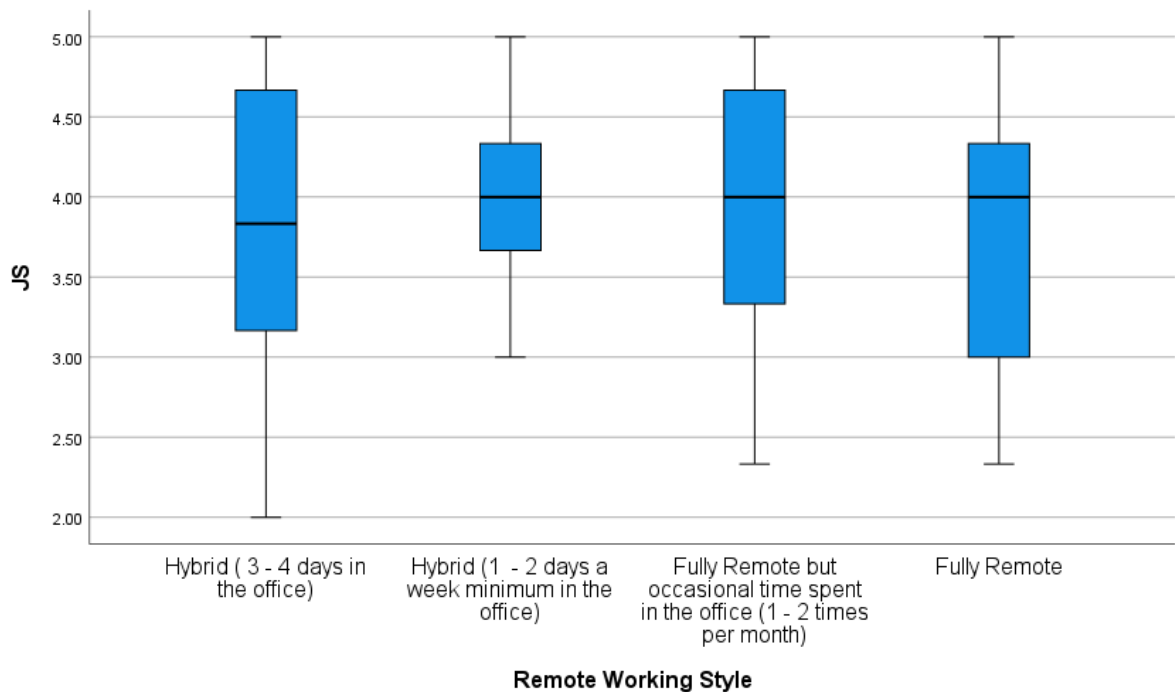**Appendix 14: Position - Trust in Managers Boxplot**

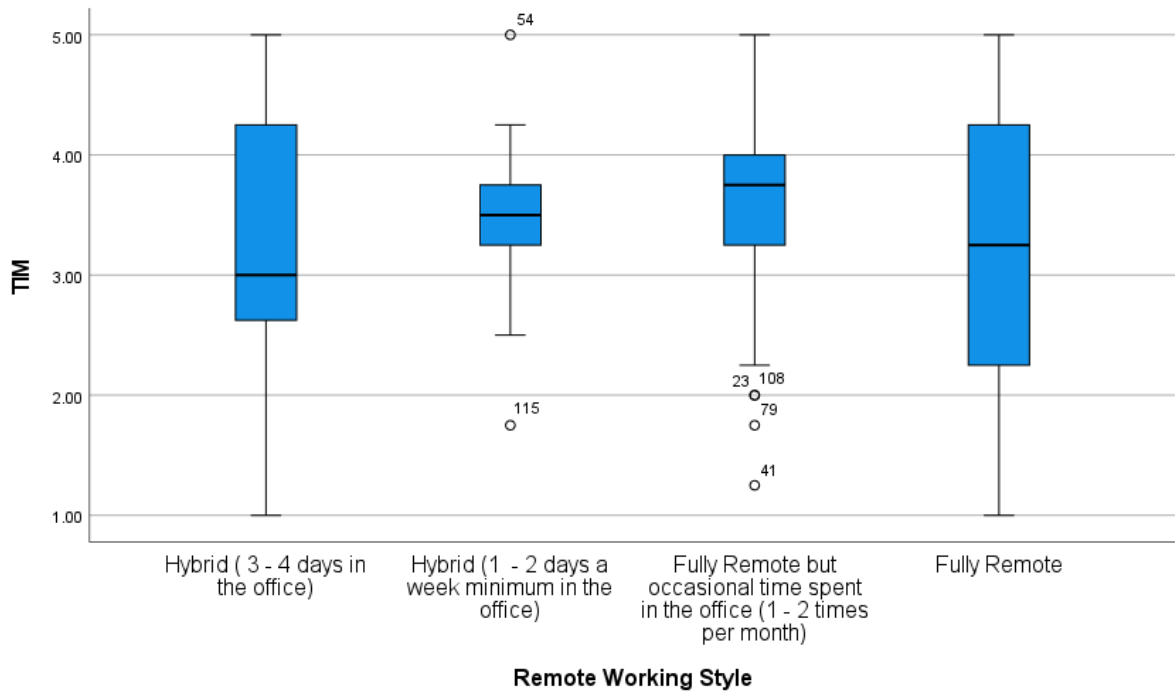**Appendix 15: Position - Trust in Colleagues Boxplot**
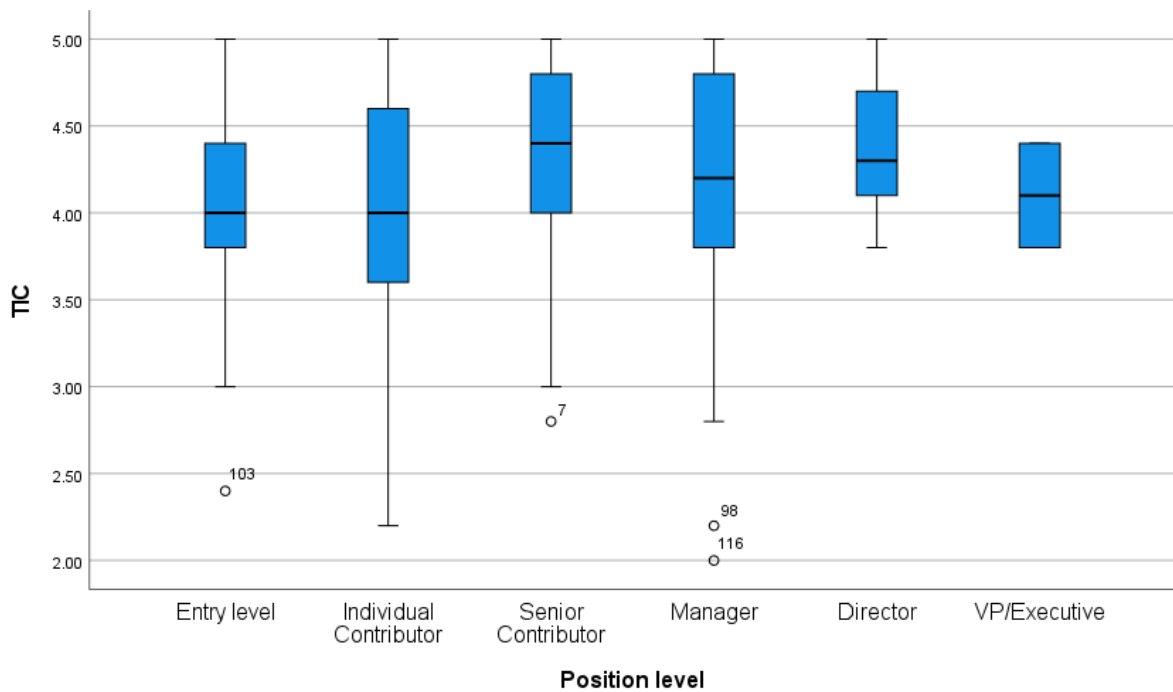
Appendix 16: Remote Working Style - Employee Relations Boxplot

Appendix 17: Remote Working Style - Job Satisfaction Boxplot

Appendix 18: Remote Working Style - Trust in Managers Boxplot

Appendix 19: Remote Working Style - Trust in Colleagues Boxplot