AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE WORK STRUCTURE AND JOB SATISFACTION AFTER THE COMPULSORY FULL RETURN-TO-OFFICE FOR IT WORKERS BASED IN DUBLIN

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Abstract

In the wake of a global pandemic that redefined how and where we work, many IT professionals found unexpected value in the flexibility of remote work: more time with family, fewer hours lost to commuting, and the comfort of working from their own space. But as the world began to stabilise, tech giants like Amazon and X reversed course, mandating a full return to the office. This research aims to investigate the impacts of mandatory return-to-office policies on work structure and job satisfaction among IT workers in Dublin. Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model and using a qualitative case study approach, the research draws on the lived experiences of employees who navigated the journey from office to remote work and back again, investigating how the compulsory return to office has affected work structure, job demands, available resources, and overall job satisfaction. The findings revealed that while workers appreciated the structure and social interactions of in-office work, they also struggled with commuting stress, diminished flexibility, and a disconnect between workplace expectations and personal needs. Many felt their well-being had taken a back seat in the push to reoccupy physical spaces, which directly impacted their job satisfaction. By shedding light on how IT workers perceive and adapt to enforced workplace shifts, this study offers timely insights for organisations aiming to balance operational goals with employee well-being in a post-pandemic world.

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List of Abbreviations

ICT - Information and Communication Technology

IT – Information Technology

HSE - Health Service Executive

STD - Self-determination theory

WFH – Work from home

WHO - World Health Organisation

1   Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of how the COVID-19 pandemic transformed work arrangements, with a particular focus on the technology sector. It highlights the relevance of examining mandatory return-to-office policies to better understand the current work structures experienced by employees. Additionally, the chapter outlines the research objectives and provides a roadmap for the structure and content of the subsequent chapters.

1.1   Background and Context

Although not a new concept, working from home (WFH) saw widespread adoption by technology companies during the Covid-19 global pandemic. The Irish government, in line with guidelines from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Health Service Executive (HSE), recommended that non-essential workers work from home to maintain physical distancing and prevent the virus' spread. These critical measures aiming at curbing the spread of the virus and protecting vulnerable populations, forced many workers in non-essential sectors to transition to remote work (Fana et al., 2020).The transition from a full-time office based model was facilitated by the suitability of some job designs, especially prominent in sectors such as finance and technology, as most of these employees have knowledge-based tasks, minimal face-to-face interactions and accentuated autonomy (Bailey and Kurland 2002). Typically, companies within these industries already possessed the necessary infrastructure and resources to support remote working arrangements even before the Covid-19 global pandemic, which explains why these sectors allowed businesses in Ireland to mitigate the financial impacts of the pandemic and maintain productivity. 9 million workers had their work model migrated to some sort of WFH arrangement across the world, representing for Irish employees an increase from 23% to 80% (Stefaniec et al., 2022; Bridi et al., 2024).

The widely adoption of the WFH model brought awareness to benefits described by Rupietta and Beckmann (2017) where employees started experiencing much better work life balance as they have flexible working hours. The model allows employees to alternate work tasks with personal tasks, leaving the freedom to set a schedule as they wish to accommodate both duties. Additionally, as commuting to the office was not a requirement anymore, individuals in Dublin opted to buy or rent houses away from rental pressure zones, where usually most of the offices are located, to escape from the Irish housing crisis (Stefaniec et al., 2022). This trend was observed by Hearne (2021), that suggested that the reallocation occurred because the Irish capital became unaffordable to buy or rent for middle-income earners. To mitigate the gap between the office and the residential infrastructure, workers invested resources to improve residential environmental factors like working comfort, facilities and information and communication technologies, building a proper work infrastructure at home (Tleuken et al., 2022).

Years after Covid-19 forced an abrupt transition from onsite work to remote work, some organisations are now implementing return-to-office policies, summoning employees back to the office, ending an era of remote and hybrid working. Corporate giants like Amazon, X,

JPMorgan and AT&T have imposed policies to enforce employees to return the office, abandoning remote and hybrid models (Jones, 2025). This study will explore the changes in the work structure after the compulsory full return-to-office for IT workers based in Dublin and how employees perceive it.

1.2   Rationale for Study

During the Covid-19 global pandemic and first years after, a prominent number of studies focused on the impact of working remotely. Precisely on how employees would manage the boundaries between work and personal life (Choudhury et al, 2019), feelings of loneliness and disconnection from colleagues (Wang et al., 2021), lack of social interaction and face-to-face communication (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010) and workplace culture and team cohesion (Lee and Lee, 2016). However, reviewing the existing literature led this research to conclude that not many studies attempt to explore the opposite direction. The Covid-19 pandemic drove a large-scale workforce transformation, representing a significant shift in work and personal life patterns (Allen et al., 2013; Bloom et 2015; Choudhury et al., 2019; Awada et al., 2021; Bridi et al., 2024). After years working remotely, employees are requested to return to the office. As more corporate giants are changing corporate policies to revert the working model to an in-person model, followed by a growing number of other companies, it is not clear the psychodynamics of work that employees will encounter after a mandatory return to office policy.

Understanding these changes and their impacts on these workers is crucial as it affects both organisational productivity and employee well-being, while also having broader implications for urban development and housing markets as employees may want to live close to the workplace to reduce the commuting time.

1.3   Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of the research is to assess the changes on the work structure employees faced when returning to the office, assess if it has impacted the job demands and resources, and measure the current job satisfaction. The objectives of the research are:

1. To evaluate the work structure after the transition to in-person model.

2. To examine the perception and behaviour of workers towards in-person model.

3. To distinguish and portray the points of interest and drawbacks of in-person model based on workers perceptions.

4. To explore and prescribe the practices that companies can implement for fruitful implementation of the in-person model.

1.4 Research Questions

What is the impact on the work structure and job satisfaction after mandatory return to office?

Research sub-questions

1. What are the benefits and disadvantages associated with the return to office?

2. What is the attitude of employees towards in-person work?

1.5 Structure of the Dissertation

The intention of this segment is to guide the reader through the structure of the research. The dissertation consists of 5 chapters, beginning with an introduction that sets the context for the research. The literature review chapter provides an understanding of the subject covered by the research. It then presents the applied methodology, followed by the analysis and discussions. The research ends with a chapter providing the conclusion and recommendations:

Chapter 1: Introduction: This initial chapter provides an overview of the research, giving background context to the reader, which justifies the relevance of the research. Additionally, this chapter also set the objectives of the research and which questions will be answered by the end of the thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: This chapter will present a review of the relevant literatures to give the reader the basic understanding of traditional work arrangements, specifically around in-person, remote and hybrid systems. The chapter will introduce the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, the framework that will later be used to correlate how the organisational structure can influence employee well-being, motivation, and performance.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology: This chapter discusses the methodology that is used to fulfil the objectives of this study. The reader will understand the research philosophy, design, and which methods will be used to collect relevant data to be further analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Discussion: This chapter is devoted to present the collected data, analyse the findings and discuss the results. The researcher will critically compare the findings with previous literature.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendation: The chapter covers the conclusion of this study and provides a comprehensive list of recommendations. The chapter also covers possible next steps of a future research.

This chapter has established the context of how COVID-19 led to widespread adoption of remote work, particularly in the technology sector, and how major companies are now reversing this trend through mandatory return-to-office policies. It also baselined the research aim to understand the impacts of the return-to-office transition on work structure and job satisfaction through examining the benefits and drawbacks of returning to office, employee attitudes and employee perception around well-being, motivation and performance.

2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review has been conducted reviewing appropriate literature relevant to the area of study. This chapter will examine the literature around the concept of in-person, remote and hybrid work systems. Lastly, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model will be covered as this is the theory that will ground the study.

2.1 In-Person Work System

The in-person work system refers to a traditional employment arrangement where employees perform their job duties within the company's physical facilities (Amadeja Lamovšek et al., 2024). This model has been the predominant work structure for most organisations before the rise of remote and hybrid work models (Allen, Golden and Shockley, 2015; Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). Allen et al. (2013) argues that in-person work fosters collaboration and communication, crucial components for innovation, problem-solving, and building company culture. Choudhury et al. (2019) highlight the idea that in-person work systems can also facilitate deeper mentorship and professional development as the model enables face-to-face supervisor support and networking opportunities with colleagues. Complementing the idea of a more structured mentorship and supervision, Hislop et al. (2018) argue other benefits such as informal learning opportunities through observation and spontaneous interactions, which are difficult to replicate in remote environments, also suggesting that these casual learning opportunities contribute to skill acquisition and career progression, which is particularly valuable for junior employees or those new to an organisation. Bloom et al. (2015) seems to be aligned with Hislop et al. (2018) idea that face-to-face interaction can lead to more spontaneous conversations, but also adds to the list of face-to-face interactions other benefits like idea generation and quicker problem-solving due to immediate feedback. Focusing on performance control, Thompson & Prottas (2006) argue that it is often easier to manage employee performance in an in-person setting because it is a structured and observable environment. Additionally, Perry-Smith and Blum (2000) go further suggesting that the employee presence in the office brings greater visibility, accountability and social pressure to perform, which has potential to improve productivity and reduce absenteeism. This idea is questioned by Sewell and Taskin (2015), who argue

that increased monitoring may lead to feelings of surveillance and stress, potentially undermining psychological well-being, in turn, leading to negative productivity impacts.

Another benefit of the in-person model is a well-established office space with optimal physical setup, designed to give to the employee adequate ergonomics and equipment to boost productivity (Brand, 2008; Karakolis and Callaghan, 2014). Awada et al. (2021) highlight that the lack of a comfortable workstation with adjustable desk and chair to prevent back and joints pain and multiple and adjustable monitor screen compromise the employee's performance. Arshad et al. (2024) include to the list of in-personal model advantages certain aspects of IT infrastructure such as high-speed internet, network reliability, printers, security, data privacy and faster access to IT support when needed. Bernstein and Turban (2018) and Sundstrom et al. (1994) cover a less tangible level, arguing that physical office spaces themselves can influence employee creativity and well-being, also suggesting that thoughtfully designed work environments that incorporate natural light, open spaces, and areas for collaboration positively affect mood and cognitive functioning. However, poorly designed or overcrowded offices can have the opposite effect, increasing distractions and reducing concentration (Kim & de Dear, 2013). Knight and Haslam (2010) correlate the physical office space with the organisation culture, arguing that the physical workspace itself conveys cultural messages through its design and layout. Thoughtfully designed offices spaces that include collaborative areas and visible representations of organisational values can strengthen employee engagement and foster a sense of belonging. This is acknowledged by Kirkman et al. (2016) who supports the idea that work environments are crucial for reinforcing organisational culture because it fosters direct and nuanced communication that strengthens the company values, norms, and identity. The workplace serves as a physical stage where cultural artifacts (e.g. office layout, dress code, logos, and ceremonies) visibly communicate the organisation's priorities and expectations (Martin, 2002). As example, open-plan offices can give the idea of a place that foster collaboration and transparency, whereas hierarchical office layouts may give the perception of authority structures and status. Through daily participation in such environments, employees learn what behaviours are rewarded or discouraged, which shapes their attitudes and work practices (Zerella, von Treuer and Albrecht, 2017). However, Cameron and Green (2020) articulate that organisations must avoid allowing entrenched cultural norms to become barriers to inclusion or adaptability. Sustaining a dynamic and inclusive culture demands continuous effort, which is facilitated by the depth of in-person interactions.

The in-person work model also brings some other challenges. As noted by Chung et al. (2020), the most common disadvantage, commonly associated with higher stress and lower job satisfaction, is the burden of commuting. Additionally, the rigidity of the in-person model can negatively impact work-life balance, contributing to burnout and higher turnover rates (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Highly structured in-person settings can impact employees perception of autonomy, which has potential to decrease motivation and job satisfaction if employees feel lacking the required autonomy to perform their job (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Gajendran and Harrison (2007) cite an association between highly structured environments and reduced autonomy, which seems to be more relaxed when comparing to remote work settings. The perception of less autonomy may come from the idea that in-person environments have increased supervision, fixed schedules, and rigid workplace protocols, which can limit employees' ability to decide how and when to carry out their tasks, impacting the perception of autonomy and empowerment. Green (2004) contributes highlighting that these settings can contribute to role overload and work intensification, as employees may find it difficult to disconnect from work during office hours, especially when office norms promote long hours or presenteeism. This can lead to negative health outcomes, including stress-related illnesses and burnout. The boundary theory, presented by Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000), argue against this thinking, suggesting that each person occupies multiple roles (e.g., worker, parent, student), and these roles exist separate within different domains (e.g., work, home).

2.2   Remote Work System

The remote work system, which got popularity and largely adoption during the COVID-19 pandemic, consists of employees performing their job duties outside of the traditional office environment, often from home (Barrero, Bloom and Davis, 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Smite et al., 2022). Flexibility is often listed as one of the primary benefits of remote work (Barrero, Bloom and Davis, 2021; Smite et al., 2022). This happens because employees can often design their work schedules to better accommodate personal life demands, which will lead to an improvement in work-life balance (Choudhury et al., 2019). The model will also allow employees to avoid long commutes, which can reduce stress and increase overall productivity (Bloom et al., 2015). Kelliher & Anderson (2010) agree to that, proposing that

remote work can lead to higher employee satisfaction and retention rates, also mentioning that employees with the option to work remotely report greater job satisfaction and are more likely to remain with their employers. This is potentialized when organisations implement robust communication tools and provide employees with the necessary resources and autonomy (Choudhury et al., 2019). As a counterpoint, Golden & Veiga (2005) argue that employee engagement and motivation can be negatively impact because remote workers may struggle with reduced visibility to managers, leading to feelings of being overlooked or undervalued, which can decrease motivation and job satisfaction. This is endorsed by Cooper and Kurland (2002), that noted that the absence of informal workplace interactions reduces opportunities for social recognition and relationship building, both of which are important for sustaining engagement.

Another benefit of remote work is its potential to widen the talent pool as this kind of work arrangement enable organisations to transcend traditional geographical limitations, allowing them to access a broader and more diverse talent pool than would be possible with solely in-person roles (Bloom et al., 2015). By eliminating the need for physical relocation or commuting, employers can recruit candidates from different cities, regions, or even countries, thus greatly expanding the scope of potential hires (Waizenegger et al., 2020). This geographical flexibility is particularly important in competitive labour markets or specialised fields where local talent supply is limited (Choudhury et al., 2019). Remote work allows organisations to tap into underutilised labour markets, including rural areas or regions with lower living costs, which can also lead to cost savings and improved workforce diversity (Morganson et al., 2010). Moreover, the remote work arrangement can foster diversity and inclusion as it enables groups that may face barriers to traditional office-based roles, such as caregivers, people with disabilities, or those who prefer flexible schedules due to personal circumstances to be part of the workforce (Shockley and Allen, 2012). By removing geographical constraints, the representation of different cultural backgrounds in the workforce tends to be more varied and access to job opportunities become more equitable (Lister and Harnish, 2011). Furthermore, companies benefit from the cognitive diversity that a geographically dispersed workforce offers, as diverse teams are linked to greater creativity, innovation, and problem-solving capabilities (Shin et al., 2012). The ability to source talent globally can therefore enhance organisational adaptability and competitive advantage in a rapidly changing business environment (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

The remote work model brings its own challenges. One prominent issue is the potential for social isolation. This is cited by Golden (2006), who brings the idea that employees experience feelings of loneliness and detachment from their colleagues, which can be harmful for team cohesion and organisational culture. The absence of face-to-face interactions between employees can also hinder informal communication, which Mann & Holdsworth (2003) see as an important player for knowledge sharing and innovation. Waizenegger et al. (2020) and Olson & Olson (2000) note that remote work can lead to communication barriers because remote workers usually are heavily dependent on digital communication tools, which may cause misunderstandings due to the lack of non-verbal cues, delayed responses, and technology glitches, potentially impairing collaboration and trust among team members. Gibson and Gibbs (2006) complement this idea arguing that these communication difficulties can be exacerbated in globally distributed teams where cultural differences and time zone variations further complicate synchronous interactions. This has a potential to impact the career development and visibility as remote employees may have fewer informal opportunities to network and build relationships with key decision-makers, potentially hindering their access to promotions and career advancement (Golden, 2006; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). The lack of "water cooler" moments can reduce the flow of mentoring and sponsorship vital for professional growth (Hislop et al., 2018). Another key concern with remote work is maintaining a healthy work-life boundary. While remote work provides flexibility, it can also obscure the boundaries between personal and professional life, resulting in overwork and burnout (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). The absence of a clear boundary between home and work can make it challenging for employees to disconnect, often resulting in heightened stress levels. While remote work is often praised for granting employees greater control over their schedules, some employees may experience increased self-imposed pressure to be constantly available and productive, resulting in work intensification and stress (Mazmanian et al., 2013). The culture of always be available can undermine the psychological benefits that flexible working arrangements aim to provide (Choudhury et al., 2019). Cascio & Shurygailo (2008) highlight that the "always-on" culture has a relation with the performance management gap for remote workers, as it becomes harder monitoring employees' progress and maintain productivity levels, especially if employees are dispersed across different time zones. When employees are dispersed geographically and operate outside of a shared physical workspace, managers often struggle to monitor work progress effectively and ensure accountability without micromanaging, which can harm trust and morale (Breuer et al., 2016). Due to the lack of

visibility into employees' daily activities, making it harder to assess effort and productivity accurately, employees can feel pressured to be constantly available in order to be perceived as productive and engaged (Knardahl and Christensen, 2021; Mdhluli, 2025).

The required infrastructure for a success WFH experience is also an important topic. Nyathani (2023) highlights that the shift to a remote work model requires essential set of tools and technologies to maintain uninterrupted productivity, engagement and operational efficiency. These include both technical and organisational elements, all aimed at providing employees with the tools, security, and support they need to work effectively from home. To mention some, stable and high-speed internet connection is mandatory for remote work activities as it is crucial for activities such as video conferencing, file sharing, and cloud-based collaboration tools (Arshad et al., 2024). Hardware and devices also play a key role in the employee productivity. Most of cases the employer will provide the basics, which can vary from merely a laptop/desktop equipped with sufficient processing power, RAM, and storage to handle work applications, to other devices such as a second monitor, keyboard, mouse, printers and others. This variety can impact employee productivity. For instance, Gallagher et al. (2019) suggests that a second screen can boost productivity by allowing users to have more open applications at once, reducing the time spent switching between windows and applications. This can improve task-switching speed and help in more efficient handling of complex tasks, also noted by Burruss et al. (2021) and Amir et al. (2021). One concern related to the infrastructure lies on data security and privacy. Employees accessing sensitive company information from home networks or personal devices may unintentionally expose organisations to cybersecurity risks (Whitty et al., 2024). Ensuring robust IT security policies and employee training becomes critical but challenging when workforces are dispersed (Evangeline, 2025).

2.3 Hybrid Work System

The hybrid work model is a flexible arrangement that blends remote and in-person work. The arrangement can take various forms, from employees working a few days at the office and the rest from home, to more flexible models that permit full autonomy over work locations (Choudhury et al., 2019). Hybrid work has become increasingly popular in recent years, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic as organisations seek to balance the benefits

of remote flexibility with the advantages of in-person collaboration. According to a report published by the McKinsey Global Institute (2023), the top 3 reasons for employees to work from office are to work with their team, to comply with the employer's policy and to increase productivity. Work with the team indeed seems to be a common ground from a variety of researches (Olson and Olson, 2000; Leonardi, Treem and Jackson, 2010; Bartel, Wrzesniewski and Wiesenfeld, 2012; Gibbs, Sivunen and Boyraz, 2017; Wang et al., 2021) because its related to employees valuing face-to-face interaction for spontaneous conversations, teamwork, and relationship building, which can be harder to replicate remotely. The second reason, which states that employees work from the office to comply with employer's policy is exactly the object of study of this research. Organisational policies often compel employees to return to or remain in the office despite their preferences (Allen et al., 2013; Moens et al., 2021). The same McKinsey Global Institute (2023) report also mentions the top 3 reason for employees to work from home, which are to save commuting time, to increase productivity and to save money. Increasing productivity was quoted by both groups within the top 3 reasons for work from home or from the office, suggesting that the work arrangement that employees feel more productivity differs by individual or task. Factors previously discussed such as clear work life boundaries, access to resources and technology, supervision and feedback may have different impacts on employees' productivity perception, which could affect their preference for working remotely or on-site. Regarding the idea of employees perceiving the elimination of commuting burden as the main benefit from the WFH model, this aligns with other researches (Berberat, et al., 2021; Faber et al., 2023; Caros et al., 2023; Waldrep et al., 2024) that also highlighted that a primary motivation for teleworking is the avoidance of daily commutes, which contribute to time savings and reduce physical and mental exhaustion. Employees value this time recovery as it improves overall job satisfaction, motivation, and often free time to be spent towards family care, hobbies, or rest, fostering greater well-being (Aksoy et al., 2023; Mdhluli, 2025). Similar idea goes for save money. Recent studies suggest that remote working facilitate employees to move to less costly regions and eliminate commuting costs, which can be the largest time and cost consuming expenses (Beno, 2021; Caros et al., 2023; Woźniak-Jęchorek, Kuźmar and Bole, 2024). Some employees are even willing to accept a pay reduction to work from home, believing the savings with housing and commuting will equalise the reduction in the salary (Mas and Pallais, 2016; Nagler, Johannes Rincke and Winkler, 2024; Cullen, Pakzad-Hurson and Perez-Truglia, 2025).

Research conducted by Gallup (2025) found that employees with flexible work options experience greater job satisfaction and were more likely to stay with their employer longer. This happens because these employees can optimise their work environment to suit their productivity preferences, whether at home or in the office. Hybrid work also allows organisations to optimise office space, lowering overhead expenses related to large office spaces management, including rent, utilities, and supplies. Companies can scale back their physical office requirements, creating a more cost-effective environment while maintaining the flexibility to accommodate employees in the office when necessary (Choudhury et al., 2019). This flexibility is particularly beneficial for organisations that have employees in multiple time zones or those who require specific collaboration days (Brynjolfsson et al., 2021).

By combining advantages and disadvantages from in-person and remote work arrangements, the hybrid has its own challenges. While it offers many benefits, including flexibility, cost savings, it also poses challenges related to communication, technology, and management. To harness the full potential of hybrid work, organisations must address these challenges through investment in infrastructure, effective leadership, and an inclusive culture that values both remote and in-office contributions (Hopkins and Bardoel, 2023; Rupcic, 2024; Hincapie and Costa, 2024).

2.4 Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

Developed by Demerouti et al. (2001), the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model is a widely adopted framework in organisational psychology that correlates how the organisational structure can influence employee well-being, motivation, and performance. The model suggests that two key categories of work characteristics, job demands and job resources, are key factors that dictates employees' experiences in the workplace, triggering at different levels outcomes like stress, burnout, engagement, and performance (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Bakker & Demerouti (2007) define job demands as elements of a job that demand ongoing physical or mental effort, often resulting in physiological or psychological strain if not effectively managed. The demands can take many forms, including heavy workloads, tight deadlines, emotional strain, and significant responsibilities. These are often categorised into three areas: cognitive demands, which involve concentration, decision-making, and problem-solving; emotional demands, which require managing feelings during

interactions with clients or colleagues; and physical demands, such as extended periods of standing or lifting heavy materials (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Excessive job demands have been linked to burnout, exhaustion, and disengagement, with detrimental effects on employee health and performance (Bakker et al., 2008).

Conversely, Bakker & Demerouti (2007) define job resources as physical, psychological, social, or organisational features of a work environment that enable employees to accomplish their tasks, alleviate job demands, and promote personal growth and development. Bao et al. (2022) and Chen (2024) argue that these resources act as buffers against stress and are crucial for fostering motivation, engagement, and productivity, including as example coworker support from colleagues, supervisors, or mentors that provides emotional or practical support, autonomy to control how they perform their tasks, constructive feedback to help employees gauge their progress and improve, and opportunities for skill development, having access to training, career advancement, and skill-building resources. The availability of job resources is directly linked to positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, engagement, and retention. Furthermore, resources can mitigate the adverse effects of high job demands, enhancing employees' ability to cope with stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Another contributing factor is the role of personal resources such as self-efficacy and optimism in the workplace. These personal resources can complement job resources, helping to keep higher motivation and job satisfaction (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). LePine, Podsakoff & LePine (2005) criticise the JD-R model as they argue that the model lacks clear boundaries between demands and resources because the distinction between these can be ambiguous. For example, social support is typically viewed as a resource but can sometimes become a demand when it requires emotional effort. Xanthopoulou et al. (2007) adds to that highlighting that the JD-R model tends to treat demands and resources as universally affecting employees, without sufficiently accounting for individual differences such as personality, resilience, or coping strategies, which influence responses to job stressors.

Continuing exploring the JD-R model, the model defines 2 core process paths:
The Health Impairment Process: When job demands are high and job resources are insufficient, employees often experience strain that can impact their health and well-being (Bakker, Xanthopoulou and Demerouti, 2022; Amiri et al., 2024). Excessive job demands can relate to negative outcomes such as burnout, emotional exhaustion, and physical health

issues. When employees are constantly exposed to high demands without adequate resources to cope, their mental and physical well-being will likely suffer (Claes et al., 2023; Salvagioni et al., 2017). Chronic stress from job demands can deplete resources, causing burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and poor health (Maslach & Leiter, 1999). A research conducted by Bakker, Xanthopoulou and Demerouti (2022) found that employees experiencing high emotional demands without sufficient social support were more likely to report symptoms of burnout.

The Motivational Process: Job resources play a crucial role in driving motivation and engagement (Bakker, Demerouti and Sanz-Vergel, 2023). The motivational process highlights how job resources can enhance employee motivation, engagement, and performance. Job resources are particularly influential in fostering employees' intrinsic motivation and job engagement. When employees perceive that they have sufficient resources to accomplish their tasks, they are more likely to feel energised and committed to their work (De Braine and Roodt, 2011; Demerouti and Bakker, 2022). According to Bakker et al. (2008) and Galanakis and Tsitouri (2022), resources like social support and autonomy enhance factors as engagement and motivation, resulting in performance improvement and lowering the probability of turnover. In essence, while job demands have the potential to cause stress and health issues, job resources can foster positive work outcomes, creating a balance that promotes well-being and high performance. This dual pathway model helps organisations to understand the complex interaction between stress and motivation at the workplace. The JD-R model will then correlate high levels of work engagement with the employee's perception of high job resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Oppositely, negative experiences come from employee's perception of high job demands without adequate resources (Hakanen et al., 2008).
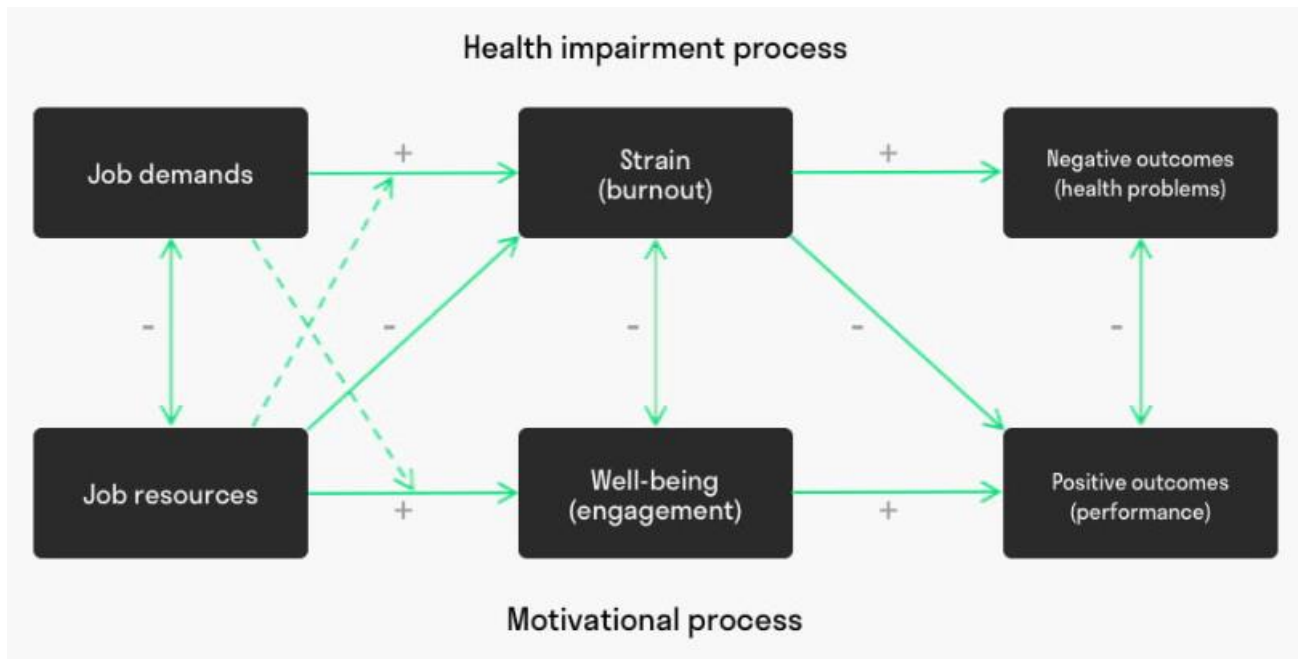
Figure 1: Health Impairment Process

Despite the limitations suggested by other authors (LePine, Podsakoff & LePine, 2005; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007), the JD-R model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how job characteristics influence employee well-being and performance. By focusing on both job demands and job resources, the model highlights the dynamic relationship between stress and motivation in the workplace. Organisations that recognise the importance of managing job demands while enhancing job resources can foster a healthier and more productive workforce (Galanakis and Tsitouri, 2022; Fadare et al., 2022; Li, Chen and Yuan, 2025; Seo, Rhee and Yoon, 2025). As workplaces continue to evolve, the JD-R model remains a critical tool for understanding the workplace scenario and developing interventions aimed at promoting employee well-being, reducing burnout, and optimising performance. This is precisely the rationale behind choosing the JD-R model for this research. As the mandatory return to the office reality is a little explored scenario in the literature due to the contemporaneity of the subject, having the first big companies announcing the mandatory RTO in the last couple of years (Jones, 2025), this research will leverage the JD-R model to distinguish between job demands (e.g., workload, emotional strain) and job resources (e.g., autonomy, support) based on the workforce transformation and personal life patterns imposed by the RTO, offering a balanced view of what contributes to employee stress versus motivation. As outcome, this research will propose practical interventions to foster employee well-being and improve performance, if necessary.

This chapter has examined three primary work systems: in-person, remote, and hybrid, highlighting their distinct characteristics, benefits, and challenges. It also covered the JD-R model, explaining job demands, job resources and its framework for understanding how these different work arrangements affect employee outcomes through two core processes: the health impairment process and the motivational process. It explained why this is the theoretical foundation that will guide the investigation of how mandatory return-to-office policies impact IT workers in Dublin, particularly focusing on why this valuable tool will be used for analysing how the organisational structure influences employee well-being, motivation, and performance.

3   Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Saunders et al. (2023) states the methodology research as a process conducted in a systematic way aiming to answer one or multiple questions. The process gives to the researcher principles, procedures, and techniques to collect, analyse, and interpret data. The methodology is critical because it provides the framework that guides the research process and ensures the validity and reliability of the results. The research starts defining an idea, which will be the base for the research question to be explored. The next step is to select the methodology which will be applied for answering the research question (Quinlan, 2011).

A clear methodology ensures the research is replicable and the results are credible (Creswell, 2009). This chapter outlines how the research was conducted and the applied approaches, methods and techniques.

3.1   Research Framework

This research was guided by the "Research Onion" framework proposed by Saunders et al. (2023). The research onion model is useful when the goal is to achieve a comprehensive and structured approach to designing the research strategy. It is ideal for complex research projects where multiple layers need to be carefully considered, from philosophical assumptions to data collection techniques. It guides researchers through stages such as research philosophy, approach, strategy, choices, time horizon, and techniques, helping ensure all key methodological decisions are systematically addressed (Saunders et al, 2023).
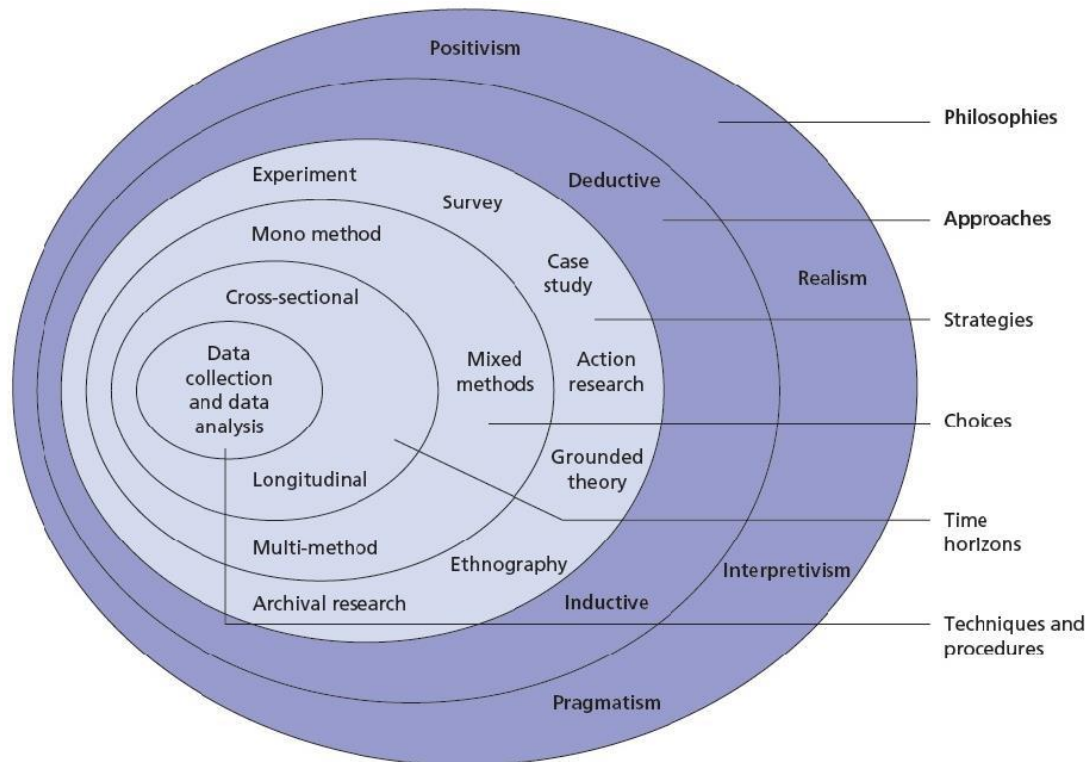
Figure 2: Research Onion Framework

Alternatives to Saunders' model like Creswell's Research Design Model (Creswell, 2009) and Maxwell Interactive Approach (Maxwell, 2013) were assessed, but the structured approach of Saunders' model seemed to be more suitable due to the clear guidance it gives through the research design process. This happens because the model breaks down the research design process into layers, making it easier to understand and communicate the methodology, accommodates various research philosophies, approaches, and strategies (Saunders et al., 2023). Last, Saunders' model is widely accepted, lending credibility to the methodology section (Bryman, 2016).

3.2   Research Philosophy

Saunders et al. (2023) describe research philosophy as the set of beliefs and assumptions about how data about a phenomenon should be gathered, analysed, and used. It underpins the researcher's worldview and influences the research design and methodology. The research philosophy encompasses three key components: ontology, which concerns the nature of reality; epistemology, which addresses the nature of the knowledge and how it can

be obtained; and axiology, which relates to the role of values in research (Saunders e al. 2023).

Saunder's model (2023) breaks the philosophy into four main possibilities:

Positivism: Rooted in natural sciences, positivism assumes reality is objective, fixed, and exists independently of human perception. The knowledge is measurable, observable, and derived from empirical facts. Researchers using this philosophy focus on quantifiable observations and often employ experiments and surveys (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2023).

Interpretivism: Based on the assumption that reality is socially constructed and subjective, it focuses on understanding meanings and experiences from the perspective of participants. Knowledge is co-created between researcher and participants through interaction and interpretation. It often uses qualitative methods such as interviews and case studies (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 1998; Saunders et al., 2023).

Realism: It acknowledges an objective reality but accepts that our understanding of it is influenced by perceptions and context. Knowledge is a result of the interaction between theory and observed reality, acknowledging social structures. It bridges positivism and interpretivism by recognising observable events and deeper underlying mechanisms (Bhaskar, 2013; Saunders et al., 2023).

Pragmatism: Reality is complex, pluralistic, and context-dependent. It focuses on practical outcomes and solutions rather than adhering to a single philosophical stance. Knowledge is judged by its practical application and usefulness; both objective and subjective knowledge are valued. It supports the use of mixed methods to best answer research questions (Morgan, 2007; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010; Saunders et al., 2023).

This research took an interpretivism approach. This seemed to be a good approach because the participants of the research had different posture facing the mandatory RTO. The researcher needed to understand the subjective meanings and social phenomena from the perspective of the involved participants (Bryman, 2016). Unlike positivism, which assumes an objective reality that can be measured, it was expected that the reality would differ by individual, socially constructed and subjective, which matches the interpretivism approach

(Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 1998; Saunders et al., 2023). Factors as proximity to the office, family situation, availability of public transports or parking spaces tend to affect the perspective of participants. These behaviours and meanings can vary depending on context, culture, and time, making findings more nuanced. Bryman (2016) suggests that researchers adopting the interpretivism philosophy aim to explore how individuals interpret their experiences and the meanings they assign to them, which is exactly what this research aimed to achieve. The researcher sought to build meaning through engagement with participants (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

3.3 Research Approach

Saunders et al. (2023) describe a research approach as the strategy or plan that integrates various elements of a study in a coherent and logical manner to effectively address the research problem. It is classified into 2 main approaches:

Deductive Approach: This approach begins with a theory or hypothesis and designs a research strategy to test it. It is associated with positivist philosophy and typically involves quantitative data collection and analysis (Saunders et al., 2023). Deductive research begins with general theories or principles and moves toward specific observations, aiming to confirm or refute theoretical propositions (Bryman, 2016).

Inductive Approach: Inductive research starts with observations or data collection, then develops patterns, themes, or theories based on the analysis (Saunders et al., 2023). It is often linked to interpretivist philosophy and qualitative research methods, moving from specific observations to broader generalisations or theory building (Creswell, 2009).

This research followed the inductive approach as this is better for exploring new phenomena or generating theory (Saunders et al., 2023). Deductive approach seems to be more suitable for testing hypotheses, which is not this research case.

3.4 Research Strategy

Saunders et al. (2023) define research strategy as the overall plan for answering the research question, which outlines how the research will be carried out. It is classified into seven main types:

Experiment: An experimental strategy tests causal relationships between variables under controlled conditions, often linked with quantitative research and positivist philosophy (Saunders et al., 2023).

Survey: Surveys are widely used to collect quantitative data from a large number of respondents, allowing for statistical analysis and generalisation (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2023).

Case Study: Case studies involve an in-depth investigation of a single case or multiple cases within a real-life context, suited for exploratory and explanatory research and often qualitative in nature (Yin, 2018; Saunders et al., 2023).

Action Research: This strategy involves a collaborative problem-solving process with participants and is used mainly in applied social sciences (Saunders et al., 2023).

Grounded Theory: Grounded theory seeks to develop a theory grounded in collected data, typically qualitative, and involves iterative data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2016).

Ethnography: Ethnographic research studies cultures and practices in natural settings, using participant observation and qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2023).

Archival Research: Uses existing records and documents as data sources, suitable for historical or contextual analysis (Saunders et al., 2023).

As this research wants to explore a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context (Yin, 2018) happening in a specific organization, case study research strategy seemed to be particularly suitable. Saunders et al. (2023) suggest case study research as ideal for when context such as organisational processes, individual behaviours, or social

dynamics are critical to understanding the phenomenon, which is the case of this research. Stake (1995) also argues that case study are a suitable strategy when studying contemporary real-world behaviour within organisational dynamics where the researcher cannot manipulate the variables involved in the study, unlike experiments.

The ethnography research strategy was also deeply assessed as this strategy aims to understand the culture, behaviours, values, and social interactions of a specific group from the inside (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2018). The researcher could potentially gather the data from a small targeted group, but the idea was abandoned because the researcher did not have proximity enough with the possible cohort of participants before the mandatory RTO, which could lead to poor results as the researcher would not have the base to compare the remote work with the RTO for each individual.

3.5   Research Choices

In Saunders et al. (2023) Research Onion framework, research choices refer to the decisions regarding the method or combination of methods used to collect and analyse data. It focuses on whether to use a single method or multiple methods during the research. It is classified into four main types:

Mono Method: Refers to the use of a single data collection technique and its associated analysis procedure, whether qualitative or quantitative (Saunders et al., 2023). For example, conducting only surveys or only interviews.

Mixed Methods: Mixed methods combine both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques within a single study to capitalise on the strengths of both approaches (Creswell, 2009; Saunders et al., 2023). This provides a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Multi-Method: This involves using more than one data collection technique within the same methodological approach. It is a mix that can combine multiple qualitative methods like interviews and focus groups, or multiple quantitative methods like surveys and experiments (Saunders et al., 2023).

Quantitative: Bryman (2016) defines the quantitative research as a structured data collection of a large sample size that will be later statistically analysed to create generalised results. It seeks to explain phenomena through the analysis of quantifiable variables, employing tools such as structured surveys, experiments, and statistical models (Muijs, 2010). Quantitative approaches are often used to test hypotheses, determine relationships between variables, and make generalizable inferences across populations (Neuman, 2014). Large sample sizes and standardized instruments are typical features of this methodology, ensuring reliability and replicability (Babbie, 2020).

Qualitative: Qualitative research holds that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the perspectives of individuals (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). This method seeks to understand meanings, processes, and experiences through rich, detailed data. Common techniques include semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and document analysis (Flick, 2023). Rather than generalizing to a population, qualitative research aims to provide in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena in specific contexts (Silverman, 2017).

Choosing the appropriate research choice depends on the research objectives, the nature of the research questions, resource availability, and the desired depth and breadth of data (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). Both quantitative and qualitative methods have distinct advantages and limitations. The choice between them should be guided by the research questions, objectives, and the nature of the phenomena being studied (Bryman, 2016). As this research aims to deeply understand the scenario that employees encountered after the mandatory RTO and their perception, the qualitative approach seemed to be the best choice. The quantitative approach would not give deeper understanding of the scenario, which would reduce the researcher ability of providing meaningful insights on how to improve the employee perception (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). Another aspect for choosing the qualitative method is the time constraints and the researcher limitation to find participants that fall under the research criteria, as quantitative research requires large sample size (Byrne, 2016). This research used a mono-method that allowed the researcher to go deep with a limited number of participants. Saunders et al. (2023) suggests that the qualitative mono-method aligns with interpretivist philosophy, focusing on understanding meanings and experiences, validating the researcher choice to use the mono method to conduct the research.

3.6 Research Time Horizon

In research design, time horizons refer to the timeframe within which data collection and analysis take place. Saunders et al. (2023) identify two main types of time horizons:

Cross-sectional Studies: Cross-sectional research entails gathering data at one specific moment or within a brief timeframe. It provides a "snapshot" of a particular phenomenon, population, or situation, making it suitable for descriptive or exploratory research (Saunders, 2023). It is often used when the researcher wants to identify relationships or patterns but not examine changes over time. Cross-sectional studies are relatively quicker and less costly compared to longitudinal studies.

Longitudinal Studies: Longitudinal research involves repeated observations or measurements over an extended period. This approach allows researchers to study changes, developments, or trends (Saunders et al., 2023). Longitudinal studies are essential when investigating cause-and-effect relationships or dynamics within a population.

As this research sought to understand a phenomenon at a specific time, had time and resources constraints and the nature of the phenomenon was best understood through a snapshot, this research took a cross-sectional approach.

3.7 Research Techniques and Procedures

The inner layer of Saunders et al. (2023) onion framework, discuss techniques and procedures as part of the research methodology process, focusing on the practical steps involved in collecting and analysing data. This stage translates the research design into actionable processes. The techniques are limited to tools or instruments used for data collection and analysis. On the other hand, procedures describe the systematic sequences or processes through which these techniques are applied in research (Flick, 2023).

Saunders et al. (2023) highlight 4 main collection techniques:

Surveys and Questionnaires: Structured tools to gather quantitative data, often used in cross-sectional or large-scale studies.

Interviews: Can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured, primarily used for qualitative data collection to gain deep insights.

- **Structured Interviews**: Byrman (2016) suggests that structured interviews are composed by a set of pre-determined, standardised questions asked in the same order and wording to every participant. There is little to no deviation from the interview schedule. It is ideal for quantitative or mixed-methods research when consistency across participants is need. it is suitable for large sample sizes.

- **Semi-Structured Interviews**: Semi-structured interviews use an interview guide with key themes or questions, but allow for flexibility in the order and wording. It is ideal to explore complex topics while maintaining some structure for studies focusing on attitudes, beliefs, or experiences (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Byrman (2016) complements suggesting using this approach when running case studies, phenomenological, or grounded theory research.

- **Unstructured Interviews:** Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggests that unstructured interviews are conversational, with no predetermined set of questions. The interviewer may begin with one broad question and allow the discussion to evolve naturally. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) complements suggesting this approach is suitable for ethnographic or narrative research designs when the topic is sensitive, complex, or poorly understood and the researcher wants to explore personal narratives or life histories.

Observation: Systematic recording of behaviours or events, useful for qualitative research.

Documentary and Archival Research: Use of existing documents or secondary data sources.

The effectiveness of research depends heavily on choosing appropriate techniques and applying procedures rigorously. This ensures the reliability and validity of data and enhances the credibility of research findings (Saunders et al, 2023).

Based on the research decisions taken so far, added to the time constraints and the researcher limitation to find suitable participants that attended the requirements associated with the mandatory RTO, the research took a qualitative approach relying on a semi-structured questionnaire. The researcher individually met all selected participants, explained

the research and sent a questionnaire that was anonymously answered by the participants. This approach was the most suitable because the researcher had close work relationship with the participants and the questionnaire covered sensitive questions around perception about their supervisor and job satisfaction. The questionnaire targeted a reduced number of participants, allowing the researcher to go deeper to understand the participants perspective associated with the mandatory return to office without compromise the quality of the results.

3.8 Data Collection

As previously discussed, an introductory interview followed by an anonymous questionnaire was the chosen data collection method because it created a combination of structure and flexibility, allowing the researcher to cover key themes while providing space for participants to elaborate and introduce new ideas (Kallio et al., 2016). To be eligible to participate in the interview, participants were required to match 4 main criteria:

1 – Having previously worked in an onsite or hybrid work arrangement with at least 3 days of the week in the office during the pre-COVID 19 pandemic
2 – Having worked full-time remote during the COVID 19 pandemic
3 – It is currently working in a full-time onsite work arrangement due to mandatory RTO
4 – Live and work in Dublin, Ireland

All the participants were selected by the researcher. There were two stages in the research: a face-to-face introductory meeting followed by an online survey sent by email. A consent form was also generated prior to participating in the survey (Appendix II). The interview was divided in four sections according to the objectives. Section 1 to section 4 were close-ended questions, using a Likert scale (Likert, 1932):

Section 1 – Demographics: This section collected demographic information about the participants, including age group, gender, current job role, time working within the current organisation, time working remotely or hybrid and time working from the office. Demographic data helps researchers interpret patterns and trends in participants' responses more accurately as it allows you to compare subgroups within your sample, such as age groups, gender identities, job roles, duration of remote work experience (Palinkas et al., 2015; Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2018). This is especially valuable in a Job Demands–

Resources (JD-R) model, where the impact of demands and resources might vary significantly between demographic groups (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

Section 2 – Job Demands: This section focused on the physical, psychological, and organisational aspects of work that require sustained effort. The interviewees answered 8 closed-ended questions.

Section 3 – Job Resources: This section explored the physical, social, and organisational supports that help achieve work goals and manage demands. The interviewees answered 12 closed-ended questions.

Section 4 – Job Satisfaction: This section focused on questions to measures overall satisfaction as influenced by job demands and resources. The interviewees answered 6 closed-ended questions.

Section 5 – Open-Ended Questions: This section focused on exploring qualitative insights into how demands and resources affect satisfaction. The interviewees answered 8 open-ended questions.

All survey question can be found in the appendix section (Appendix I). The questionnaire was designed based on the compilation of several academic references (M.A.J. Kompier and Kristensen, 2000; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Van den Broeck et al., 2008; Bakker et al., 2008; Creswell, 2014; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017), adapted to be relevant to the RTO topic. A paper-based pilot with one selected participant was run to test and refine the methods before the main data collection. The intention was to have an idea of the time to complete the questionnaire, confirm if the questions were clear and test whether the study design respects participant autonomy and comfort. The pilot did not lead to any significant change in the methodology. The main data collection period spanned from July 07, 2025 to July 16, 2025. The primary data for this study was collected through an online survey, which was created and administered using the EUSurvey platform (European Commission, 2025). When the target number of participants was achieved, the survey was closed and the responses were exported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, facilitating efficient organization and analysis of the dataset. This method was selected as the most suitable given the research objectives, available resources and the researcher substantial prior

experience using the tool for analytical tasks. Microsoft Excel enabled the researcher to sort, filter, and visualise data, as well as to identify trends and patterns through various charting and formatting tools.

3.9   Sample Size

Qualitative research aims to explore the depth and complexity of human experience, meaning-making, and social processes rather than generalize findings to a larger population, hence the focus is on quality of insight rather than quantity of data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who can provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). The sample consisted of 7 participants drawn from the technology sector that fulfilled the research criteria regarding transition from an in-person/hybrid model to a full-time remote and transitioning back to in-person model due to mandatory RTO, ensuring that participants could meaningfully contribute to the research questions. According to Mason (2010), qualitative studies often reach data saturation with relatively small samples, which is the point at which no new themes are emerging, particularly in homogeneous or focused studies. This means that a well-chosen group of 7 participants can be entirely sufficient for meaningful thematic analysis.

3.10 Data Analysis

This research used a thematic analysis approach, which Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest as a common and adaptable approach in qualitative research that helps to find, understand, and explain patterns in meaning from the data, particularly suitable for an interpretivist design. Braun and Clarke (2006) complement saying this approach seeks to capture the complexity and depth of human experience and nuanced interpretation of participants' personal narratives without being constrained by predefined coding frames or rigid procedural rules.

The researched adopted Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase model, adapted as follow:

Step 1: Familiarisation with the data: The researcher immersed in the data by reading the surveys multiple times to gain an overall sense of participants' experiences.

Step 2: Generating initial codes: The data was manually coded to emphasize key features pertinent to the research objectives. Codes were both semantic (descriptive) and latent (interpretive), allowing exploration of explicit statements and underlying assumptions.

Step 3: Searching for themes: Codes were grouped into potential themes that captured patterns of shared meaning across participants' narratives. Initial thematic categories emerged inductively through repeated engagement with the data.

Step 4: Reviewing themes: Themes were refined through comparison with both the coded data and the entire dataset to maintain consistency and uniqueness. This iterative approach enabled the merging, splitting, or redefinition of themes.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes: Final themes were named to reflect their core essence and were supported by direct quotations from the interviews to preserve the participants' voices.

Step 6: Producing the report: The final write-up included a detailed account of the themes, supported by interpretation and integration with relevant literature, presented in the findings chapter.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an important part of research, making sure that people taking part are treated with respect, their rights are protected, and they are not harmed, keeping the research honest and reliable (Resnik, 2018). Participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form (see appendix II), which outlined the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, voluntary participation, and withdrawal rights, as suggested by Berg and Appelbaum (2001). Saunders, Kitzinger and Kitzinger (2015) also highlight that researchers must implement measures to protect the identity and privacy of participants, including anonymizing data and securely storing sensitive information. The research data followed the recommendations and is stored in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and institutional ethical guidelines.

3.12 Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this research is its small and purposive sample size of only seven participants, all drawn from the technology sector and based in Dublin, Ireland. As previously discussed, this aligns with the principles of qualitative research and supports in-depth exploration (Mason, 2010; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018), but the limited number of participants restricts the ability to generalise findings beyond the specific group studied. The findings may not reflect the experiences of employees in other sectors or regions where working conditions, organisational culture, or transportation infrastructure differ. The use of non-probability sampling can also introduce selection bias, as participants were chosen by the researcher, potentially affecting the diversity of perspectives. Another important limitation was the existing professional relationship between the researcher and participants, as this has potential to introduce social desirability bias or influence how openly participants expressed their opinions, mainly on sensitive topics such as perceptions of management or organisational policies. The anonymity was discussed with the participants, but there is the possibility that the researcher proximity shaped participants responses.

This chapter discussed the rationale to use Saunders' Research Onion framework as methodological approach for this research. It also justified the reason to adopt an interpretivist philosophy to understand the subjective experiences of participants, coupled with an inductive approach to generate insights from the data. It justified why the research used the case study strategy, implemented through a mono-method qualitative design using semi-structured questionnaire. Lastly, it justified why using the cross-sectional time horizon to reflect the understanding of the current impact of RTO policies.

4 Chapter 4: Research Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the results based on data gathered from 7 participants through the answered questionnaires. The findings were analysed, connecting them to the objective of the research.

4.1 Demographics

The first section in the questionnaire aimed to capture demographic information regarding age group, gender, job role, tenure in the organisation, and time working remotely before the mandatory RTO. The intention behind this section is to validate whether all participants meet the required criteria to participate in this research and form groups to understand how different profiles experience job demands and resources (Palinkas et al., 2015; Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2018). Out of 7 participants, 6 identified themselves as male and 1 as female. This was not intentional, but an unforeseen research limitation caused by the gender imbalance in the tech sector previously flagged by a variety of authors (Cheryan, Master and Meltzoff, 2015; Wang and Degol, 2017; Widdicks et al., 2021; Berry et al., 2022; Frachtenberg and Kaner, 2022; Kurti, Mexhid Ferati and Viktorija Kalonaityte, 2024; Amor, Naga and Lavilles, 2024). It's understandable that the gender imbalance limits the diversity of perspectives, but it also mirrors real-world workforce compositions and validates the importance of this study in tech contexts.
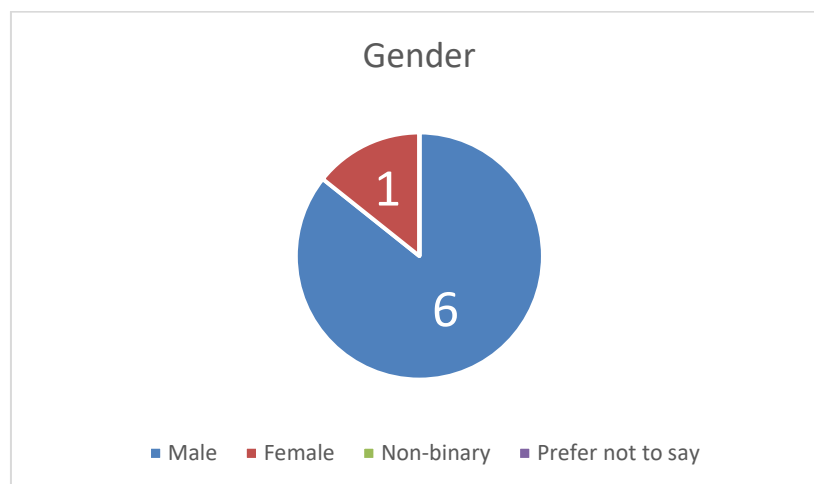
Figure 3: Participants Gender

Among the participants, 3 declared themselves in the age group of from 25 to 34 years old. The remaining 4 participants were in the age group ranging from 35 to 44 years old. With a near-even split between early-career (25–34 years old) and mid-career (35–44 years old) professionals, different answers from these groups may give the basis for comparing how age or career stage might affect perceptions of job demands/resources during RTO (Ng and Feldman, 2010).
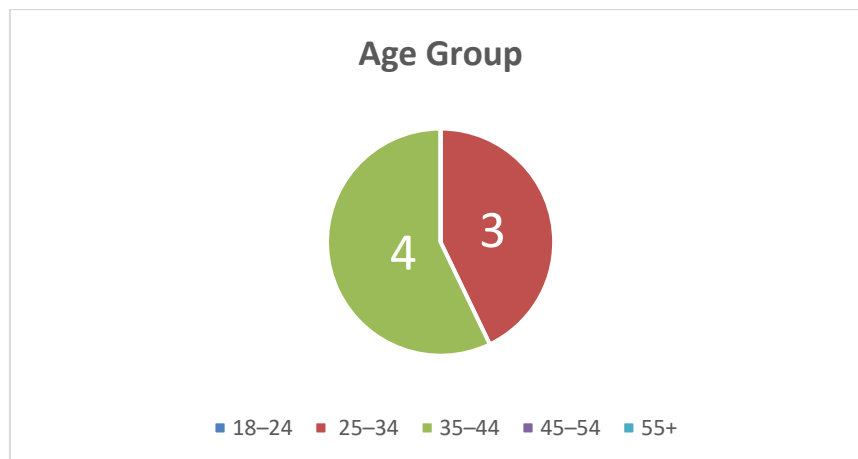
Figure 4: Participants Age Group

Regarding their tenure with the company, 2 employees had been with the company for 1 to 3 years, 4 employees for 3 to 5 years, and 1 employee had worked for more than 5 years. The spread of tenure allows exploration of how organisational familiarity and career investment relate to attitudes toward change (Palinkas et al., 2015; Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2018). This will be later used to validate if longer-tenured employees might feel a stronger sense of loyalty or expectation about workplace norms.
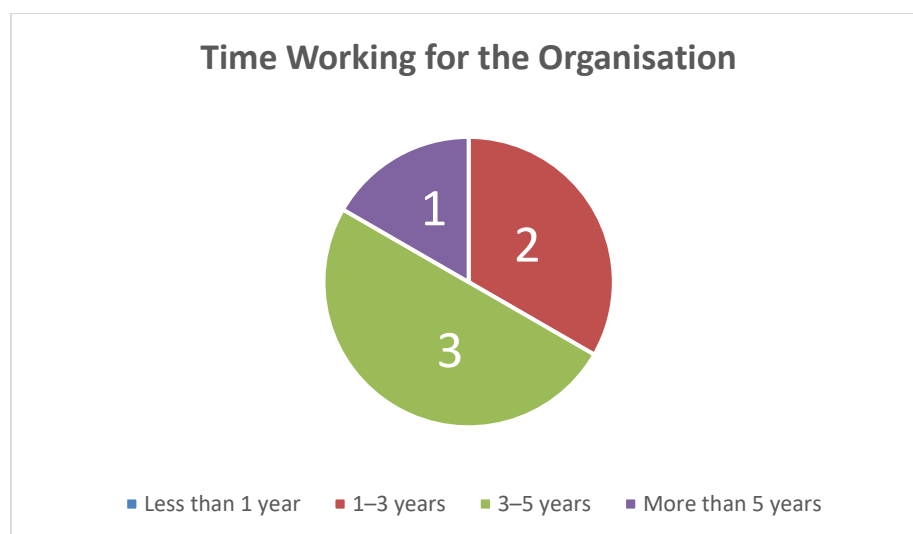
Figure 5: Time Working in the Organisation

The data shows that before the mandatory RTO 6 employees were working remotely for 1 to 3 years and 1 employee was working remotely for 3 to 5 years. All participants had substantial remote work exposure, meaning their opinions on RTO are grounded in lived experience rather than novelty. The single participant with longer remote experience can offer insights into pre-pandemic remote work culture and whether their adaptation differs from others.

Time Working Remotely Before RTO

■ Less than 1 year ■ 1–3 years ■ 3–5 years ■ More than 5 years
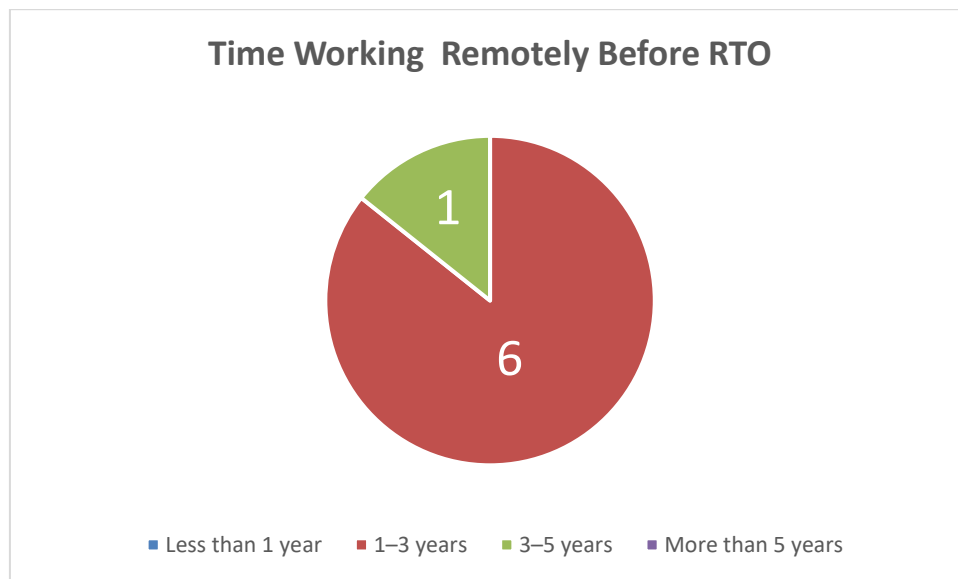
Figure 6: Time Working Remotely

The demographic questions successfully validated that all participants met the inclusion criteria, which strengthens the reliability of responses concerning post-RTO transitions (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2018).

4.2   Job Demands

This section in the survey was composed by 8 questions where participants had to choose one answer ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, following the Likert scale (Likert, 1932).

Questionnaire Questions	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7
1. My job requires me to work under time pressure.	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree
2. I have a high workload that is difficult to manage.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
3. Since returning onsite, my workload has increased.	Neutral	Neutral	Disagree	Neutral	Neutral	Agree	Agree
4. I feel less able to balance work and personal life now that I work onsite.	Neutral	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
5. I experience emotional demands in my work (e.g., dealing with difficult clients or colleagues).	Neutral	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree
6. I experience more emotionally draining to work onsite compared to working remotely.	Neutral	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Disagree
7. My work often involves conflicting or unclear expectations.	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
8. Commuting adds to my daily stress.	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree

Table 1: Job Demands Questions

In response to the first question, a combined 100% of participants indicated that they experience time pressure in their roles, with 72% agreeing and 29% strongly agreeing. This unanimity underscores time pressure as a core and pervasive feature of the participants' working environment, uncovering potential systemic workflow issues, unrealistic deadlines, or organisational norms that prioritize speed over sustainability (Kunzelmann and Rigotti, 2020). According to Kim and Cho (2020), if time pressure is universal but not explicitly acknowledged in organisational planning or support structures, it could reflect a disconnect between leadership expectations and employee capacity. Participants were then asked how they perceive their workload. 86% reported that they struggle to manage their high workload, whereas 14% disagreed, reporting a manageable workload. This seems to be the directly correlated with the feeling of time pressure. A manageable workload implicates that employees have appropriate time to perform their tasks. The result presents a significant concern, highlighting that the majority of employees feel overburdened because they are not able to manage their workload within the given time, which aligns with the findings from Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001). This is a dangerous path, also discussed by Bakker & Demerouti (2007) who linked chronic time pressure with stress, burnout, and decreased productivity, especially in high-cognitive-demand sectors like tech. Only a small minority indicated that they find their workload manageable. A follow-up question would be necessary to understand if this disparity points to an issue in workload distribution, expectations, or

support structures within the organisation. The next questions asked whether participants felt that the RTO has impacted their workload. Opinions were more varied. A minority of 14% disagreed that their workload had increased post-RTO, 57% stated that their workload remained the same and 29% felt that their workload had increased. Although the RTO had not uniformly affected workload volume, some participants perceived it as contributing to greater work demands. The disconnection between perceptions of workload change and overall workload struggle could indicate that the challenge is not solely due to increased volume of work but could be rooted in reduced efficiency, work-life balance challenges, or shifting expectations in the post-RTO environment. This is aligned with Saridakis et al. (2023) findings, who observed productivity boost from employees working from home.

A more consistent pattern emerged in perceptions when participants were asked about work-life balance. A total of 85% either agreed (72%) or strongly agreed (14%) that their ability to maintain balance between work and personal life had diminished since returning to onsite work. The absence of disagreement suggests a broadly shared sense that RTO has negatively affected work-life boundaries. Emotional demands also featured prominently in responses. 72% agreed that their roles involve demands like dealing with difficult clients or colleagues, with only 14% disagreeing, suggesting that emotional strain is a common feature of the work environment for many employees. When comparing emotional strain between onsite and remote work, 43% reported greater emotional drain when working onsite, while an equal proportion remained neutral, and 14% disagreed. The combined findings show that emotional demands are prevalent, but nearly half of the respondents perceive those demands to be more intense in an onsite environment. Gomez-Dominguez et al. (2024) and Picker-Roesch et al. (2024) had similar finding, also attributing greater psychosocial risks to face-to-face interactions. However, the 43% neutral responses also indicate that emotional strain may be more closely tied to the nature of the job itself rather than the work location alone. Further research is required to understand why participants felt neutral. Concerning role clarity, 86% of respondents (43% strongly agreeing, 43% agreeing) indicated that their jobs often involve conflicting or unclear expectations. There is a clear widespread issue with ambiguity in roles, responsibilities, or communication within the organisation. For decades different authors (Kahn, Rosenthal and Al, 1964; Fried et al., 1998; Iannello et al. 2017; Purnomo, Lustono and Tatik, 2021) have been describing lack of clarity as an aggressor that can contribute to inefficiencies, hinder performance, reduce confidence, and increase stress for employees. Finally, 86% of participants reported that commuting contributes to their daily

stress, with only 14% disagreeing. This reinforces the perception that the RTO has reintroduced stressors such as time lost to travel and reduced flexibility that were absent during remote work periods. Murphy et al. (2022) and Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2023) noted similar findings.

4.3   Job Resources

Once more using the Likert-scale (Likert, 1932), participants were asked 12 questions to measure their job resources perception.

Questionnaire Questions	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7
1. I receive adequate support from my supervisor.	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
2. My colleagues are helpful and supportive when I face challenges at work.	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Agree
3. I feel I receive more support onsite than remotely.	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree
4. I have the tools and resources I need to perform my job effectively (e.g., technology, information).	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
5. I feel I have better tools and resources onsite than remotely.	Disagree	Neutral	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Disagree
6. I have sufficient autonomy in how I organize my tasks onsite.	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Agree
7. I feel I have more autonomy in how I organize my tasks onsite than remotely.	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree
8. My organisation provides opportunities for me to grow and develop professionally.	Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Neutral	Agree	Agree	Disagree
9. I feel I have better opportunities and visibility to grow and develop professionally onsite than remote.	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Neutral	Disagree
10. I feel recognised and valued for the work I do.	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
11. I receive regular feedback about my work performance.	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
12. My job offers enough flexibility to balance my personal and professional life.	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree

Table 2: Job Resources Questions

The first item assessed perceptions of supervisory support. Responses were relatively divided: 29% agreed and another 29% strongly agreed that they receive adequate support from their supervisor. These results suggest a polarisation in perceived supervisory support, where just over half of respondents feel adequately supported, while a notable minority

experience either insufficient support or uncertainty. This variation may point to inconsistencies in managerial communication or support practices across different teams or departments, which Dirks and Ferrin (2002) found before and warn of the harmful effects on the leader-follower trust relationship. In contrast, 14% strongly disagreed, 14% disagreed, and 14% remained neutral. These results reveal a notable split, with just over half of the participants feeling supported, while the other part disagreed or were uncertain. Further research is required to identify why participants feel supported or not by their supervisors. The second question explored the perceptions of the participants about their colleagues, specifically whether colleagues are helpful when challenges arise at work. In this case, responses were overall positive with 86% feeling supported by colleagues. No respondents expressed disagreement, indicating a strong culture of peer support within the workplace. That is an interest finding because even where managerial support fails, colleagues are generally seen as reliable and collaborative, serving as a valuable buffer against workplace stress or task-related difficulties according to House's Social Support Theory (1981). To assess perceptions of support in the context of the RTO, participants were asked whether they feel they receive more support when working onsite compared to working remotely. A majority of 57% disagreed with this statement, while 29% remained neutral, and only 14% agreed. Adding the numbers, 86% do not perceive a significant improvement in support when working onsite, challenging a common assumption highlighted by other authors (Allen et al., 2013; Choudhury et al, 2019; Roghanizad and Bohns, 2021) that physical presence enhances communication and access to help. The high level of disagreement reflects Kurtessis et al. (2017) finding that the quality of support is less dependent on location and more influenced by the consistency of communication, availability of resources, and managerial practices, regardless of work setting. Further insight was gathered through a question on the adequacy of tools and resources such as technology and access to information needed to perform daily tasks. Here, all respondents agreed that they are well-equipped, confirming a strong baseline level of satisfaction with the available infrastructure. However, when the question was narrowed to compare the quality of resources onsite versus remotely, the results revealed a shift in perception: 57% disagreed that they have better tools onsite, 29% were neutral, and only 14% agreed. While employees generally feel well-equipped, they do not perceive being onsite as offering a clear advantage in terms of tools and resources. This possibility was previously explored by Tleuken et al. (2022) when suggesting that workers invested resources to improve residential environmental factors like

working comfort, facilities and information and communication technologies, aiming to mitigate the gap between the office and the residential infrastructure.

In exploring perceptions of autonomy, participants were first asked whether they feel they have sufficient autonomy in organising their tasks while working onsite. A strong majority of 86% confirmed they feel empowered to manage their work independently in the office, which is great as autonomy was directly linked to psychological well-being by Deci and Ryan (1985) Self-Determination Theory. However, when asked to compare if they feel more autonomy in how they organise their task onsite than remotely, responses shifted: 43% disagreed with the statement that they have more autonomy onsite, 43% were neutral, and only 14% agreed. The result brings an interesting insight that while autonomy was perceived by 86% as adequate in the onsite environment, it is not necessarily seen as superior to remote work in this regard. This finding contradicts Sennott and Stewart (2025) and Kurtessis et al. (2017) that correlate remote work arrangement to increased autonomy. Further research is required to check participants' understanding of autonomy and how the autonomy was impacted by the RTO. Participants were also asked whether they believe the organisation provides opportunities for professional growth and development. A good majority of 72% responded positively, but 28% were negative, highlighting that although most employees perceive some level of development support, nearly a third feel that professional growth opportunities are lacking or not equitably accessible. The next question complemented the topic by comparing onsite versus remote work in terms of growth and visibility. The responses became more mixed. 43% agreed that they have better opportunities and visibility to grow professionally while working onsite but 29% disagreed, and 29% remained neutral. This distribution indicates that some employees still associate physical presence with career progression. This was also noted by Sennott and Stewart (2025) and Ferrara et al. (2022), who mentioned that a key worry among remote workers is that being "out of sight" leads to being "out of mind" for career advancement opportunities. As a follow-up question, participants were asked whether they feel recognised and valued for the work they do. Only 29% of respondents agreed that they feel valued for their work, while a majority (57%) remained neutral and 14% disagreed. Recognition is a key driver of engagement and retention pointed out by other authors (Kooij et al., 2008; Sadilla and Wahyuningtyas, 2023; Kwarteng et al., 2023), and this data suggests that the organisation may be falling short in making employees feel genuinely appreciated. The high level of neutrality raises the question of whether employees are uncertain or ambivalent about the recognition they receive, which can be

rooted in a lack of consistent or visible acknowledgment from leadership or peers. Participants were also asked about the frequency and consistency of performance feedback. Here, 72% perceive a consistent flow of performance-related communication, which is good as several researches (Sommer and Kulkarni, 2012; Xiao, Liu and Chen, 2017; Liu et al., 2022; Göller and Maximilian Späth, 2023) defend that regular constructive feedback is essential not only for performance improvement but also for fostering engagement and professional growth. Conversely, 28% reported feeling underserved in this area, pointing to potential inconsistencies in how feedback is delivered across teams or departments. Analysing organisational justice, Greenberg (1990) suggested that the process for delivering feedback should be consistent and transparent across the organization, reducing perceptions of bias and favouritism. The last question asked whether participants feel they have enough flexibility to balance personal and professional responsibilities. The results were one-sided with 72% feeling they do not have the flexibility. 29% were neutral, with no respondents agreeing. This overwhelming lack of perceived flexibility aligns with diverse authors (Allen et al., 2013; Shagvaliyeva and Yazdanifard, 2014; Boell, Cecez-Kecmanovic and Campbell, 2016; Junça Silva, Almeida and Rebelo, 2022; Ferrara et al., 2022) that also found that employees have greater struggle to manage work-life demands when working onsite, which is critical because flexibility is recognised as a key factor in promoting well-being, reducing burnout, and supporting long-term retention.

4.4   Job Satisfaction

This section of the survey aimed to assess the job satisfaction of the participants through 6 Likert-scale (Likert, 1932) questions.

Questionnaire Questions	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7
1. I feel satisfied with my current job overall.	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Disagree
2. I find my work meaningful and rewarding.	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree
3. My current work arrangement (e.g., remote, hybrid, in-office) meets my needs and preferences.	Neutral	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
4. I would prefer to return to a remote or hybrid working model.	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
5. I feel motivated and engaged in my daily tasks.	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree
6. My workplace promotes my overall well-being.	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Neutral

Table 3: Job Satisfaction Questions

The section in the survey began asking whether the participants were overall satisfied with their current job. The responses were mixed but leaned toward concern: 29% reported dissatisfaction. A significant 57% remained neutral, while only 14% expressed contentment. 86% of the responses demonstrate a general sense of ambivalence or dissatisfaction among the participants. The high level of neutrality can indicate that employees are uncertain about their long-term commitment or feel disengaged, potentially due to unmet expectations, lack of recognition, or reduced motivation. Based on participants previous answers around workload, management support, flexibility and growth opportunities, it is not a surprise that the job satisfaction is undermined. This is totally aligned with Demerouti et al. (2001) JD-R model, which argues that job demands lead to strain, burnout and dissatisfaction. To further understand employee sentiment, participants were asked whether they find their work meaningful and rewarding, factors closely tied to intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement (Taris, van Beek & Schaufeli, 2020; Allan, 2017). Results were alarming as 57% feel they were not doing something meaningful and rewarding. 29% see purpose in what they were doing and 14% were neutral. This was further confirmed in the follow-up question, where 43% stated that their daily tasks lack personal significance or emotional fulfilment, with 29% remaining neutral and other 29% seeing motivation and engagement in what they do. This disconnection is linked with the participants dissatisfaction, possibly also impacting productivity, retention, and engagement (Geldenhuys, Łaba and Venter, 2014; van Wingerden and van der Stoep, 2018; Charles-Leija et al., 2023). When the questionnaire shifted the focus to RTO, directly asking participants whether their current mandatory onsite work arrangement aligns with their needs and preferences, most participants expressed dissatisfaction. In fact, 72% (29% strongly disagreed and 43% disagreed) expressed that the arrangement does not meet their expectations. 29% were neutral and no one agreed. The negative sentiment highlights that the mandatory RTO policy is misaligned with employees' values, work styles, and/or personal circumstances. These findings were endorsed in the next question, which asked the participants whether they prefer to return to a remote or hybrid model. All respondents expressed a preference for remote or hybrid arrangements, with 43% agreeing and 57% strongly agreeing. This unanimous support indicates a strong collective desire for greater autonomy in how and where work is performed. The strength of this preference also signals a disconnect between current onsite requirements and employee expectations, reinforcing the need for leadership to re-evaluate rigid return-to-office mandates. In the last question participants were asked whether they

believe their workplace promotes their overall well-being, a critical factor discussed by other authors (Sears et al., 2013; Hamar et al., 2015; Amano, Fukuda and Kawachi, 2020; Yang et al., 2024) in sustaining long-term engagement, health, and performance. The responses here were less decisive but still noteworthy. 43% disagreed, 43% remained neutral, and only 14% agreed. While not overwhelmingly negative, the data shows that a majority of employees either feel unsupported or are unsure about their employer's commitment to well-being. Perhaps, such efforts exist but are not clearly communicated, accessible, or impactful. This response pattern underscores a pressing need for the organisation to evaluate how its culture, policies, and practices affect employee health and satisfaction.

4.5 Open-Ended Questions

The final section of the survey featured eight open-ended questions split into 3 themes: job demands, job resources and job satisfaction. The questions gave to the participants the opportunity to address aspects that may not have been covered in the closed-ended questions. As the research had 7 participants, the researcher was able to go through each answer multiple times and group what was common among them and what was unique perspective. The analysis below will cover all the findings.

Job Demands: The first question asked them to outline the most challenging or demanding aspects of their jobs. The answers varied, but the vast majority aligned with previous findings discussed in this research: aggressive deadlines (unmanageable workload), ambiguity in roles and/or expectations and lack of recognition for meaningful contributions. New findings were around difficulty to manage conflicting priorities, coping with constant changes to an unclear roadmap, navigate time zone differences when working with international teams, and a sense that the organisation prioritised short-term wins over long-term planning, which Mårtensson et al. (2023) argue creates instability and limit strategic progress. Additionally, around a third of participants raised concerns about the RTO mandate or described the office as overly distracting environment, which Bernstein and Turban (2018) and Kim and de Dear (2013) found as a source of stress and productivity loss. The second question focused on the challenges associated with the RTO policy, asking participants to describe the most difficult aspect of the RTO transition. The most common issue, reported by 67% of respondents, was the daily commute. Many described it as a drain on their time and energy,

making it harder to maintain a healthy work-life balance. This is aligned with findings of other authors (Murphy et al., 2022; Nagler, Johannes Rincke and Winkler, 2024). Also aligned with Cullen, Pakzad-Hurson and Perez-Truglia (2025) and Allen et al. (2013), parenthood emerged as a challenge for 33% of participants, which cited the difficulty of managing childcare or family commitments alongside mandatory office attendance. 50% of participants pointed again to the workplace noise and frequent distractions as a significant factor hindering their ability to concentrate and perform effectively.

Job Resources: When asked what kind of support would help them manage their workload more effectively, 83% said that having a hybrid work setup would be the most impactful form of support that the company could offer. In addition to flexible work arrangements, some participants also suggested ways the company could improve operations. A few noted that working across multiple time zones often slows things down and suggested reducing these dependencies to make collaboration smoother. Others called for clearer direction from leadership and more decisive action, emphasising that timely decisions and well-communicated priorities from management would empower then to move forward with more confidence and efficiency. The subsequent question invited participants to share any benefits they have experienced since returning to onsite work. 83% quoted improvements around team bonding and collaboration. This is in line with the idea of Bloom et al. (2015) and Hislop et al. (2018) that physical presence facilitates relationship building, informal exchange of ideas, and fosters a stronger sense of team cohesion. However, 17% didn't see any real benefits to being back onsite, highlighting that not everyone feels the positives outweigh the downsides, like longer commutes and less flexibility. Participants were then asked whether they felt they had parity in working conditions, specifically in terms of health and safety, working comfort, facilities, and ICT when comparing WFH to working onsite. About 67% stated that they experienced equal or even better conditions while working from home. These participants pointed to greater comfort, fewer distractions, and more control over their environment as main advantages. The other 33% felt the office provided a better setup. Although the answers were not detailed enough for a deeper analysis, they highlighted how different people's preferences and home environments shape their experience, reinforcing the importance of flexibility in accommodating diverse working styles and needs. Ferrara et al. (2022) and Höcker et al. (2024) had similar conclusion.

Job Satisfaction: 83% said that their job satisfaction had gone down since being required to work onsite. They attributed this to increased commuting time, reduced flexibility, and challenges in balancing personal responsibilities. Similar results were found by Faber et al. (2023) and Egole Ifeyinwa Stella, E. B. J. and J. I. (2021). A smaller group of 17% noted a slight improvement in job satisfaction, primarily due to enhanced social interaction and team engagement. However, even within this group, most said they would still prefer not to have mandatory in-office days and valued having more autonomy over their schedules. The final question asked participants which working model they would prefer if given the choice, and why. All participants unanimously expressed a preference for a hybrid work model. While they acknowledged the value of in-person collaboration, particularly for team bonding, spontaneous idea-sharing, and problem-solving, they also emphasised the importance of maintaining the flexibility and focus that remote work allows. This unanimous response underscores a clear employee desire for balance: the ability to connect with colleagues face-to-face when needed, but not at the cost of autonomy or well-being.

This chapter offered an in-depth look at participants' experiences around job demands, available support, satisfaction levels, and how the mandatory return-to-office policy has impacted them. The demographic filtering ensured that only relevant voices were included. In terms of job demands, participants highlighted several challenges since returning onsite, including high pressure, heavier workloads, commuting stress, and unclear expectations. On the flip side, many still felt well-equipped to do their jobs, had support from peers and managers, and access to development opportunities. The job satisfaction section surfaced serious concerns around dissatisfaction and perceptions of meaningful, motivation levels. Finally, the open-ended responses offered deeper qualitative insight into these issues, specially about the overwhelming sentiment related to flexibility, with a unanimous preference for a hybrid model.

5   Chapter 5: Discussions

This chapter critically discusses the findings presented in the previous chapter, connecting them with the research question and sub-questions proposed in the first chapter. By the end of this chapter, readers will have clarity on the impact on the work structure and job satisfaction after mandatory return to office, the associated advantages and disadvantages and the attitude of employees towards in-person work.

5.1   Question 1: What is the impact on the work structure and job satisfaction after mandatory return to office?

Before starting answering, it is important to note that all participants had substantial prior remote experience, which makes their post-RTO responses grounded in contrast rather than novelty. The overall results showed that the move from remote work to a full-time office presence marked a profound structural shift for participants. Employees transitioned from highly autonomous, flexible arrangements during remote work to a more rigid, centrally controlled schedule. Employees who had grown accustomed to structuring tasks around personal rhythms, whether starting early, taking extended lunch breaks for childcare, or working in bursts of deep focus, found the imposed structure restrictive. This introduced commuting routines and physical presence in a specific location. The majority of participants reported that this change eroded their work-life balance, increased stress, and undermined their ability to manage personal responsibilities. Job satisfaction declined sharply, with many citing the loss of flexibility as a key factor. All participants were clear that onsite working is not their preferred work arrangement and they all prefer a hybrid arrangement. This affected their perception about the company commitment to promote their well-being, which may undermine the effectiveness of other well-being initiatives promoted by the company. Even before the RTO, the company presented some chronical issues around time pressure, unmanageable workload, work and life balance, emotional demands, unclear expectation, management support, recognition and growth opportunities. The RTO did not improve any of these issues, but it did worsen some of them. These findings bring serious implications for motivation, productivity, and retention. Authors like Charles-Leija et al. (2023), van Wingerden and van der Stoep (2018) and Geldenhuys, Łaba and Venter (2014) argue that these employees are more likely to feel disengaged or seek alternative employment.

Critically, while the data strongly indicates a negative impact on job satisfaction, it is drawn from a small, homogeneous sample of IT professionals in Dublin. Broader studies across multiple companies are needed to confirm whether these effects are consistent or if they are amplified by company-specific factors. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of this research cannot determine whether dissatisfaction is a temporary reaction to change or indicative of a lasting cultural shift. This would require longitudinal follow-up.

5.2 Sub-question 1: What are the benefits and disadvantages associated with the return to office?

Participants reported both benefits and disadvantages. From the perspective of participants in this study, the disadvantages of RTO were far more salient than any perceived benefits.

Benefits: A relevant portion acknowledged that the in-person presence helped improve collaboration and team bounding. However, expected benefits mentioned by Bloom et al. (2015) and Hislop et al. (2018) around idea generation and quicker problem-solving due to immediate feedback were not prominent in participant responses. This absence can indicate that such benefits either did not materialise in this context or were overshadowed by the negatives, but without specific probing into potential upsides, it is difficult to determine whether they were truly absent or simply not front-of-mind for participants. Another group reported they feel they have better opportunity and visibility onsite than remote. These were all the notable reported improvements. There were also isolated cases were one or two participants reported improvement on their job infrastructure comparing to the one they have at home, support from colleagues and autonomy in task organisation, but for all these cases the majority of respondents have different opinion.

Disadvantages: Unfortunately, the list of disadvantages that groups pointed out is larger. The list includes items like commuting as time waster and daily stressor, loss of autonomy and flexibility, greater difficulty balancing professional and personal responsibilities, perceptions that organisational well-being commitments were undermined, workplace distractions such as noise and frequent interruptions impacting their productivity and more emotional demands.

These findings show that the RTO reintroduced certain structural advantages but also revived significant practical and psychosocial costs. This suggests two areas for further research:

1) Comparative studies that explore whether employees in other organisations or industries report more balanced perceptions of RTO, especially where implementation includes targeted strategies to retain some flexibility.

2) An examination of conditions under which the collaborative benefits of in-person work genuinely outweigh the costs, particularly for knowledge-intensive work.

5.3   Sub-Question 2: What is the attitude of employees towards in-person work?

The consensus among participants was unequivocal: a fully onsite work model is not desirable. All seven participants expressed a preference for a hybrid arrangement, which they felt would combine the collaborative benefits of in-person work with the flexibility and autonomy of remote work. While the unanimity in this small sample is striking, caution is needed before generalising. Employee attitudes toward in-person work is likely to vary across job roles, industries, organisational cultures, and even personal circumstances (e.g., commuting distance, family responsibilities). Because this research focused on workers who had substantial remote experience, their baseline expectations may differ from employees who worked onsite throughout the pandemic. There is also the question of adaptation over time. Current attitudes may reflect an initial resistance to change; further longitudinal research could reveal whether preferences shift after employees re-establish routines, or whether dissatisfaction remains entrenched. Additionally, studies incorporating managerial perspectives could provide insight into whether there is alignment or a disconnection between leadership's rationale for RTO and employee sentiment.

This chapter has critically answered the proposed research questions, bringing to light the complex realities experienced by IT professionals following a mandatory RTO policy. The data presented that RTO, in its current rigid form, is undermining employee satisfaction, efficiency, and well-being. The RTO has not translated into better productivity, collaboration, or satisfaction. The findings signal an urgent need for the company to move beyond binary choices between remote and onsite work, and instead design adaptive, employee-centred approaches that align with both business goals and evolving workforce expectations.

6   Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

Through the lens of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, the study examined how the transition from remote work to full-time office work affected employee well-being, motivation, and performance. This last chapter will explore the conclusion and suggest recommendations to address the concerns uncovered as outcome of the questionnaire.

6.1   Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive and multidimensional insight into the impacts of the mandatory RTO policy on IT professionals based in Dublin. While the RTO was introduced with the aim of revitalising collaboration, improving communication, and restoring organisational culture, the responses collected from the questionnaire highlighted that the actual experience of employees has been far more complex and often negative than anticipated. Job demands have significantly increased since the RTO was implemented. Employees reported higher levels of time pressure, difficulties in managing workloads, deteriorating work-life balance, and heightened commuting-related stress. These stressors reflect a return of burdens that had been temporarily alleviated during the remote work period. These findings align with the health impairment pathway (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) of the JD-R model, which argues that high demands in the absence of adequate resources can lead to burnout, disengagement, and reduced well-being. Compounding these demands was a resurgence of role ambiguity. Despite increased physical proximity to managers and colleagues, most participants reported unclear or conflicting expectations. This undermines a core assumption behind the RTO that in-person work naturally fosters clarity and control (Allen et al., 2013; Choudhury et al, 2019; Roghanizad and Bohns, 2021). Instead, the physical office introduced additional layers of complexity, including unstructured interactions, spontaneous meetings, and frequent interruptions, which in many cases made work processes more fragmented and unpredictable. In terms of job resources, peer collaboration remained a consistent strength. Employees praised the supportiveness and reliability of colleagues. However, supervisory support was described as inconsistent and, in many cases, ineffective. Nearly half of participants reported receiving adequate support from their supervisors, and a majority disagreed that being in the office improved access to leadership or mentorship. Furthermore, less than one-third felt genuinely recognised or appreciated for their contributions, which is associated by Cooper and Kurland (2002) as detrimental to

motivation and engagement. The assumption that physical presence equates to increased visibility and progression was largely unfounded, directly declining job satisfaction. Only 14% of participants reported being satisfied with their current work experience, bringing serious concerns to the company around productivity, increased turnover, and a long-term decline in organisational commitment (Kwon and Kim, 2020; Ghani et al., 2023; Junça-Silva and Lourenço, 2025). Participants cited rigid routines, inflexible scheduling, and task overload as key reasons for their disengagement, with unanimous consensus that a hybrid model would increase their job satisfaction. The hybrid arrangement was believed by participants as better suitable to support their productivity, autonomy, and personal well-being. The same well-being feeling that only 14% of participants believed that is actively promoted by the organisation, posing as a significant risk, as it not only exacerbates the effects of job demands but also undermines trust in the employer's commitment to its workforce (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Junça Silva, Almeida and Rebelo, 2022).

6.2   Recommendations

In light of the findings, this study puts forward several recommendations for organisations when considering or enforcing mandatory RTO policies.

6.2.1 Adopt a Flexible, Employee-Centric Approach

The return to office can serve some strategic or cultural goals, but the organisation should reconsider rigid, one-size-fits-all mandates (Santos et al., 2024). Some suggestions to address that:

- Offer a flexible hybrid model tailored to job roles, team needs, and individual circumstances.
- Allow teams to determine optimal in-office days based on collaboration needs and prove clear guidelines for hybrid work expectations. This will help to mitigate the commuting stress, which emerged as a major source of stress and dissatisfaction.
- Explore options like staggered hours, compressed work weeks, or transportation allowances.
- Locational flexibility, such as satellite offices or co-working hubs.

6.2.2 Enhance Supervisory and Organisational Support

Managers are not born with management skills. To address that, the company can:

- Regularly train managers to provide consistent and empathetic support, regardless of work location.

- Regular programs to develop managers' soft skills such as empathy, active listening, and emotional intelligence, qualities that are essential for recognising employee needs, building trust, and addressing emerging challenges.

- Focus on upskilling leaders in hybrid management techniques, including asynchronous collaboration, remote performance tracking, and inclusive communication practices.

- Institutionalise regular one-on-one check-ins, constructive feedback loops, and accessible mentorship programs.

- Routinely assess employee perceptions of managerial support through engagement surveys or focus groups and use the data to refine leadership practices.

6.2.3 Clarify Roles and Communication Channels

Conflicting expectations and role ambiguity came as an issue in the survey. This can be mitigated by:

- Investing in clear documentation of responsibilities and expectations, creating detailed documents for each role outlining core responsibilities, reporting lines, decision-making authority, performance indicators, and scope of autonomy.

- Institutionalise quarterly or monthly one-on-ones to revisit individual goals, adjust priorities based on changing business needs, and acknowledge progress, also aligning work objectives with professional development plans so that employees understand how their contributions impact both the company and their own growth.

- Improving communication channels by providing clear, transparent, and frequent communication from leadership via internal communication platforms and leadership Q&A forums.

- Implement anonymous feedback systems to ensure that information flows both top-down and bottom-up.

6.2.4 Ensure Equal Access to Development Opportunities

RTO policies should not unintentionally create inequities in professional growth. Some suggestions to improve this area:

- The company should post clear and transparent criteria for promotions based on performance, contribution, and potential, not proximity to leadership or attendance in the office.

- The company can equalise the opportunities by tracking project assignment data, regularly monitoring who is being assigned to high-impact or cross-functional initiatives, and whether there's an imbalance in opportunities between in-office and remote employees.

- Access to professional development programs, technical training, leadership courses and mentorship should be accessible asynchronously and not limited to in-person sessions.

- Hold skip-level meetings, encourage senior leaders to meet periodically with employees across the organisation to hear about goals, challenges, and aspirations directly.

6.2.5 Foster Recognition and Belonging

Recognition mechanisms must be improved to ensure employees feel valued, regardless of where they work. A culture of appreciation should be cultivated through leadership modelling and peer encouragement. To implement that, the company can:

- Create structured programs that acknowledge individual and team achievements on a regular basis. This might include recognition awards or points-based peer recognition platforms where employees can receive and send shout-outs.

- Set a culture of celebrating wins across channels where managers can share recognition through virtual channels such as internal messengers platforms or newsletters to ensure all employees, regardless of location, are publicly acknowledged.

- Regularly hold team bonding sessions, ensuring employees from all backgrounds, roles, and work modes are included.

- Directly ask whether employees feel valued, connected, and seen, and act on those insights.
- Train managers to give meaningful, specific, timely, and tied to impact praise.

6.2.6 Use Data to Guide Ongoing Adjustments

These are some suggestions to understand the current scenario and be able to draft an effective strategy:
- Regularly assess the impact of RTO policies using structured feedback tools like surveys or focus groups.
- Hold small-group conversations with employees from different departments, tenure levels, and work arrangements to capture nuanced perspectives that surveys may miss.
- Correlate turnover trends, absenteeism, and productivity with specific work models or RTO phases to detect hidden risks or inequities.

6.2.7 Future Research Directions

As the world of work continues to evolve in response to post-pandemic organisational decisions, further research is necessary to deepen the understanding of how RTO mandates affect employees and organisations in both the short and long term. While this study offered valuable insights into the current perceptions of IT workers in Dublin who experienced a compulsory return to in-person work, other areas remain underexplored. Future research should aim to expand the generalisability, depth, and longitudinal validity of these findings by addressing the following directions:

Longitudinal Studies: One key limitation of this research is its cross-sectional time horizon. To better capture the extent of the impacts of RTO policies on employee well-being and organisational performance, longitudinal studies are needed (Saunders et al., 2023) to track changes in employee well-being, motivation, and job satisfaction over an extended period, helping to determine whether initial resistance or dissatisfaction persists, improves, or deteriorates over time. Longitudinal research could also examine the long-term influence of RTO on team cohesion, organisational culture, and leadership dynamics.

Comparative Analysis: Another fruitful avenue for future research involves conducting comparative analyses across industries, organisation sizes, and geographical regions. Different industries are likely to experience unique challenges and benefits associated with RTO. Cultural and geographical contexts including factors such as cost of living, housing infrastructure, and transportation systems have the potential to shape employee attitudes toward commuting and in-office work (Choudhury, Foroughi and Larson, 2019). Comparative studies between urban and rural settings, or across countries with distinct work cultures, such as Ireland, Germany, or the United States, could provide nuanced insights into how RTO policies are perceived, implemented, and adapted.

Performance Metrics: As organisations continue to assess the impact of RTO policies on business performance, Sichel (2019) suggests that developing more robust and context-sensitive performance metrics becomes essential. Future studies should incorporate dimensions such as employee engagement, innovation, and the quality of collaboration. Future studies could also examine how RTO policies influence broader business outcomes such as customer satisfaction, project delivery timelines, and operational efficiency.

Beyond the main categories discussed above, future research could also examine other areas that raised a red flag during this research. As example:

- The role of leadership and management style in shaping employee responses to RTO, particularly in relation to trust, autonomy, and psychological safety.
- Why the research identified that 43% of participants reported greater emotional drain when working onsite and an equal proportion remained neutral.
- Which aspect of management support made 58% of participants report they feel supported by their manager while 28% reported they do not feel supported.
- Why 43% of the participants disagreed that they have more autonomy onsite than remotely, while some researches (Sennott and Stewart, 2025; Kurtessis et al., 2017) correlate remote work arrangement to increased autonomy.

6.3   Final Consideration

All recommendations given in the study are not just reactive fixes, but proactive strategies to create a resilient and adaptive organisational model. Aligning with the JD-R model,

organisations should focus on reducing excessive job demands while increasing job and personal resources in meaningful ways (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). This research brought the reflection that the future of work is not binary between remote or office, but relational, contextual, and employee-driven. Based on the job satisfaction data gathered in this research, it is plausible to say that companies that embrace this complexity will not only attract and retain top talent but also foster a more engaged, healthier, and productive workforce. This research highlighted the complex challenges organizations face in managing the return to office transition. The findings suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to RTO is detrimental to both employee satisfaction and organizational performance. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on post-pandemic work transformations by examining the relatively underexplored experience of returning fully to the office, suggesting that success in the post-pandemic workplace will require organisations to balance the benefits of in-person collaboration with the flexibility and autonomy that employees have come to value. By implementing the recommended changes and maintaining open dialogue with employees, organisations can create more sustainable and effective work arrangements that benefit both the business and its workforce.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – JD-R Survey

Section 1: Demographics

Demographic data helps researchers interpret patterns and trends in participants' responses more accurately.

1. What is your age group?

☐ 18–24

☐ 25–34

☐ 35–44

☐ 45–54

☐ 55+

2. What is your gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Non-binary

☐ Prefer not to say

3. How long have you worked for this organisation?

☐ Less than 1 year

☐ 1–3 years

☐ 3–5 years

☐ More than 5 years

4. How long did you work remotely before returning onsite?

☐ Less than 1 year

☐ 1–3 years

☐ 3–5 years

☐ More than 5 years

Section 2: Job Demands

Focuses on the physical, psychological, and organisational aspects of work that require sustained effort.

1. My job requires me to work under time pressure.
2. I have a high workload that is difficult to manage.
3. Since returning onsite, my workload has increased.
4. I feel less able to balance work and personal life now that I work onsite.
5. I experience emotional demands in my work (e.g., dealing with difficult clients or colleagues).
6. I experience more emotionally draining to work onsite compared to working remotely.
7. My work often involves conflicting or unclear expectations.
8. Commuting adds to my daily stress.

Scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

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Section 3: Job Resources

Explores the physical, social, and organisational supports that help achieve work goals and manage demands.

1. I receive adequate support from my supervisor.
2. My colleagues are helpful and supportive when I face challenges at work.
3. I feel I receive more support onsite than remotely.
4. I have the tools and resources I need to perform my job effectively (e.g., technology, information).
5. I feel I have better tools and resources onsite than remotely.
6. I have sufficient autonomy in how I organise my tasks onsite.
7. I feel I have more autonomy in how I organise my tasks onsite than remotely.
8. My organisation provides opportunities for me to grow and develop professionally.
9. I feel I have better opportunities and visibility to grow and develop professionally onsite than remote.
10. I feel recognised and valued for the work I do.
11. I receive regular feedback about my work performance.
12. My job offers enough flexibility to balance my personal and professional life.

Scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

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Section 4: Job Satisfaction

Measures overall satisfaction as influenced by job demands and resources.

1. I feel satisfied with my current job overall.
2. I find my work meaningful and rewarding.
3. My current work arrangement (e.g., remote, hybrid, in-office) meets my needs and preferences.
4. I would prefer to return to a remote or hybrid working model.
5. I feel motivated and engaged in my daily tasks.
6. My workplace promotes my overall well-being.

Scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

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Section 5: Open-Ended Questions

Explores qualitative insights into how demands and resources affect satisfaction.

1. What aspects of your job do you find most challenging or demanding?
2. What has been the most challenging aspect of returning to onsite work?
3. What resources or support do you think would help you manage your job demands more effectively?
4. What benefits, if any, have you experienced from working onsite again?
5. How has returning to the office affected your satisfaction with your job?
6. How has the return to onsite work affected your work-life balance?
7. Do you feel you have work parity conditions in the following environmental factors comparing WFH and in-person?
    1. Health & Safety
    2. Working Comfort
    3. Facilities
    4. ICT (Information and Communication Technology)
8. If given the choice, what working model (remote, onsite, hybrid) would you prefer, and why?

Appendix 2 – Survey Participation Consent Form

Project Title:

An exploratory study of the psychodynamics of work after the mandatory return to office

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Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study that explores how employees experience the transition from remote to onsite work, particularly in terms of job demands and resources. The purpose is to understand how this shift affects employee well-being, motivation, and work-life balance.

What Participation Involves

- You will be asked to complete a **survey** that includes both **multiple-choice and open-ended questions**.
- The survey will take approximately **20–30 minutes** to complete.
- Participation is **entirely voluntary**, and you may choose to withdraw at any time without any consequences.
- You may also skip any question you do not feel comfortable answering.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

- Your responses will remain **anonymous** and **confidential**.
- No personally identifiable information will be collected.
- All data will be stored securely and used only for academic purposes.
- Data will be reported in aggregate form only (e.g., group averages, themes) and will not be linked to any individual.
- The data collected may be published in a thesis or academic journal but will not include any identifying details.

Potential Risks and Benefits

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study. While there are no direct personal benefits, your input will contribute to a better understanding of the workplace challenges and needs of employees during transitions in work arrangements.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study or your rights as a participant, please contact:

Tara Cheevers

NCI Lecturer / Associate Faculty

Tara.Cheevers@ncirl.ie

Consent Declaration

By ticking the box below or signing this form (for printed versions), you are confirming that:

- You are **18 years of age or older**.
- You have **read and understood** the purpose of the study.
- You understand that participation is **voluntary** and that you can withdraw at any time.
- You **consent** to participate in the survey.

☐ I consent to participate in this research study.