

**EFFECTS OF HYBRID WORK ARRANGEMENTS ON LEAVE UTILISATION
AMONG EMPLOYEES: A CASE OF CHILDFUND INTERNATIONAL**

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ABSTRACT

The shift to hybrid work arrangements after Covid19 significantly changed employee behaviors, particularly in the way they use their allocated leave days. This study explored the effects of hybrid work arrangements on leave utilization among employees, a case of Childfund International, with a focus on three key aspects, I.e autonomy, work experience and sense of belonging. The study was directed by the self- determination theory (SDT), the researcher explored how these three psychological needs as stated by the SDT shape employee's motivation to take leave in a hybrid work context. The study adopted the sequential explanatory mixed methods research design, that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather comprehensive insights allowing for a better understanding of the research phenomenon. In phase one, quantitative data was collected using a structured questionnaire administered to 76 employees, while in phase two, qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews guided by the interview guide with 12 key informants. Findings in phase one indicate that autonomy negatively impacts leave utilization, as employees feel they are able to manage personal matters without the need to formally request time off. Work experience on the other hand positively impacts leave utilization, as senior employees are more confident in planning and requesting for leave compared to junior employees. A strong sense of belonging also negatively impacts leave utilization as employees with a greater sense of belonging tend to stay engaged in work related activities even while on leave to show commitment. The study provides recommendations to optimize leave utilization and enhance employee well-being in hybrid work settings, including fostering a culture that encourages leave-taking, implementing clear policies on leave management, and providing targeted support for junior employees. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on hybrid work arrangements and offers practical insights for organizations seeking to balance flexibility with employee well-being.

DECLARATION

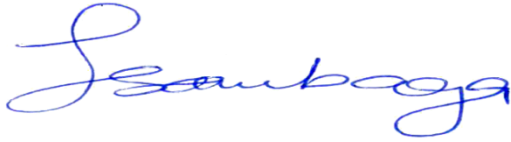
I, Teddy Aloikin do affirm that this is my original work which is not plagiarized and hasn't been submitted to any other institutions for any award.

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Date: _____4th April 2025_____ Signature:  _____

APPROVAL

This is to confirm that Teddy Aloikin's dissertation titled Effects of Hybrid Work Arrangements on Leave Utilization Among Employees: A Case Study of ChildFund International has been reviewed and submitted for examination, with my approval as the supervising professor.



Sign:

Date: 4th April 2025

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Supervisor

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DEDICATION

I dedicated this research dissertation to my family most especially my darling husband and children for their unwavering support and moral encouragement.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

FY-Financial Year

FWA-Flexible Work Arrangements

ILO-International Labour Organisation

CIPD-Chartered Institute of Personnel Development

SDT-Self Determination Theory

ICT-Information Communication Technology

HR-Human Resource

SPSS-Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

CFI-ChildFund International

ETC-Et cetera

I.E-That Is

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the foundation of the investigation, problem explanation, general goal, specific objectives, research questions and hypotheses, conceptual and theoretical framework, significance and justification of the study, and the scope of the study.

1.1 Background to the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a paradigm shift in workforce management, propelling organizations toward hybrid work arrangements which is a blend of remote and in-office work. These arrangements have been celebrated for promoting work-life balance, reducing commute times, and enhancing employee engagement (Pulido-Martos et al., 2021; Hopkins & Bardoel, 2020). However, emerging evidence reveals a troubling behavioral shift: employees working remotely are increasingly reluctant to utilize their leave entitlements (Bowen, 2023; Ware, 2021).

A study by Gusto Inc. (2021) found that remote workers are 22% less likely to take leave than their in-office counterparts, often due to a perceived lack of necessity or fear of negative consequences for being away. This reluctance has fueled presenteeism, where employees feel compelled to remain virtually available even when rest is needed (CIPD, 2020; Keshwani & Patel, 2023).

The issue is further exacerbated by information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Google Meet, which enable continuous connectivity and blur the lines between personal and professional life (Derks et al., 2016; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). As hybrid work becomes a norm, critical concerns arise around its impact on leave utilization, employee wellbeing, and organizational compliance, thus the need to study the effects of hybrid work arrangements on leave utilisation among employees.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although hybrid work arrangements have gained substantial traction in organizational practice, the academic discourse remains underdeveloped in examining their nuanced impact on leave utilization. Existing literature primarily highlights the advantages of hybrid models including increased worklife balance, flexibility, productivity, compliance and employee satisfaction (Pulido-Martos et al., 2021; Hopkins & Bardoel, 2020) but offers limited empirical and theoretical exploration of how these arrangements affect employees' willingness or motivation to take leave.

Recent studies suggest that hybrid workers are increasingly reluctant to utilize their leave entitlements, either because the flexibility of hybrid work reduces the perceived need for formal time off or because of persistent digital connectivity that promotes an “always-on” culture (Bowen, 2023; Ware, 2021; Keshwani & Patel, 2023). This behavior has been associated with presenteeism-employees remaining virtually engaged despite needing rest, which can have adverse effects on both individual health and organizational performance (CIPD, 2020; Derks et al., 2016).

However, there is a notable scholarly gap in understanding the psychosocial mechanisms such as autonomy, work experience, and sense of belonging that mediate the relationship between hybrid work and leave behavior. While Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) provides a useful lens to explore these dynamics, few studies have applied it within the context of hybrid work arrangements and leave utilization.

Furthermore, the broader implications of reduced leave-taking particularly on employee well-being, work-life balance, and statutory compliance (Employment Act, Cap. 226) remain under-researched. This conceptual void limits the ability of scholars and practitioners to develop informed strategies that optimize leave utilization and promote sustainable hybrid work cultures. This study seeks to bridge that gap by investigating how hybrid work arrangements affect leave utilization among employees.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study focused on examining the effects of hybrid work arrangements on employee leave utilisation, with a focus on three key aspects of autonomy, work experience and sense of belonging as drawn from the SDT. Exploring these factors, the research uncovered insights that can inform strategies to optimize leave utilisation and support employee wellbeing in a hybrid work context.

1.4 Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- 1. To examine how autonomy influences leave utilization in a hybrid work context.
- 2. To assess how employee’s work experience affects their confidence and likelihood of taking leave in a hybrid work environment.
- 3. To investigate how a sense of belonging impacts employee’s willingness to utilize their leave entitlements in a hybrid work context.

1.5 Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions.

- 1. In what ways does autonomy affect employees' decisions to take formal leave in a hybrid work environment?
- 2. How does work experience influence employees’ leave utilization behavior in hybrid arrangements?
- 3. What is the relationship between a sense of belonging and employees’ willingness to utilize leave entitlements in hybrid work settings.

Table. 1. Table of Objectives and Hypothesis

Objectives		Hypothesis	
1	To examine how autonomy influences leave utilization in a hybrid work context	H ₁	There is a positive relationship between autonomy and Leave utilization in a hybrid work context.
2	To assess how employee’s work experience affects their confidence and likelihood of taking leave in a hybrid work environment	H ₂	There is a positive relationship between employee work experience and Leave utilization.
3	To investigate how a sense of belonging impacts employee’s willingness to utilize their leave entitlements in a hybrid work context	H ₃	There is a positive relationship between sense of belonging and leave utilization in a hybrid work context.

1.6 Justification of the Study

Employee leave utilization is critical for maintaining a healthy and productive workforce. Uganda's Employment Act 2006 outlines various types of leave to ensure employees receive adequate rest. However, the shift to hybrid work arrangements during and after the COVID-19 pandemic altered how employees balance work and personal life. A study by Asana found that working from home improved focus and personal life management, leading to fewer leave requests (MacNeil, 2024). This suggests that hybrid work arrangements could disrupt traditional leave patterns. This study seeks to investigate the effects of hybrid work arrangements on leave utilization and provide insights and strategies to optimize leave utilization while supporting employee well-being.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study is of paramount importance to the academic discipline, particularly for universities and students, as it enhances understanding of the effects of hybrid work arrangements on leave utilization among employees. Additionally, the findings of this study could serve as a foundation for organizations and governments to develop alternative leave models and arrangements better suited to hybrid work environments, thereby enhancing employee well-being. This research not only contributes to the academic field but also provides practical insights for legal considerations, policy formulation, and strategic planning.

1.8 Scope of the Study

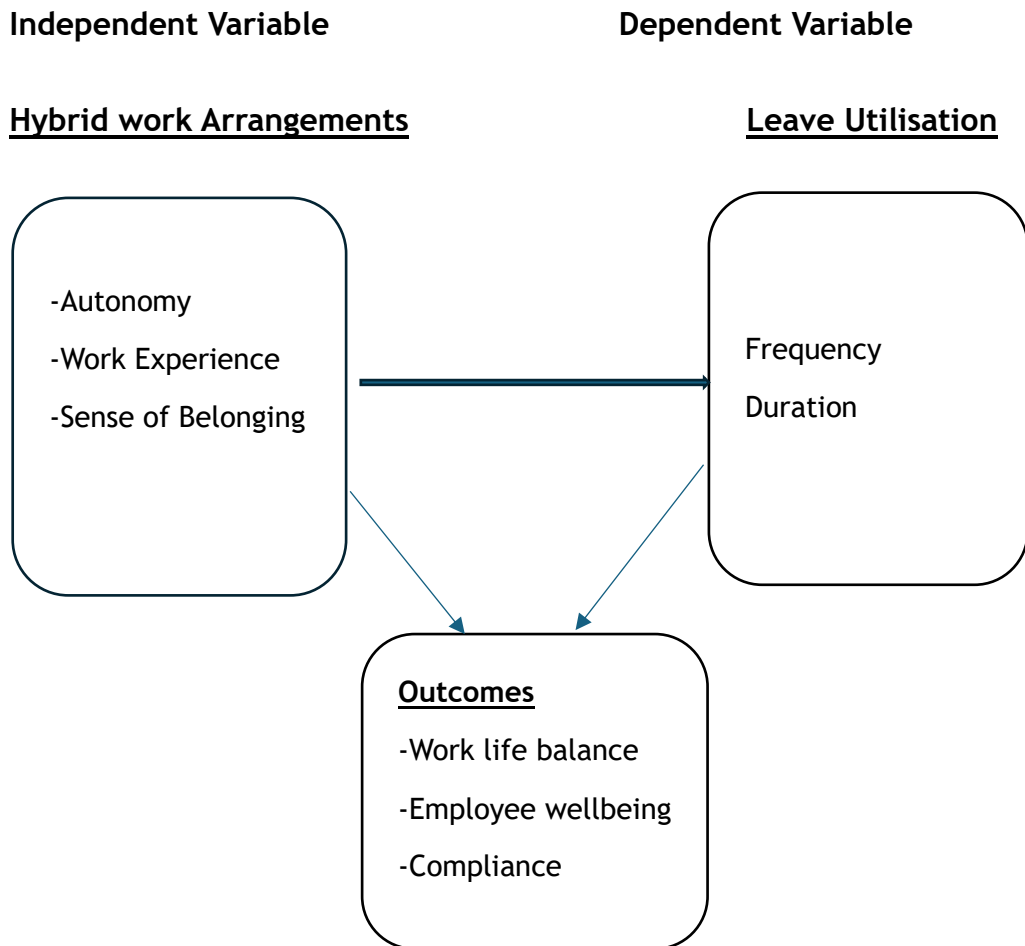
This study focused on ChildFund International, which has implemented hybrid work arrangements since 2019. The study concentrates on the period from FY 2023 to FY 2024 but also considers relevant information from outside this timeframe. The research aimed to gather detailed insights into the problem and obtain actionable strategies for Childfund International and similar organizations.

1.9 Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by the self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (1985). SDT posits that individuals have three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the context of hybrid work, autonomy refers to employees' control over their work schedules, which may influence the need for formal leave. Work experience (competence) involves mastery and

effectiveness in one's work, enabling employees to confidently plan and take leave. Sense of belonging (relatedness) emphasizes the need for meaningful relationships, which may influence employees' decisions to take leave. This framework provided a lens to examine how these psychological needs influence leave utilization in hybrid work arrangements.

Figure 1: Conceptual/theoretical framework



Source: The conceptual model was adapted and modified from theoretical and other Literature which is the self-determination theory and literature from Van den Broeck, A., Vansteenkiste, M., De Witte, H., Soenens, B., & Lens, W. (2010).

The diagram figure 1, explains how hybrid work arrangements influence leave utilization. Key dimensions of hybrid work such as better autonomy, sense of belonging, and work experience directly affect employees' decisions regarding leave utilization. Frequency and duration of leave are highlighted as measures of leave utilization, with hybrid work providing flexibility and autonomy that may reduce the need for extended leave periods (Bowen,2023).

1.10 Summary of Chapters

Chapter One introduces the study, providing background information on hybrid work arrangements and their implications for leave utilization. It outlines the research problem, objectives, research questions, scope, justification, significance, and theoretical framework guiding the study. Chapter Two presents a review of relevant literature, examining existing studies on hybrid work arrangements and employee leave utilization. Chapter Three details the research design, population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and analytical techniques. Chapter Four presents the research findings based on quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Chapter Five discusses the findings, draws conclusions, and provides recommendations for improving leave utilization in hybrid work settings.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviewed relevant literature on hybrid work arrangements and their impact on employee leave utilization. The literature review provides a theoretical and empirical foundation for the study, allowing identification of the research gap and gives context for the research questions (McCombes, 2023). The section is organized in three main segments which correspond the research questions. The chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of how hybrid work arrangements affect leave utilisation among employees.

The not so new hybrid work arrangements have grown in importance after covid19 (ILO, 2020c) which forced the organisations to adopt to remote work practices to be able to manage administrative costs as well as continue operations despite the lockdowns. This popularity of the flexible work arrangements is attributed to a number of trends including but not limited to advancement in technology which enables the virtual office and increased need for work life balance (Caros & Zhao, 2022).

Leave utilisation refers to the extent and tracking of how employees utilize their allocated leave days such as annual leave, sick leave and maternity leave. This usually happens when employees take time off work while still receiving pay and other benefits (ILO, 2004).

Hybrid work arrangements offer employees flexibility to choose where and how they do their work, in office or remotely (Pulido-Martos et al., 2021). The move had significant effects on employee behavior especially in terms of leave utilisation. It is crucial to understand the factors that influence employee's motivation to take leave helps to optimize leave utilisation in this context. This literature review investigated three critical aspects influencing leave utilization in a hybrid work environment: autonomy, work experience, and sense of belonging.

2.2 Theoretical Literature Review

Grounded in the self-determination theory proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), the study suggests that individuals have three psychological needs, i.e. autonomy, work experience and sense of belonging. These needs are essential if employees are to feel motivated. In the hybrid work context, autonomy is defined as the ability of employees to control their work schedules and decision-making processes which motivates employees to take leave (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Work experience is about the mastery and effectiveness in one's work, enabling employees to confidently plan and take their leave. Sense of belonging is defined as the need for meaningful relationships at work, which can influence leave taking decisions among staff (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). This theory provided a lens through which to examine how the three psychological needs affect leave utilisation in a hybrid work environment.

The SDT highlights competence (work experience) as a key psychological need which is developed through experience. This plays a significant role in employees ability to navigate their roles effectively. A study Ng and Feldman (2009) shows that experienced employees are better at time management and task planning/prioritizing, which enables them to balance work and personal responsibilities more effectively. This experience gains fosters confidence in managing workloads

and scheduling time off which is crucial in hybrid work settings where work and personal life boundaries are blurred.

The relationship between experience and leave utilisation is double edged, while experience equips employees with skills to better manage their time and responsibilities, it can also create a reluctance to take leave. A study by Johnsen, Ku, and Salvanes (2020) shows that experienced employees are hesitant to take leave due to concerns about career progression and inability to delegate work. This means that while experience develops confidence, it can also lead to a higher sense of responsibility and fear of disengagement from work which can discourage employees to utilize their leave.

Research by Kossek, E. E., & Lautsch, B. A. (2018) highlights that experienced employees have more accrued leave and high levels of trust with management, which gives them the confidence to ask for leave compared to the junior counterparts. Likewise, Allen, T. D., Johnson, R. C., Kiburz, K. M., & Shockley, K. M. (2013) in their study, emphasized that experienced employees are better planners and schedulers of time off due to their knowledge of the organizational processes and policies. Bardoel, E. A., De Cieri, H., & Santos, C. (2008) additionally noted that experienced employees have a better understanding of leave policies which enables them to utilize their leave days effectively.

Similarly, Kelliher, C., & Anderson, D. (2010) noted that senior employees are more likely to take time off because they have a better understanding of how to balance work and personal life. This was reinforced by Lewis, S., & Cooper, C. L. (2005), that experienced employees have control over their schedules, can handle pressure better and are better at planning leave due to their knowledge asset in the Organisation.

The SDT also highlights sense of belonging as a motivating factor and is associated with staff emotional well-being and engagement. Blau, (1964) social exchange theory provide a lens to examine how employees perceive their sense of belonging within the organisation and colleagues. Those with a stronger sense of belonging feel a higher sense of commitment, responsibility and loyalty to the organisation which inclines them to use more leave. This is backed up by findings from a study by

Dery and Hafermalz (2016), who found that a strong workplace connection which is enhanced through digital platforms leads to increased engagement, this leads to burnout and eventual need for leave.

While the theory highlights autonomy as a motivating factor, the risk of working beyond the normal work hours remains unaddressed as employees keep engaging in work related activities even while sick or on annual leave through digital platforms. Likewise work experience is seen to support efficiency and mastery which increases leave utilisation but can also foster reluctance to take leave among less experienced staff. Lastly a stronger sense of belonging theoretically promotes work life balance which motivates employees to take leave.

2.3 Empirical Literature Review

2.3.1 How Does Autonomy Influence an Employee's Motivation to Take Leave

Autonomy is a fundamental component of hybrid work arrangements, allowing employees to control their work schedules, tasks, and decision-making processes. Deci and Ryan (2000) define autonomy as the need for individuals to have control over their work. Research indicates that autonomy enhances job satisfaction and work-life balance while potentially increasing the urgency to take formal leave (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

The increasing ability to work outside traditional office settings has amplified the role of self-management, particularly as more employees telecommute. Compared to 30 years ago, three times as many workers now perform their duties primarily from home, coffee shops, or other remote locations (Mateyka et al., 2012). As a result, organizations increasingly use technology for surveillance and monitoring (Okhuysen et al., 2013; Watson et al., 2013). Employees exercise control not only over how they complete tasks (methods autonomy) but also over when (worktime autonomy) and where (workplace autonomy) they work (Kubicek et al., 2017). This level of autonomy enables employees to manage their schedules, reinforcing the role of autonomy in hybrid work settings as a mechanism for delegating power and providing freedom of choice in the work environment.

Kubicek et al. (2017) provide insights into how different types of job autonomy influence leave utilization. Employees with control over their tasks often experience higher job satisfaction and

lower stress levels, which can enhance job performance and increase the need for time off. In the context of hybrid work, methods autonomy helps employees to manage workloads more effectively, which encourages leave utilisation. Allowing staff to determine their work schedules can have mixed effects. On one hand it increases work life balance, on the other hand it may result into working beyond work hours and thus inability to disconnect from work (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2020). Additionally, workplace autonomy enhances comfort and reduces commuting time and stress, which can positively motivate employees to take leave (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). However, the effects of these autonomy dimensions vary on individuals and job characteristics. Employees who are disciplined and can manage time may thrive, while other who struggle in un structured environments may struggle to adopt thus leading to varying leave taking behaviors.

Parker and Collins (2010) in their study examined workplace behaviors and found that autonomy does significantly predict employee's willingness to take leave. Fiorini (2024) found factors that influence leave behaviours to be; health related concerns, work factors and perceptions of sickness which contribute to presenteeism and leaveism. Presenteeism is the tendency of employees to engage in work activities even while sick rather than formally request for leave (Hemp, 2004; Taloyan et al., 2012; Aronsson & Gustafsson, 2005), this is worsened by the ever-available technology in hybrid work environments (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2020). Bowen (2023) proposed that hybrid workers may take workcation or simply recharge at home. Leaveism, a concept where employees use their leave for work related activities or entirely avoid taking leave due to work load has increased with autonomy in place (Hesketh & Cooper, 2014).

Keshwani and Patel (2023) studied the effects of technology on leave utilisation and found that constant connectivity through work whatsapp groups, MS teams etc, blur work life boundaries leading to tech stress. Derks, Fischer, and Bos (2014) also found that employees experiencing higher level of tech stress were more likely to utilize leave but will stay connect to work by responding to emails. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found that employees with a preference for boundary autonomy were

more likely to use their leave benefits, which means that those who prioritize work life balance are more able to use their leave entitlements.

Studies have suggested that autonomy encourages being proactive by enabling employees to schedule and plan their work strategically and therefore see leave as a right rather than a burden (Kossek et al., 2014; Parker & Collins, 2010). A study by Parker and Collins (2010) found that employees working hybrid took 17% more leave days than those working from office as they felt more confident in delegating tasks. This is supported by Bloom et al. (2015) who observed a 22% increase in leave utilisation among remote workers in a Chinese firm which was attributed to schedule autonomy. Choudhury et al. (2019) also found that hybrid work policies led employees to shorter but more frequent vacations by planning and aligning their leave with work load periods.

Kelly and Moen (2020) confirmed that schedule autonomy allowed employees to take more parental leave and sick leave due to reduced concerns about career drawbacks. Ryan and Deci (2017) associated autonomy to intrinsic motivation which reduces stress and increases leave utilisation. However, critics argued that autonomy can decrease leave utilisation by blurring boundaries between work and home thus a perceived lack of need for leave (Derks et al., 2016). It also encourages employees to continue working even while sick in order to maintain productivity and show commitment (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

Parker et al. (2021) addressed these by suggesting that autonomy increases leave utilisation if supported by mandatory leave reminders and policies and leadership role models.

However, research presents a more complex picture. Derks et al. (2016) argue that digital communication tools used in hybrid work settings can erode boundaries between work and personal life, encouraging employees to remain constantly available. This can lead to "digital presenteeism," where autonomy paradoxically reduces disconnection from work. Similarly, Bowen (2023) found that employees with greater control over their schedules often bypass formal leave by informally adjusting their hours, leading to underutilization of leave entitlements.

Thus, while autonomy is designed to empower employees, it may unintentionally contribute to a culture of continuous availability, undermining the purpose of structured leave.

While autonomy is often linked to greater job satisfaction and work-life balance (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), its influence on leave utilization is complex. On one hand, autonomy allows employees to manage their own schedules, leading to increased self-regulation and potentially reducing the need for formal leave (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). On the other hand, heightened autonomy may encourage an “always-on” culture, particularly in hybrid work settings where digital connectivity blurs boundaries (Derks et al., 2016), thereby undermining rest and recovery. Contrary to the presumption that flexibility improves leave behavior, Derks et al. (2016) found that high-autonomy environments can decrease actual disconnection from work, suggesting that autonomy, in practice, may lead to **underutilization** of leave due to blurred professional boundaries.

H₁. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between autonomy and leave utilization.

However, the results of the analysis indicate a negative relationship between autonomy and employee leave utilization, contrary to the proposed hypothesis. This suggests that as employee autonomy increases, leave utilization decreases at Childfund International.

2.3.2 The Relationship Between Employees' Work Experience And Leave Utilization

Work experience is described as the overall length of time in an occupation or workforce (Kegans, McCamey, & Hammond, 2012). It plays a critical role in shaping employees' ability to navigate hybrid work arrangements and utilize leave effectively. Experienced employees are more likely to take leave due to their familiarity with organizational policies, confidence in delegating tasks, and accumulated leave entitlements (Ng & Feldman, 2009). Conversely, junior employees may hesitate to take leave due to fear of negative perceptions or lack of confidence in managing workloads (Johnsen, Ku, & Salvanes, 2020). Research by Srikanth (2020) highlights that work experience enhances employees' ability to balance work and personal responsibilities, leading to more effective

leave utilization. However, the relationship between work experience and leave utilization is nuanced, as experienced employees may also face challenges in disconnecting from work due to role demands and organizational expectations (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018).

Previous work experience can influence how employees adapt and navigate flexible work environments. A worker with good experience in their job can become a master of their work due to the special gift of experience they acquired during their work. This experience gives them the expertise and makes them more reliable and efficient due to tacit knowledge (Ng & Feldman, 2009). They can also influence their skills and knowledge gained to excel in hybrid work environments. Experienced employees find it easier to manage the different work settings. Experience is an asset that contributes to job satisfaction and wellbeing. This review aims to establish the relationship between employee's work experience and leave utilisation in the hybrid work context.

Research by Srikanth, P. B. (2020) found that both cognitive ability and job experience are good predictors of work performance, suggesting that as employees gain more experience, their job knowledge and performance improve drastically thus enabling them to better manage remote work. The depth of the experience which refers to the intensity and variety of the work experience was also found to be a good predictor of competencies. Employees with diverse and intensive work experience have more developed cognitive skills suggesting that the depth of work experience is crucial for employees to balance and manage hybrid work and leave entitlements.

Senior employees may therefore take more leave as they are better at handling work related challenges, pressures and maintaining work life balance. Similarly, junior employees may utilize less leave benefits to in order to cope with workloads, and stress of their roles as they still building their job knowledge and skills. The findings from Srikanth, P. B. (2020). Found that increased experience not only enhances work performance but also influences leave utilisation as employees are able to manage their responsibilities more effectively and experience lower job-related stress levels. This connection supports the hypothesis that work experience plays a critical role in influencing leave

utilization patterns among employees in a hybrid work environment.

Helyer & Lee, (2014)., agree that work experience is a crucial factor of professional development, that contributes to an individual's skills, knowledge and employability Work experience is widely recognized as a crucial component of professional development, contributing to an individual's skills, knowledge, and overall employability. Research by Oswald-Egg & Renold, (2021). Has shown that work experience has a positive impact on employment outcomes and Leave utilization.

Oswald-Egg & Renold, (2021) emphasized that work experience is important in enhancing employability and the practical application of knowledge. These findings submit that employees with relevant and superior work experience are likely to be more adept at navigating hybrid work arrangements. These workers may also feel more confident in managing their leave benefits, given their established skills and understanding of job expectations. The fear of missing out on career promotion can discourage experienced employees from taking leave (Johnsen, Ku, and Salvanes, 2020) In hybrid work settings, as online visibility and presence affect perceptions of commitment and productivity. Experienced employees working remotely and are more concerned about career progression may less likely take leave, fearing that it could hinder their professional growth. On the other hand, those with better integration skills might use their leave entitlements more effectively.

A study by Allen and Martin (2017) suggests that more experienced employees typically excel at managing work and family roles and are better at utilizing their leave benefits effectively. Their competence shapes their psychological contracts, influencing their expectations and obligations regarding leave (Ng & Feldman, 2009). This is particularly relevant in hybrid work arrangements, where the ability to prioritize and multi task significantly affect leave utilization. In a hybrid work context, staff with extensive experience might have different outlooks regarding leave and work arrangements compared to less experienced colleagues. Their reputable psychological contracts can influence how they perceive and utilize their leave entitlements. Conversely, other scholars highlight

a counter-narrative. Johnsen et al. (2020) and Mayer (2023) note that experienced employees often occupy senior roles with higher responsibilities, which can deter them from taking leave due to perceived indispensability or fear of workflow disruption. This is echoed in this study's findings, where participants cited workload and a sense of duty as barriers to utilizing leave.

Therefore, while experience equips employees with procedural knowledge, it may also entrench a sense of obligation that discourages formal rest.

H₂ Therefore, there is a positive relationship between work experience and leave utilization.

This is supported by the regression results in Chapter four, which indicate a positive relationship between employees work experience and leave utilisation suggesting that as employees gain more experience, leave utilisation increases.

2.3.3 The Relationship Between Employees' Sense Of Belonging And Leave Utilization

A sense of belonging means employees' feelings of inclusion, support, and connection within their workplace (Maslow, 1968). It promotes job satisfaction and reduces stress which can influence leave utilization by fostering engagement and commitment (Stamper & Masterson, 2002). In hybrid work environments, technology which is always available facilitates constant connectivity thus thinning the boundaries between work and personal life (Filstad et al., 2019). A strong sense of belonging in such settings can help mitigate feelings of isolation, reinforcing employee's confidence in utilizing leave when they need to. Equally, a lack of belonging may lead to disengagement which can potentially increase leave utilization as employees feel disconnected from their work and organization (Shore et al., 2011).

Belonging is a vital human need that fosters identification and social connection within organizations (Blau et al., 2023). It is different from related concepts such as perceived organizational support, organizational culture, and organizational commitment (Blau, Goldberg, & Kyser, 2023). Insider status, psychological ownership, and organizational identification are critical components of belongingness. Employees who perceive themselves as integral members of their workplace are more able to delegate work due to trust within the team thus are likely to take leave when necessary,

particularly in a hybrid work environment, where work-life boundaries thin (Stamper & Masterson, 2002).

The SDT provides a framework to understand how belonging influences leave utilization. It suggests that a strong sense of belonging satisfies the need for relatedness, fostering psychological safety and reducing guilt associated with taking leave, if supported by inclusive workplace policies, employees are more likely to take leave without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 2018). Trust in colleagues enables delegation and workload management further reinforces this behavior (Allen & Shanock, 2013). However, the effects of belonging on leave utilization is shaped by organizational culture more so in workplaces that normalize rest and recovery, employees with a high sense of belonging are more likely to use their leave (Kelly & Moen, 2020).

Nishii (2013). research on diversity and inclusion found that gender-diverse teams in inclusive environments exhibited higher leave utilization suggesting that a psychologically safe workplace encourages employees to prioritize wellbeing. Additionally, Dery and Hafermalz (2016) emphasized the role of ICT in maintaining remote workers' identity and connection. ICT tools like Ms teams that facilitate virtual presence can reinforce a sense of belonging thereby influencing leave utilization in hybrid work settings.

A strong sense of belonging contributes to a positive work environment enhancing job satisfaction and organizational commitment while reducing stress and burnout (Filstad et al., 2019). Employees who feel valued and integrated within their teams are more likely to take leave as and when needed without fear of professional repercussions. Supportive leadership style further fosters this dynamic, as empathetic and approachable leaders foster a culture of trust and engagement (Filstad et al., 2019). Literature consistently shows that experienced employees exhibit more proactive leave behaviors, citing confidence in task delegation and policy knowledge as enablers (Ng & Feldman, 2009; Allen et al., 2013). However, this perspective overlooks that senior roles often come with increased responsibility, which can paradoxically discourage leave-taking. For example, Johnsen et al. (2020) observed that experienced employees may hesitate to take leave for fear of work

disruption or negative career consequences. Furthermore, qualitative data from this study revealed that experienced staff often feel indispensable during critical periods, suggesting that while experience facilitates leave knowledge, it may also correlate with leave avoidance due to job demands.

However, the relationship between belonging and leave utilization is not straightforward. Davis and Wilson (2022) found that highly engaged employees often feel guilty about taking leave, fearing they may let their teams down or miss out on important developments. This aligns with Bowen (2023), who observed that strong organizational commitment can manifest in reduced time off.

Contrastingly, Kelly and Moen (2020) argue that in organizations where belonging is paired with supportive leadership and clear well-being policies, employees are more likely to take leave without guilt. Thus, belonging can either facilitate or inhibit leave behavior, depending on the organizational culture and leadership approach. While a strong sense of belonging is associated with increased engagement and psychological safety (Stamper & Masterson, 2002; Edmondson, 2018), it may inadvertently suppress leave utilization as highly engaged employees feel guilty or reluctant to disconnect (Davis & Wilson, 2022). However, other studies argue that a supportive and inclusive culture can foster confidence in taking leave, especially where organizational norms endorse rest as part of well-being (Kelly & Moen, 2020; Shore et al., 2011). This duality suggests that belonging can both encourage and discourage leave, depending on whether the workplace culture prioritizes continuous availability or balanced rest organizational policies and practices to optimize leave utilisation.

H₃ it was hypothesized that, there is a positive relationship between a sense of belonging and leave utilization.

Contrary to the hypothesis, the analysis in chapter four indicates that there is a negative relationship between sense of belonging and leave utilisation. Suggesting that as employees feel a great connection, they tend not to utilize their leave entitlements for fear of missing out.

2.4 Gap in the Literature

While existing research has examined the benefits and challenges of hybrid work arrangements, productivity, work life balance and engagement in a hybrid work context, few have looked into the interchange between autonomy, work experience and sense of belonging in shaping leave behaviours in hybrid environments. There is a gap in understanding how these arrangements impact employee leave utilisation. This study addresses this gap by investigating the effects of hybrid work arrangements on leave utilization among employees, providing insights that can inform the effect of belonging on leave behavior.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

2.0 Introduction

This chapter explains how the research was designed and conducted to explore how hybrid work arrangements affect employees' use of leave at ChildFund International. The study follows a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, meaning it first gathers and analyzes quantitative data before using qualitative methods to provide deeper insights. This section covers the research framework, participant selection, data collection methods, and analysis techniques. It also discusses ethical considerations, as well as measures taken to ensure the study's validity and reliability, ensuring the findings are both credible and meaningful.

2.1 Research Approach

This study used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, meaning it first gathered and analyzed numerical data before following up with in-depth qualitative insights (Creswell, 2018). This approach aligns with Creswell's (2018) recommendation for integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to fully understand complex issues like how autonomy, work experience, and a sense of belonging influence leave utilization in hybrid work settings.

Quantitative Phase: The first phase focused on collecting numerical data through structured questionnaires. The goal was to test hypotheses, identify patterns, and generalize findings from a sample to a larger population. This method provided a broad, data-driven perspective on how employees at ChildFund International use their leave in a hybrid work environment (Ghanad, 2023).

Rooted in empiricism and positivism, the quantitative approach followed a structured process to measure variables, detect trends, and draw objective conclusions using statistical evidence (Bryman, 2016). By collecting data in a standardized way, the study ensured consistency and reliability in its findings. The structured questionnaires were designed to answer key research questions outlined in Chapter One, forming a strong foundation for data-driven decision-making.

Qualitative Phase: The second phase involved in-depth interviews to explore employees' experiences and perspectives more deeply. Unlike the numerical focus of the first phase, this stage gathered descriptive, non-numerical data—such as personal stories, perceptions, and lived experiences (Edwards & Holland, 2013). This approach allowed for a richer understanding of how employees navigate leave policies in a hybrid work environment, capturing the complexities that numbers alone might miss (Burch & Heinrich, 2016).

A qualitative descriptive approach was chosen because it provides clear, detailed insights without overinterpreting the data (Neergaard et al., 2009). This method helped paint a fuller picture of how hybrid work affects leave utilization at ChildFund International, while its flexibility allowed for adjustments throughout the research process (Maxwell, 2012).

While qualitative research is powerful in capturing human experiences, it has its limitations. Some critics, like Silverman (2010), argue that it can be too subjective or overlook important contextual factors. To address these concerns, the study also incorporated descriptive statistics to help interpret and present findings more effectively.

By combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, this two-phase design provided a well-rounded understanding of the research problem. The structured data from the first phase offered measurable insights, while the in-depth interviews in the second phase added context and depth. Together, these methods created a more comprehensive analysis of how hybrid work arrangements influence employees' leave utilization.

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 Sequential Explanatory Design

This study set out to explore how hybrid work arrangements impact employee leave utilization at ChildFund International, using a sequential explanatory research design. In simple terms, this approach involved two phases: first collecting and analyzing numerical data, followed by in-depth qualitative insights to add context and deeper understanding (Creswell, 2018). This method provided a clear framework for aligning the research questions with the overall strategy (Khanday & Khanam, 2023, p. 376). Since the research questions outlined in Chapter One required both comprehensive patterns and personal perspectives, a two-phase approach was chosen:

Quantitative Phase: Hybrid employees completed structured surveys to measure factors like autonomy, work experience, sense of belonging, and leave utilization.

Qualitative Phase: Follow-up interviews were conducted with key informants to explore the reasons behind the survey results and uncover additional insights. This focused more on the positive hypotheses.

By combining both methods, the study examined how autonomy influences employees' motivation to take leave and how work experience and a sense of belonging play a role in leave utilization (Wasti et al., 2022). The integration of these two approaches created a more well-rounded understanding of the research problem.

The sequential explanatory design made it possible to systematically blend numerical data with qualitative perspectives, offering a richer and more nuanced interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2018). By leveraging the strengths of both methods, the study was able to address the research questions in a comprehensive and meaningful way.

3.2 Area of Study

The study took place at ChildFund International in Uganda and Kenya, a nonprofit organization that has been using hybrid work arrangements since 2019. This made it a fitting setting for exploring the

research questions, as the organization had real experience with hybrid work models and their impact on employees.

3.3 Sources of Information

The main sources of information for this study were primary data collected through questionnaires filled out by ChildFund staff in Uganda and Kenya, as well as key informant interviews with management and global staff.

3.4 Population and Sampling

3.4.1 Population

ChildFund Uganda and Kenya had a total of 100 hybrid workers. This comprised of 85 staff and 15 managers. The quantitative study focused on the 85 employees at ChildFund International Uganda and Kenya who work under hybrid arrangements to gain insights into leave utilization in a hybrid work context, aligning with the research objectives outlined in Chapter One.

The qualitative study focused on the 15 management and global staff, who served as key informants due to their relatively longer experience with hybrid work arrangements. The researcher believed that these individuals were in a better position to substantiate the results from the quantitative study.

3.4.2 Sampling Method

3.4.2.1 Probability Sampling

The quantitative phase applied probability sampling to select the sample. In this method, a sample was selected from a population giving every member an equal chance of being selected and participating. This approach ensured that the sample was representative of the population and reduced selection bias. It is based on the principle of randomization, or chance (Rahman et al., 2022).

3.4.2.2 Non-Probability Sampling

non-probability sampling methods were used for the qualitative phase. As articulated by Alvi (2016),

non-probability sampling does not afford every unit within the population an equal opportunity for participation in the study.

The principle of non-probability sampling lay in its reliance on non-random methods to select participants (Vehovar, Toepoel, & Steinmetz, 2016). This approach is advantageous when the researcher seeks to obtain specific insights from subgroups within a population, in this case, management staff who had worked remotely longer than other employees. Non-probability sampling allowed the researcher to leverage their subjective judgment, convenience, and the availability of participants to inform their sampling decisions (Vehovar, Toepoel, & Steinmetz, 2016). Since this phase aimed to substantiate the results from the quantitative phase, the researcher believed it was the appropriate choice for the study.

3.4.3 Sample Size

Quantitative Phase: Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, a sample size of 76 employees was selected from a population of 85, ensuring adequate representation.

Qualitative Phase: Data saturation was achieved after interviewing 12 key informants, as no new themes emerge from the data.

In quantitative research, a larger sample size is often deemed necessary to obtain accurate and reliable results (Gumpili & Das, 2022). However, according to Indrayan and Mishra (2021), researchers should focus on creating an optimal study design, obtaining accurate measurements, conducting appropriate analyses, and ensuring correct interpretation to enhance the validity of their results, rather than fixating on sample size. Validity was crucial for producing accurate findings. This approach could often be more cost-effective. In some cases, when disproving a hypothesis or demonstrating a potential effect, even a very small sample size might suffice (Indrayan & Mishra, 2021). Mooney (2019) defines a sample size as a subset of a specific selected population. The sample size was determined from the study population based on Krejcie and Morgan table as shown below:

Table 1: Krejcie and Morgan Table

N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	100	80	280	162	800	260	2800	338
15	14	110	86	290	165	850	265	3000	341
20	19	120	92	300	169	900	269	3500	246
25	24	130	97	320	175	950	274	4000	351
30	28	140	103	340	181	1000	278	4500	351
35	32	150	108	360	186	1100	285	5000	357
40	36	160	113	380	191	1200	291	6000	361
45	40	180	118	400	196	1300	297	7000	364
50	44	190	123	420	201	1400	302	8000	367
55	48	200	127	440	205	1500	306	9000	368
60	52	210	132	460	210	1600	310	10000	373
65	56	220	136	480	214	1700	313	15000	375
70	59	230	140	500	217	1800	317	20000	377
75	63	240	144	550	225	1900	320	30000	379
80	66	250	148	600	234	2000	322	40000	380
85	70	260	152	650	242	2200	327	50000	381
90	73	270	155	700	248	2400	331	75000	382
95	76	270	159	750	256	2600	335	100000	384

Note: "N" is population size
"S" is sample size.

Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970

Source: Image from the internet

Based on the above table, from a population of 30 staff, Childfund Uganda country office contributed 28 and Childfund Kenya with a population of 55 contributed 48 staff considering the slightly higher number of hybrid workers in the Kenyan office.

In the qualitative phase, the researcher interviewed management and global staff until a point of saturation was reached.

Table 3: The sample size determination for quantitative phase

Category	Population	Sample size	Sampling Technique
Childfund Uganda Hybrid staff	30	28	Simple random Sampling
Childfund Kenya hybrid staff	55	48	Simple random sampling
Total	85	76	

Source: Childfund Uganda and Kenya Primary data 2024.

3.4.4 Sampling Techniques

3.4.4.1 Simple Random Sampling

Quantitative Phase: A simple random sampling technique was used to select 76 employees from the population. This ensured that every employee had an equal chance of being selected, reducing selection bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample.

This is a probability sampling technique that ensures every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected, thereby increasing the representativeness of the sample (Noor, Tajik, & Golzar, 2022). Simple random sampling was chosen because it reduces selection bias and allows the findings to be generalized to the broader population.

Qualitative Phase

3.4.4.2 Purposive Sampling

Qualitative Phase: A purposive sampling was used to select 12 key informants, including managers and global staff with extensive experience in hybrid work arrangements. This approach ensured that participants with relevant insights were included in the study. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research to select participants with relevant insights (Palinkas et al., 2015)."

This non-probability technique allowed the researcher to select participants based on their knowledge, experiences, and other relevant characteristics (Palinkas et al., 2015). It enables the selection of employees who are eligible for hybrid work arrangements at ChildFund International (Alvi, 2016).

3.5 Variables, Indicators and Measurements

3.5.1 Independent Variables

Autonomy was defined by the study as the level of control employees have over their work schedules and decision-making processes within a hybrid work environment. The rationale for autonomy is that it forms the very basis of hybrid work arrangements. High degree of autonomy leads to reduced leave utilization among hybrid workers as they perceive it unnecessary due to the flexibility they already enjoy. Indicators included flexibility in work schedules, control over

task execution, and decision-making authority. This variable was measured using an ordinal scale (6-point Likert scale) to assess perceived flexibility and autonomy in hybrid work settings.

Work experience was described as mastery and effectiveness in one's work, enabling employees to confidently plan and take leave. It is a combination of tenure at the organisation as well as years of work experience accumulated. It stems from overall length of time in an occupation or workforce (Kegans, McCamey, & Hammond, 2012). The rationale for this variable is that work experience is crucial in navigating the hybrid work arrangements. The more the work experience the better an employee is able to plan and utilize their leave. Indicators included tenure at ChildFund, total years of professional experience, ability to manage workload, and awareness of leave entitlements. Measurement was conducted using a 6-point likert scale and ratio scale (self-reported years of experience) and categorical rankings (confidence in handling tasks and awareness of leave policies).

Sense of Belonging was defined as the extent to which employees feel included, supported, and engaged in their workplace (Blau, Goldberg, & Kyser, 2023). The rationale for this is that it provides a form of cohesion among staff thus influencing relationships, commitment and ultimately leave utilization. Indicators included workplace inclusion, peer support, and participation in organizational activities. This variable was measured using an ordinal scale (6-point Likert scale) to assess perceived inclusion, frequency of participation in work-related activities, and social support at work.

3.5.2 Dependent Variable

Leave Utilization was defined as the degree to which employees take advantage of their leave entitlements within a hybrid work arrangement. The rationale for the variable was that leave is essential for rest and recuperation and general wellbeing of employees. Indicators included the frequency of leave taken and the duration of leave. Measurement was conducted using a ratio

scale (employee self-reported leave patterns) and an ordinal scale (6-point Likert scale) to assess confidence in taking leave.

3.6 Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher sought for an introductory letter from Uganda Christian University, which facilitated her introduction to ChildFund International. This letter was emailed to ChildFund's management, enabling her to obtain their consent for data collection. Following the development of a questionnaire, the researcher also drafted a consent letter to assure participants that their responses would remain confidential and would be used solely for academic purposes. A positive rapport was established with the respondents, who were briefed on the study's objectives and provided with clear instructions and guidelines on how to complete the questionnaires.

Quantitative Data Collection

3.6.1 Structured Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on autonomy, work experience, sense of belonging, and leave utilization. The questionnaire included a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6, to assess the effects of hybrid work arrangements on leave utilization (Msuya & Kumar, 2022).

A six-point scale strikes an effective balance by offering a broader range of responses than simple yes-or-no options while still being easy for participants to use. It helped capture more detailed opinions and subtle differences in responses. By avoiding neutral middle option, it encouraged participants to think more carefully about their viewpoints. This scale works well across different types of surveys, providing enough detail without being overly complex. Researchers also find it useful for analysis, as it generates richer data without overwhelming participants (Joshi, Kale, Chandel, & Pal, 2015).

The questionnaire was administered online using Google Forms and distributed via email and WhatsApp. Participants are provided with clear instructions and assured of confidentiality.

The researcher-oriented respondents on the content of the questionnaire before administering it to ensure clarity on the terms and content. The aim was to collect data to understand the research questions and test hypotheses.

The researcher downloaded the responses from Google Forms, organized the data in excel and subjected them to SPSS 29 for analysis.

Qualitative Phase

3.6.2 Interviews

An interview guide was used to conduct in-depth interviews with key informants. The guide included open-ended questions to explore participants' experiences and perceptions of hybrid work arrangements and leave utilization.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via phone, depending on participants' availability. Each interview was audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed for analysis. Interviews are the most widely used approach for data collection in qualitative research (Jamshed, 2014). To gain a deeper understanding of how autonomy, work experience, and a sense of belonging influence leave utilization in a hybrid work setting, the researcher had in-depth conversations with management and global staff. These discussions were carried out through both face-to-face and phone interviews, ensuring a flexible and inclusive approach. As Jamshed (2014) suggests, in-depth interviews require adaptability, so participants were interviewed at times and locations that were most convenient and comfortable for them.

The interviews were designed to be engaging and interactive, encouraging open and honest responses. This approach helped create a natural flow of conversation while allowing room for deeper insights. A total of twelve participants—including management and global staff—were interviewed, with the final number determined by the point of data saturation, meaning interviews continued until no new information was emerging.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments and Equipment

3.7.1 Structured Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a structured tool used to gather information from respondents about their

attitudes, experiences, and opinions on how hybrid work arrangements impact leave utilization. As Kuphanga (2024) points out, questionnaires are a flexible and effective method for collecting data across various research fields. Their standardized format makes it easier to organize and analyze responses, making them especially valuable for quantitative research.

This approach is also practical and cost-effective, allowing researchers to reach a broad and diverse group of participants. By streamlining data collection, questionnaires help capture comprehensive insights efficiently, making them a reliable tool for understanding trends and patterns in employee leave utilization (Kuphanga, 2024).

3.7.2 Interview guide

The interview guide, detailed in Appendix 2, was designed with follow-up questions to help validate and expand on the findings from the quantitative study on how hybrid work arrangements impact leave utilization among employees at ChildFund. It also served as a tool for gathering insights from key informants across different departments within the organization.

To gain a well-rounded perspective, the researcher conducted interviews with management and global staff at ChildFund International using an interview guide with open-ended questions. This approach allowed participants to share their thoughts and experiences in depth, providing valuable context to the study. Since interviews are widely recognized as an essential qualitative research tool (McIntosh & Morse, 2015), careful preparation of the guide was crucial it ensured meaningful conversations and helped capture a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

The researcher also demonstrated strong listening skills and fostered authentic relationships with participants to ensure meaningful engagement (Lavis, 2010). Interviews were conducted because they had the advantage of ensuring probing for more information, clarification and capturing non-verbal expressions of the interviewees. It gave the researcher time to revisit some of the issues that could have been an oversight in the questionnaire and yet was deemed vital for the study. The collected data addressed the research questions and was triangulated with findings from the

accompanying quantitative study to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic, support the questionnaire, and supplement findings.

3.8 Quality/Error Control

To ensure data quality and reliability in the study, the researcher adhered to key data management principles as advised by Stvilia, Pang, Lee, and Gunaydin (2024).

Pilot Testing. The questionnaire and interview guide were pilot-tested to identify and address any issues before the main data collection.

Data Cleaning. The data was thoroughly checked for errors, missing values, and outliers before analysis. **Triangulation.** Quantitative and qualitative findings were triangulated to enhance the credibility and validity of the results.

3.8.1 Control of Common Bias

To minimize common biases in the study, several strategies were employed. Temporal separation was used alongside a 6-point Likert scale to reduce bias associated with neutral or middle-range responses. One key advantage of using a six-point scale was that the even number of response options resulted in well-balanced categories (Joshi, Kale, Chandel, & Pal, 2015), which simplifies interpreting and discussing the findings.

Words with multiple meanings or complex structures were eliminated from the questionnaire to ensure clarity. Double-barreled questions were avoided to prevent confusion, and the anonymity of respondents was maintained throughout the process.

3.8.2 Reliability

Reliability is defined as the consistency and stability of findings. It's based on the assumption that the data accurately reflects the intended objectives of the research and is consistent and reproducible (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008).

Quantitative Phase

Cronbach's alpha (α) is a measure of reliability that assesses how consistently a set of items measures a concept. It is calculated using the formula

$$\alpha = \frac{K}{K-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum_{i=0}^K \delta_{Y_i}^2}{\delta_X^2} \right)$$

Where:

δ_X^2 represents the variance of the total test scores

$\delta_{Y_i}^2$ represents the variance of each individual item in the dataset.

K is the number of items in the test.

By applying statistical procedures to this formula, Cronbach's coefficient was calculated to assess the reliability of the findings. A value above 0.7 was considered acceptable, indicating a good level of internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). Reliability, as described by Chetwynd (2022), refers to the ability of a measurement tool to consistently produce the same results when applied under the same conditions. Ensuring reliability minimizes errors and enhances the credibility of the data, making it more dependable for analysis and decision-making.

The Test-Retest Method

To ensure reliability, the research instruments were pre-tested with a small group of staff members before being officially used in the study (Yusoff, 2019). This allowed the researcher to review the questionnaires carefully and confirm that all responses were accurately recorded. The pre-testing process helped improve the credibility and dependability of the questionnaires, ensuring they consistently measured key factors like autonomy, sense of belonging, and work experience in relation to leave utilization in a hybrid work setting.

For the reliability analysis, the data was coded and processed using SPSS 30, a widely used statistical software for assessing internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability, with a threshold of 0.70 or higher indicating strong internal consistency (Amirrudin et al., 2021). The results showed that the instrument met this standard, confirming its reliability and effectiveness for the study.

Table 2: Test for Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of items
Autonomy	0.867	5
Work Experience	0.869	4
Sense of belonging	0.868	11
Leave Utilisation	0.871	4
Average Cronbach Alpha	0.868	24

Source: Primary data 2024

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.868	24

Source: SPSS 30

From the table above, Cronbach alpha=0868 which is considered acceptable since it exceeds the 0.7 value recommended by Nunnally (1978).

Reliability in the Qualitative Phase

To maintain the reliability of qualitative data, the researcher focused on capturing authentic experiences and genuine perspectives related to how hybrid work arrangements influence leave usage. This was achieved by encouraging participants to openly share their thoughts and ensuring that their responses reflected their true sentiments.

To build credibility, the researcher ensured that the data was interpreted accurately and faithfully represented the participants' intended meanings. Any contradictory or unusual responses were examined closely, and care was taken to minimize ambiguity during analysis. Reliability was further reinforced through repeated reviews of participant responses to ensure consistency. All interviews were recorded using a mobile device, and participants were assigned identification codes to safeguard their anonymity.

3.8.3 Validity

Quantitative phase

Validity refers to the extent to which a study's findings are trustworthy and reflect what they claim to measure (Andersson et al., 2024). This study employed content validity to assess the

appropriateness of the research tools. Content validity involves evaluating how well the test items correspond with the subject matter they are intended to examine.

In designing the data collection instruments, the researcher considered factors such as clarity, simplicity, and the potential for misinterpretation. To test the validity of the questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted with 12 employees—representing 10% of the total sample size—in accordance with the recommendation by Mugenda (2008). Insights from the pre-test helped refine the questionnaire for improved relevance and accuracy.

Additionally, both the questionnaire and the interview guide were reviewed by experts in the field to confirm that they effectively captured the intended concepts. A Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.82 was achieved, indicating high validity. The CVI was calculated using the following formula.

$$CVI = \left(\frac{n_e - \left(\frac{N}{2}\right)}{\left(\frac{N}{2}\right)} \right)$$

Where n_e represents the number of raters who agree that the tool is valid and N the total number of raters. A CVI of over 0.8 is recommended (Lawshe, 1975)

Item CVI

CVI= Number of agreements/Total Number of Raters

As per the Lawshe table below for 12 raters, the minimum value of CVI is 0.56 (Lawshe,1975).

Table 3: Lawshe Table 1975

No. of Panelists	Min Value
5	0.99
6	0.99
7	0.99
8	0.75
9	0.78
10	0.62
11	0.59
12	0.56
13	0.54
14	0.51
15	0.49
20	0.42
25	0.37
30	0.33
35	0.31
40	0.29

Source: Researchgate Lawshe 1975

The table below shows how different raters rated the validity of the different questions referred to as items.

Table 4: Results of Content Validity Index

Variables	No of Items	Relevant/Clear	CVI
Autonomy	9	8	0.82
Work Experience	5	5	0.95
Sense of Belonging	12	11	0.90

Source: Primary data 2024

The table presents the average Content Validity Index (CVI) for each variable. As shown, all variables had a CVI above 0.8, which aligns with the recommended threshold of 0.8 (Davis, 1992). This indicates that the tool was valid and effectively measured the study's variables of autonomy, work experience and sense of belonging in predicting leave utilization in a hybrid work environment.

The results also revealed that 2 out of 25 items required improvement, which the researcher addressed accordingly. Middleton (2023) suggests that a tool can be considered valid if the CVI meets or exceeds 0.7—a criterion met by all three variables in the study.

Validity in the qualitative phase

In the qualitative phase, validity was ensured by being honest and careful while collecting responses (Robson, 2002). The questionnaire was checked to ensure that it doesn't contain mistakes, and questions were double checked to ensure clarity, and the influence of personal values was controlled by being straight forward and focusing on the point.

Construct Validity. Factor analysis was conducted to confirm that the questionnaire items load onto the intended constructs (autonomy, work experience, sense of belonging, and leave utilization).

3.9 Data Processing and Analysis

3.9.1 Data Processing

Both quantitative and qualitative data were securely stored on email and Google Drive for easy retrieval, accessibility, and protection. This was crucial for accurately analyzing the effects of hybrid work arrangements on leave utilization. Proper data management upheld the integrity of the

research and allowed for thorough examination and re-examination of data, ensuring that findings were based on well-maintained evidence. Additionally, data were protected using a password known only to the researcher.

Questionnaires were stored on email and Google Drive for backup. Interviews were recorded to accurately capture participants' perspectives. To safeguard the data and ensure continuity in case of technical issues, backups were stored on multiple platforms, including a flash drive and OneDrive. This approach not only protected against data loss but also enabled efficient cross-referencing throughout the research process. Each interview recording was systematically organized – saved in clearly labeled folders with individual files created for each session. These were arranged alphabetically to streamline data retrieval and facilitate thorough analysis.

3.9.2 Data Analysis

The research incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data, requiring distinct analytical approaches suited to each type, as outlined in the following sections.

Quantitative Data Analysis

To summarize the numerical data, the study utilized descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and dispersion (standard deviation, range), in line with recommendations by Kaliyadan & Kulkarni (2019).

To delve deeper into the relationships between variables such as autonomy, work experience, sense of belonging, and leave utilization, inferential statistics were applied. This included correlation analysis to explore associations among variables and regression analysis to test the hypotheses introduced in Chapter One. All statistical procedures were conducted using SPSS version 30, ensuring precise and efficient data processing (Kaliyadan & Kulkarni, 2019).

3.9.2.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

For the qualitative component, interview data were transcribed and analyzed thematically using NVIVO software. This process involved coding the transcripts, grouping similar codes into broader themes, and interpreting the results in the context of the research objectives.

Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to identify patterns and underlying meanings related to leave utilization in hybrid work environments. Interviews, recorded via smartphones, were carefully transcribed and examined to uncover shared values, norms, and perceptions among participants (Naeem, Ozuem, & Ranfagni, 2023). These themes were then interpreted to answer the research questions and complement the findings from the quantitative phase, providing a comprehensive understanding of the study’s objectives. The data were presented in the form of narratives to provide a clear understanding of the findings.

3.9.3 Testing for Parametric Assumptions

Parametric statistics were conducted to test the association between the study variables.

Normality distribution test: To determine whether the data followed a normal distribution.

Table 5: Test for Normality

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Leave utilization	.126	76	.004	.957	76	.012
Sense of belonging	.064	76	.200 [*]	.980	76	.281
Work Experience	.095	76	.086	.970	76	.065
Autonomy_T	.099	76	.063	.966	76	.041

^{*}. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The results from both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests consistently show that all three variables (sense of belonging, work experience, and autonomy) are approximately normally distributed since all the values are greater than 0.05 ($P > 0.05$).

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The concept of ethical considerations in research pertains to the moral obligations that researchers must uphold when working with human subjects (Okorie, Udeh, Adaga, Dara Ojimba, & Oriekhoe, 2024). Given the increasing societal awareness of the need to protect individuals' rights, the researcher adhered to the following ethical considerations while interacting with employees to explore the effects of hybrid work arrangements on leave utilization at ChildFund International. Ethical approval was obtained from the research ethics committee before data collection commenced.

3.10.1 Considerations Regarding Research Relations

Research relations encompass issues of access, power dynamics, potential harm, deception, secrecy, and confidentiality (Okorie et al., 2024). To address these concerns, the researcher obtained permission from the office of the Country Director of ChildFund Uganda. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. To uphold confidentiality and protect participants' identities, the researcher assured all individuals involved that their names would not appear in the final report. The information they provided was strictly used for research purposes only. In order to minimize any perception of deception, the study's purpose was clearly explained to participants before data collection began. Emphasis was placed on the ethical principles of anonymity and confidentiality, ensuring participants' well-being was safeguarded throughout the research process.

3.10.2 Informed Consent

Voluntary participation was a key aspect of this study, especially given that data collection for the qualitative phase relied on in-depth interviews. Participants provided informed consent, which is a foundational ethical requirement in research involving human subjects (BERA, 2011; Okorie et al., 2024).

The researcher took steps to ensure participants were fully aware of the nature of the study, the importance of their involvement, how the findings would be used, and who the end users of the research would be. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without needing to provide a justification.

Where applicable, consent was also requested from the Country Director and Human Resources office at ChildFund International to facilitate the research. In addition, the researcher explained the questions clearly during the interviews to make sure participants were comfortable and understood what was being asked. These procedures were in alignment with the ethical standards set by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011).

3.10.3 Research Integrity

Maintaining research integrity is essential to ensure that ethical standards are upheld at all stages of a study. Researchers bear the responsibility of adhering to ethical guidelines when it comes to data collection, analysis, and the communication of findings (Okorie et al., 2024).

Misconduct in research can take many forms, including fabricating results, manipulating data, publishing selectively, making defamatory remarks against peers, or using findings for unlawful purposes (BERA, 2011).

To guard against such issues, the researcher made sure that all interview questions were closely aligned with the research questions presented in Chapter One. The study also received clearance from a research panel before proceeding. Additionally, appropriate citation practices and acknowledgment of original sources were followed meticulously to avoid plagiarism and uphold academic honesty.

3.11 Methodological Constraints

One of the limitations of the study stemmed from the use of structured questionnaires during the quantitative phase. While these tools helped standardize data collection, they may have restricted deeper exploration of participants' experiences, potentially leaving out nuanced insights that could have enriched the findings.

The varying availability of participants due to hybrid work arrangements led to scheduling conflicts, limiting participation in the qualitative phase.

Inter country data collection over stretched the data collection time due to geographical dispersion of respondents.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis, presentation, and interpretation of the data collected to investigate the effects of hybrid work arrangements on leave utilization among employees at ChildFund International. The chapter is organized into two main sections: quantitative data analysis and qualitative data analysis. The findings are presented in relation to the study's objectives and research questions, with a focus on autonomy, work experience, and sense of belonging as predictors of leave utilization. The chapter concludes with a summary of key findings and their implications.

4.1 Response Rate

The quantitative phase involved administering structured questionnaires to 85 employees, of which 76 were completed and returned, representing a response rate of 89.4%. This high response rate ensures the reliability and representativeness of the data.

Table 6: Response rate of participants

Category	Targeted	Actual Response	Response rate (%)
Questionnaires	85	76	89.4%
Interview guide	15	12	80%
Total	100	88	88%

Source: primary data 2024

From table 4.1 above, out of the 85 questionnaires administered, 76 were returned representing 89.4%. Out of the 15 targeted key informants, 12 were able to be interviewed implying a response rate of 80%. The overall response rate was 88% deemed well enough since it was over and above the 50% recommended by Amin (2005).

4.2 Findings on Background Characteristics

The demographic characteristics for the 76 respondents were examined and findings are below.

Table 7: Demographics

Demographics		Frequency	Percent
Age	21-30	16	21.1
	31-40	28	36.8
	41-50	26	34.2
	51 and above	6	7.9
	Total	76	100
Duration	1-5 Days	8	10.5
	11-15 Days	7	9.2
	16-20 Days	13	17.1
	21 and Above	41	53.9
	6-10 Days	7	9.2
	Total	76	100
Gender	Female	34	44.7
	Male	42	55.3
	Total	76	100
Department	Admin and HR	27	35.5
	CD's Office	2	2.6
	Finance	10	13.2
	Programs	37	48.7
	Total	76	100
Tenure	1 year	10	13.2
	2-5 years	35	46.1
	6-10 years	14	18.4
	Above 10 years	11	14.5
	Less than a year	6	7.9
	Total	76	100

Source: spss 30

The table summarizes data for 76 individuals, highlighting demographic and employment attributes. The majority are aged 31-40 years (36.8%), followed by 41-50 years (34.2%), with fewer in the 21-30 (21.1%) and 51+ age groups (7.9%). This implies that the data provided by virtue of age was reliable since it was generated from different respondents with different age brackets.

Most respondents reported a duration of 21+ days (53.9%), while the gender distribution shows slightly more males (55.3%) than females (44.7%). The implication of this finding was that no matter the disparity in percentage of males and females who took part in the study, at least views from both males and females were captured which is too vital in making a critical analysis on the effects of hybrid work arrangements on leave utilization in childfund international.

The Programs department holds the largest share (48.7%), followed by Admin and HR (35.5%), Finance (13.2%), and the CD's Office (2.6%).

In terms of tenure, 46.1% have 2-5 years of experience, with smaller groups in 6-10 years (18.4%), over 10 years (14.5%), 1 year (13.2%), and less than a year (7.9%).

Figure 2: Age of respondents

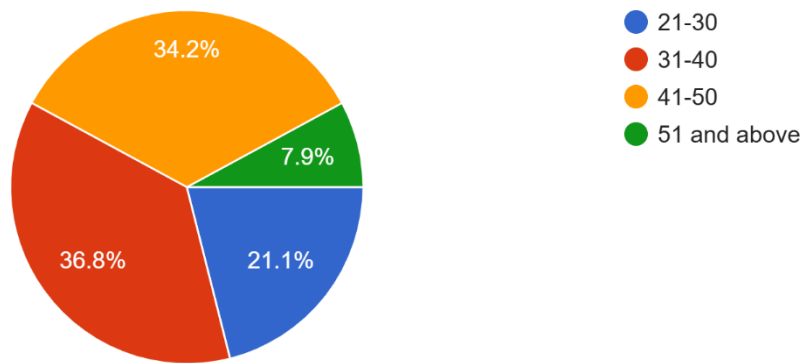


Figure 3: Duration of Leave Taken

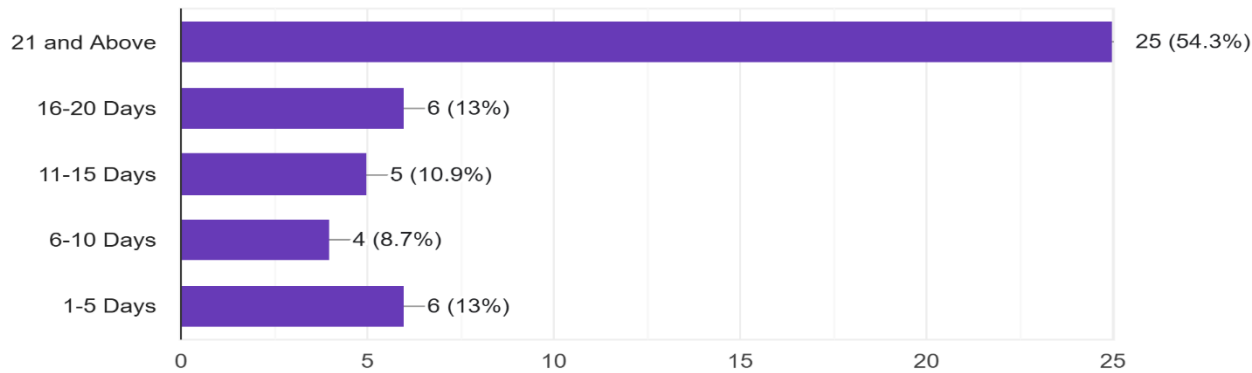


Figure 4: Gender Characteristics

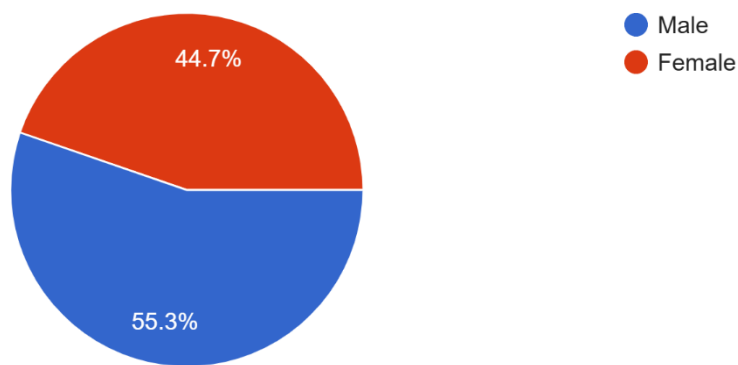


Figure 5: Departments

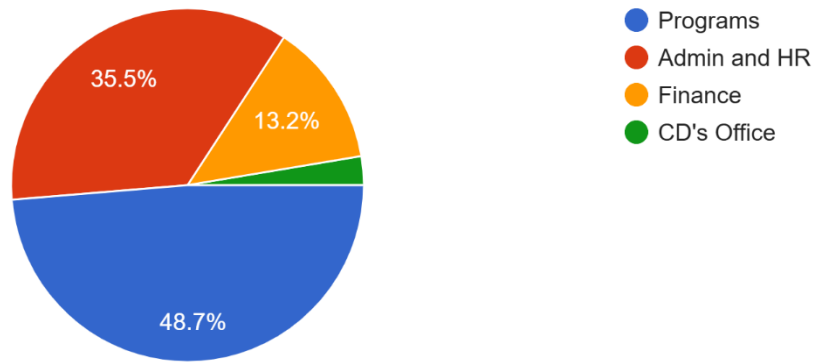
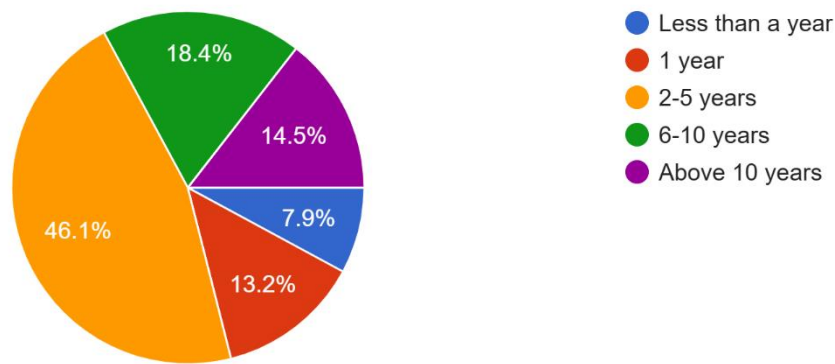


Figure 6: Tenure at Childfund International



4.3 Qualitative Data Analysis

4.3.1 Thematic Analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying, categorizing, and interpreting key themes related to work experience. The following themes emerged from the interviews;

Work Experience and Leave Utilization

Experienced employees were more confident in taking leave due to their familiarity with organizational policies and ability to delegate tasks. Junior employees were less likely to take leave due to fear of negative perceptions and lack of confidence in managing workloads.

Table 8: Profile of Key Informants

Interviewee Code	Age bracket	Gender	Tenure in CFI
CF/001	30-40	M	8 years
CF/002	41-50	F	8 years
CF/003	30-40	F	7years
CF/004	41-50	M	11 years
CF/005	51 and above	M	11 years
CF/006	41-50	F	8 years
CF/007	41-50	F	13 Years
CF/008	30-40	F	6Years
CF/009	41-50	M	6year 2 months
CF/010	41-50	F	7 years
CF/011	41-50	M	10years
CF/012	51 and above	M	10Years

Source: Primary Data 2025

The dataset included responses from 12 interviewees, these key informants were purposefully selected for their extended tenure at ChildFund International and their extensive experience with hybrid work, as many of them work remotely while supporting the global department at Childfund international. They also formed part of senior management and the extended senior management team at Childfund Uganda and Kenya. The researcher believed that they are better placed to elucidate the effects of hybrid work arrangements on leave utilization among employee's at childfund international.

Majority of interviewees fell within the 41-50 age range, representing seven individuals, while three were aged 30-40, and two were aged 51 and above. In terms of gender, there was a predominance of female interviewees, with seven females compared to five males, which indicated a relatively even gender split.

The years of experience in their current roles varied widely, ranging from 6 to 13 years. The majority of interview participants had between 6 and 11 years of professional experience. Notably, two respondents had each worked for 10 years, and another two reported 11 years of experience. One participant stood out with a tenure of 13 years, reflecting substantial long-term involvement in their role. This variation in experience levels offered valuable insights into how hybrid work arrangements influence leave utilization among employees at ChildFund International.

Furthermore, the diversity in age, gender, and length of service among the interviewees contributed to a rich and well-rounded dataset. These differences allowed the study to capture a wide range of perspectives on how various employee groups perceive and make use of leave in a hybrid work setting. This balance enhanced the credibility of the findings, ensuring they reflected the experiences of a broad cross-section of the workforce.

4.4 Qualitative Model

From the qualitative analysis conducted using NVIVO, the qualitative figure below reflects a different understanding of work experience as perceived by the key informants. The qualitative findings provided a deeper, more contextualized view of how these variable influences leave utilization in a hybrid work environment.

Work Experience and Leave Utilization

Work Experience is linked to confidence in taking leave, with senior employees more likely to utilize leave due to their experience and trust in their team. Leave Utilization is higher among experienced employees who feel secure in their roles and understand the importance of taking time off. Junior Employees are less likely to take leave due to fear of negative consequences and lack of confidence in delegating tasks (Ng and Feldman, 2009).

Figure 7: Qualitative Model



Ng and Feldman (2009) argued that experienced employees are more adept at managing their workloads and are more confident in taking leave due to their familiarity with organizational policies and their ability to delegate tasks. Junior employees are less likely to take leave due to fear of negative perceptions. Experienced employees are also better at planning for their leave

entitlements. Johnsen et al. (2020) found that junior employees often hesitate to take leave due to concerns about career progression and fear of being perceived as less committed.

This qualitative model complements the quantitative findings by providing a deeper understanding of how employees perceive and experience this variable in a hybrid work environment.

4.5. Findings According to the research Objectives

4.5.1 Findings on Autonomy and Leave Utilization.

The (05) items on Autonomy were structured basing on the objective of the study. Items were measured on a six-point Likert scale as follows

This is very much like me	This is like me	This is somewhat like me	This is a little like me	This is not like me	This is not like me at all
1	2	3	4	5	6

Table 9: Findings on Autonomy and Leave Utilisation

		This is very much like me	This is like me	This is somewhat like me	This is a little like me	This is not like me	This is not like me at all	Mean	Rating
Autonomy									
I feel that I have control over how I perform my tasks	frequency	32	26	10	2	5	1	2.01	This very much like me
	%	42.1	34.2	13.2	2.6	6.6	1.3		
I am satisfied with the level of flexibility I have regarding my work tasks	Frequency	32	23	12	3	5	1	2.07	This very much like me
	%	42.1	30.3	15.8	3.9	6.6	1.3		
I am comfortable taking leave when I feel it is necessary for my well being	frequency	30	21	14	4	6	1	2.18	This very much like me
	%	39.5	27.6	18.4	5.3	7.9	1.3		
I feel psychologically pressured to remain connected to work even during my personal time	Frequency	19	20	14	10	7	6	2.79	
	%	25	26.3	18.4	13.2	9.2	7.9		This is like me
I believe that technology keeps me engaged to work related activities even when I am on leave	frequency	36	11	14	6	6	3	2.26	This is very much like me
	%	47.4	14.5	18.4	7.9	7.9	3.9		

The analysis indicates that a strong majority of employees 42.1% strongly agree and 34.2% agree, summing to 76.3% feel they have control over how they perform their tasks, with a mean score of 2.01, showing a strong agreement with the statement.

Only a small portion (9.2%) disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting minimal dissatisfaction.

This highlights that employees generally experience a high degree of autonomy in managing their tasks, which negatively affects leave utilisation.

The analysis shows that a majority of employees 42.1% strongly agree and 30.3% agree, summing to 72.4%, are satisfied with the level of flexibility they have regarding their work tasks, as reflected by a mean score of 2.07, indicating strong agreement. Only a small percentage (10.5%) express dissatisfaction. This demonstrates that flexibility is well-regarded by employees, contributing positively to their autonomy and job satisfaction and hence low leave utilization.

The analysis indicates that most employees summing to 67.1% feel comfortable taking leave when necessary for their well-being, as shown by a mean score of 2.18, reflecting a general agreement with the statement.

A smaller proportion (14.5%) express discomfort in taking leave. This suggests that while the majority feel supported in prioritizing their well-being, there may be some barriers or hesitations among a minority of employees.

Feeling psychologically pressured to remain connected to work during personal time, 25% strongly agree and 26.3% agree, summing to 51.3%, which indicates a significant portion of employees feel pressured to stay connected to work which negatively affects leave utilization and confirms that hybrid workers tend not to take leave and even when they do they keep engaged in work related activities.

A notable 13.2% disagree and 7.9% strongly disagree, showing some employees manage to disconnect. Mean Score of 2.79 shows moderate tendency toward agreement. Many employees experience psychological pressure to stay connected to work during personal time, which may indicate a challenge in leave utilization.

Technology keeping employees engaged with work even when on leave. 47.4% strongly agree and 14.5% agree, totaling 61.9%, which highlights that most employees feel technology keeps them engaged with work even when on leave. Only 7.9% disagree and 3.9% strongly disagree, indicating a small group feels unaffected by technology during leave. A majority of employees find technology

to be a factor that keeps them connected to work, even when on leave, potentially reducing their ability to fully disconnect.

To summarize, the hybrid work model offers employees greater flexibility and autonomy, reducing the perceived need for formal leave. This finding aligns with previous research by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) who found that autonomy in remote work improves job satisfaction but may lead to underutilization of leave due to increased flexibility. While hybrid work enhances flexibility, it also presents challenges in ensuring employees fully disconnect and prioritize their well-being. Organizations should foster a culture that encourages leave utilization, set clear work-life boundaries, and support employees—especially new hires—to take time off without fear of falling behind. This approach will help increase leave uptake and prevent burnout.

4.5.2 Findings on Work Experience and Leave Utilisation

The (05) items on Work Experience were structured basing on the objective of the study. Items were measured on a six-point Likert scale as follows

This is very much like me	This is like me	This is somewhat like me	This is a little like me	This is not like me	This is not like me at all
1	2	3	4	5	6

Table 10: Findings on Work experience and Leave Utilization

		This is very much like me	This is like me	This is somewhat like me	This is a little like me	This is not like me	This is not like me at all	Mean	Rating
Work Experience									
Because of my work experience I can ably adapt to different work arrangements	frequency	35	26	6	2	2	5	2.01	This is very much like me
	%	46.1	34.2	7.9	2.6	2.6	6.6		
my work experience affects my job performance while in a hybrid work setting	frequency	14	13	13	5	12	19	3.59	This is not like me at all
	%	18.4	17.1	17.1	6.6	15.8	25		
My work experience affects my leave utilisation	frequency	12	14	15	5	16	14	3.54	This is not like me
	%	15.8	18.4	19.7	6.6	21.1	18.4		
My work experience has an effect on my work life balance	frequency	19	11	13	7	10	16	3.34	This is very much like me
	%	25	14.5	17.1	9.2	13.2	21.1		

The analysis indicates that a majority of employees (80.3%) agree or strongly agree that their work experience enables them to adapt to different work arrangements, as reflected by a mean score of 2.01. This adaptability likely allows employees to navigate hybrid work settings effectively, balancing flexibility and task completion. As expressed by a key informant;

“....one can do more work on hybrid faster while concentrating as well as do personal business. Sometimes one would want time with the family too, time for travel from home to office is saved to do work thus more output and time to take leave.” (CF/004: Childfund International staff, February 2025).

key informants further expounded that;

“.... experienced employees are more familiar with leave policies and confidently take leave, unlike newer employees who may have limited knowledge of leave management in a hybrid work setup. With a strong understanding of their rights, experienced employees can effectively balance their workload, complete tasks on time, and take scheduled leave. In contrast, newer employees may opt for flex time instead of formal leave, as they are still navigating their roles and the leave policies.

However, this same adaptability could negatively influence leave utilization, as experienced employees may feel more confident managing workloads across various settings, potentially reducing the perceived need to take leave.” (CF/005: Childfund international staff, February 2025).

The demands of the senior roles often keep staff on the job more’ even when they should be taking some time off for leave. Sometimes, the little breaks within their daily schedule to energise come in handy to boost their work energy than taking leave. (CF/009: Childfund international staff, February 2025).

Experienced Staff tend to work for more hours while on hybrid work model and get more fatigued, the demands of the job also make them fail to disconnect from work completely even while on leave as they keep responding to emails. (CF/011: Childfund international staff, February 2025).

The small proportion (9.2%) who disagree or strongly disagree suggests that only a minority face challenges in adjusting to different work arrangements. A key informant additionally said;

“.... It’s due to lack of understanding of the hybrid work arrangement that’s some staff may fail to adjust to the different work arrangements”. (CF/002: Childfund international staff, February 2025).

Another key informant *further elucidated that;*

“.... they may want to demonstrate their availability and dedication to building skills or proving their worth. As a result, they may feel they need to be present for day-to-day tasks, making it harder for them to take time off. (CF/008: Childfund international staff, February 2025).

My work experience affects my job performance while in a hybrid work setting. The analysis reveals that a significant portion of employees (40.8%) disagree or strongly disagree that their work experience negatively affects their job performance in a hybrid work setting, as indicated by a mean score of 3.59. This suggests that many employees feel their work experience supports their performance in a hybrid arrangement.

“.... It is because they have mastered how to execute the job roles and tasks thus, they can complete on time and be able to take their scheduled leave (CF/005: Childfund international staff, February 2025).

However, 31.6% of respondents agree or strongly agree that their work experience impacts their performance negatively, indicating that a notable group may face challenges leveraging their experience in a hybrid environment. This was complimented by views of a key informant who reviewed that:

“.... The seniors have more work load which requires multitasking so may not ask for longer days. This workload also results into burnout. The seniors have more confidence in asking for leave compared to a junior. The junior may plan to go on leave but the senior can delegate the junior to first sit in for them (CF/004: Childfund international staff, February 2025).

The remaining 17.1% are neutral, which reflects mixed perceptions or variability in how work experience influences hybrid work performance. Overall, while the majority feel their experience supports them, the challenges faced by a significant minority highlight the need for targeted support or adjustments in hybrid work settings to optimize performance.

My work experience affects my leave utilization. A notable proportion of employees (39.5%) strongly disagree that their work experience affects their leave utilization, as reflected by a mean score of 3.54. This suggests that many employees do not see their experience as a factor influencing their decision to take leave. However, 39.5% of respondents agree or strongly agree, indicating that for an equally significant group, work experience does play a role in their leave utilization, potentially leading to more leave days taken due to their confidence in managing workloads or prioritizing tasks.

A key informant additionally reviewed that;

“.... Senior employees have more leave compared to the junior staff because leave days are progressive per the years worked at Childfund. Also, seniors are able to delegate there tasks easily to the juniors and seniors tend to accomplish tasks faster than junior due to mastering their art thus have time to take leave.” (CF/005: Childfund international staff, February 2025).

Another key informant further elucidated that;

“ Senior staff tend to take longer leave once in a while given the critical tasks while the junior staff tend to take shorter and frequent leaves.” (CF/008: Childfund international staff, February 2025).

The remaining 19.7% are neutral, which may reflect variability in how work experience affects leave-taking behaviors. The finding is supported by a key informant who reviewed that:

“.... Junior employees may have more direct supervision and may feel a heightened sense of responsibility to prove themselves. They could be more hesitant to take leave due to fear of burdening their team, missing deadlines, or being seen as less committed. Early-career employees may also often feel a pressure to gain experience quickly and may view taking leave as a potential setback in their professional development. These employees might not yet have the same level of long-term projects or responsibilities that require careful leave planning.” (CF/001: Childfund international staff, February 2025).

The analysis indicates that employees have varied perspectives on the effect of their work experience on work-life balance. A considerable portion (38.2%) disagrees or strongly disagrees that their work experience impacts their work-life balance negatively, suggesting that for these individuals, their experience helps them maintain balance effectively. On the other hand, 34.2% agree or strongly agree, indicating that a significant group feels their work experience affects their ability to balance work and personal life. The remaining 17.1% are neutral, reflecting variability in experiences. With a mean score of 3.34, the overall tendency leans toward neutrality, showing that while work experience may provide a foundation for balance for some, others might struggle with maintaining equilibrium, possibly due to the demands of hybrid or flexible work arrangements.

Work experience enhances adaptability, job performance, and leave utilization in hybrid work environments, this is consistent with research by Ng and Feldman (2009), who argued that experienced employees are more confident in managing workloads and navigating organizational policies. but its impact on work-life balance varies. While experienced employees confidently manage workloads and take leave, less experienced employees may struggle to disconnect. Organizations should foster a culture that supports leave utilization, provide clear hybrid work policies, and help employees at all levels balance work and well-being, ensuring long-term productivity and job satisfaction.

4.5.3 Findings on Sense Of Belonging and Leave Utilization

The (05) items on sense of belonging were structured basing on the objective of the study. Items were measured on a six-point Likert scale as follows

This is very much like me=1, This is like me=2, This is somewhat like me=3, This is a little like me=4, This is not like me=5, This is not like me at all=6.

Table 11: Findings on sense of belonging and Leave

		This is very much like me	This is like me	This is somewhat like me	This is a little like me	This is not like me	This is not like me at all	Mean	Rating
Sense of belonging									
I feel like I am a valued member of my organization	frequency	35	25	25	11	3	2	1.87	This is very much like me
	%	46.1	32.9	32.9	14.5	3.9	2.6		
I feel included in workplace discussions and decisions	frequency	29	28	13	3	1	2	2.01	This is very much like me
	%	38.2	36.8	17.1	3.9	1.3	2.6		
I believe my contributions to the organisation are recognised and appreciated	frequency	29	24	15	2	4	2	2.13	This is very much like me
	%	38.2	31.6	19.7	2.6	5.3	2.6		
I feel a sense of psychological ownership towards my organization	frequency	16	27	13	9	4	7	2.72	This is like me
	%	21.1	35.5	17.1	11.8	5.3	9.2		
I feel connected to my colleagues, even in a hybrid work environment	frequency	29	27	10	5	2	3	2.12	This very much like me
	%	38.2	35.5	13.2	6.6	2.6	3.9		
I believe that my sense of belonging influences my decision to take leave	frequency	18	30	11	3	6	8	2.64	This is like me
	%	23.7	39.5	14.5	3.9	7.9	10.5		
I feel that my organisation promotes diversity and inclusion effectively	frequency	33	22	13	1	4	3	2.08	This is very much like me
	%	43.4	28.9	17.1	1.3	5.3	3.9		
I am satisfied with the support I receive from my leadership	frequency	27	26	15	3	2	3	2.16	This is very much like me
	%	35.5	34.4	19.7	3.9	2.6	3.9		
I believe that a supportive work environment encourages me to take leave	frequency	42	25	3	2	3	1		This is very much like me
	%	55.3	32.9	3.9	2.6	3.9	1.3		
I believe that my colleagues are supportive when I take leave	frequency	33	31	8	1	1	2	1.84	This is very much like me
	%	43.4	40.8	10.5	1.3	1.3	2.6		
I believe that a strong sense of belonging enhances my overall job performance	frequency	36	26	6	2	2	4	1.95	This is very much like me
	%	47.4	34.2	7.9	2.6	2.6	5.3		
I am included in workplace activities while on hybrid arrangement	frequency	29	29	10	2	2	4	2.09	This is like me
	%	38.2	38.2	13.2	2.6	2.6	5.3		

The survey results suggest that a majority of employees feel valued, included, and supported in their organization. Specifically, 46.1% strongly agree that they are valued members of the organization, while 38.2% feel included in workplace discussions and decisions. A similar proportion, 38.2%, believe their contributions are recognized and appreciated. However, 35.5% of employees report feeling a sense of psychological ownership towards the organization. In terms of connection, 38.2% feel connected to colleagues even in a hybrid work environment.

Regarding the impact of belonging on leave decisions, 39.5% agree that it influences their leave utilization. Furthermore, 43.4% believe the organization promotes diversity and inclusion effectively, and 35.5% are satisfied with the support they receive from leadership. A strong majority, 55.3%, agree that a supportive work environment encourages them to take leave, and 43.4% feel their colleagues are supportive when they take leave. Additionally, 47.4% believe that a strong sense of belonging enhances their overall job performance, and 38.2% feel included in workplace activities while on a hybrid arrangement. These results indicate that fostering a supportive, inclusive environment and a sense of belonging can positively impact employee engagement, and negatively impact leave utilization, especially in hybrid work settings.

The results suggest that a strong sense of belonging negatively influences leave utilization. A majority of employees (55.3%) believe that a supportive work environment encourages them to stay engaged in work related activities even while on leave.

Furthermore, 43.4% of employees feel their colleagues are supportive when they take leave, which likely reduces any perceived stigma or barriers to taking time off.

However, the results also highlight a neutral impact on leave utilization. While 39.5% of employees believe that their sense of belonging influences their decision to take leave, a significant portion (39.5%) disagrees, suggesting that for some, the perception of a supportive work environment or belonging does not directly translate into taking more leave.

This is especially with seniors' employees who feel that they are the only ones who can execute certain tasks especially during busy seasons.

Additionally, employees who feel valued and included in discussions and activities (46.1% and 38.2%, respectively) may feel more invested in their work, potentially leading them to work through periods when they might otherwise take leave or even work while on leave.

In conclusion, while a strong sense of belonging and a supportive work environment positively influence employee engagement and well-being, they can also inadvertently reduce leave utilization, particularly among highly engaged or senior employees. This finding aligns with research by Stamper and Masterson (2002), who found that employees with a strong sense of belonging are more engaged and less likely to take leave. To support employee well-being and sustained productivity, organizations must find a balance between fostering a culture of inclusion and emphasizing the importance of taking time to disconnect. Encouraging staff at all levels to utilize their leave without fear of repercussions not only promotes a healthier work-life balance but also helps prevent burnout and supports long-term organizational performance. Organizations must therefore strike a balance by promoting a culture that values both inclusion and the importance of disconnecting. By encouraging employees at all levels to take leave without fear of negative

consequences, organizations can ensure long-term productivity, reduce burnout, and maintain a healthy work-life balance for their workforce.

4.6 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

To gain a well-rounded understanding of the research topic, the study integrated findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases. The quantitative results highlighted statistically significant relationships between variables such as autonomy, work experience, sense of belonging, and leave utilization. In contrast, the qualitative data offered deeper, contextual explanations that helped interpret these connections more meaningfully.

For instance, the positive relationship between work experience and leave utilization appears to be driven by seasoned employees' greater familiarity with organizational leave policies and increased confidence in balancing workloads. These insights demonstrate how varying levels of experience and autonomy shape employees' approaches to leave in hybrid work environments.

4.7 Correlation Results

Table 12:correlation results

Correlations					
		Leave utilization	Autonomy	Work Experience	Sense of belonging
Leave utilization	Pearson Correlation	1	-.278**	.646**	-.665**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.008	.000	.000
	N	76	76	76	76
Autonomy	Pearson Correlation	-.278**	1	-.216*	.216*
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.008		.031	.031
	N	76	76	76	76
Work Experience	Pearson Correlation	.646**	-.216*	1	-.584**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.031		.000
	N	76	76	76	76
Sense of belonging	Pearson Correlation	-.665**	.216*	-.584**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.031	.000	
	N	76	76	76	76

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

4.7.1 Autonomy and Leave Utilization

A correlation of -0.278 indicates a weak -moderate negative relationship. This means that as autonomy increases, leave utilization tends to decrease. Employees who experience greater autonomy might take less leave, potentially because they feel more control over their work

schedules or work-life balance, making formal leave less necessary. The p-value of .008 ($p < 0.01$), indicates the relationship is statistically significant.

Employees who have greater autonomy (control over their work, decision-making, and schedules) may feel less need to take leave because they can manage their workload and time more effectively.

Autonomy could also enhance job satisfaction, reducing the likelihood of leave utilization for reasons like stress or burnout.

4.7.2 Work Experience and Leave Utilization.

A value of 0.646 indicates a strong positive relationship between work experience and leave utilization. This means that as work experience increases, leave utilization also improves, a strong positive correlation indicates that employees with more work experience tend to utilize more leave. Therefore, employees with more work experience tend to utilize leave more frequently in a hybrid work arrangement.

The p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$) shows that the correlation is highly statistically significant.

More experienced employees might feel more confident and secure in their roles, leading them to take leave without fear of repercussions.

Experienced employees might also have accumulated leave entitlements or greater awareness of leave policies, encouraging them to utilize leave.

Alternatively, the demands of long-term work or the cumulative effects of stress over time may increase the need for leave among experienced employees.

4.7.3 Sense of Belonging and Leave Utilisation

The value -0.665, with a p-value of .000 indicates a strong negative relationship between sense of belonging and leave utilization implying that as employees' sense of belonging increases, their utilization of leave decreases. The p-value of .000 ($p < 0.01$) shows that this relationship is highly statistically significant.

Employees who feel a strong sense of belonging may feel more connected, engaged, and committed to their work and team, which could reduce their desire or need to take leave.

A high sense of belonging may foster a supportive and fulfilling work environment, mitigating factors like stress or dissatisfaction that could otherwise drive leave utilization.

4.8 Regression Results

Table 13:Regression Results

Model Summary ^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.741 ^a	.549	.530	.08929
a. Predictors: (Constant), Belonging, Autonomy, Work Experience				
b. Dependent Variable: Leave Utilization				

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.698	3	.233	29.191	.000 ^b
	Residual	.574	72	.008		
	Total	1.272	75			
a. Dependent Variable: Leave Utilization						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Belonging, Autonomy, Work Experience						

Table 14: Regression Coefficients

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.597	.064		9.278	.000
	Autonomy	-.057	.058	-.080	-.983	.033
	Work Experience	.238	.075	.315	3.182	.002
	Belonging	-.385	.080	-.484	-4.844	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Leave Utilization						

4.8.1 Autonomy.

The negative regression coefficient of $-.057$ (57%) means that for each additional unit of autonomy, the leave utilization decreases by $.057$ units. As employees have more autonomy which is prevalent in hybrid work settings, they tend to use less leave. This indicates a negative relationship between autonomy and leave utilization. The more control or independence employees have over their work,

the less likely they are to take formal leave. A p value of 0.033 ($p < 0.05$), means the result is statistically significant and is a meaningful finding in the context of the data. Employees with higher autonomy might have more flexibility in how and when they manage their workload, which could reduce the need for formal leave. They may be able to take shorter breaks, adjust their work hours, or manage stress through more flexible arrangements instead of taking extended leave.

4.8.2 Work Experience.

A coefficient of 0.238 (23.8%) means that for each additional unit of work experience (for example each additional year of experience), the leave utilization increases by 0.238 units. This indicates a positive relationship between work experience and leave utilization, It suggests that, on average, employees with more work experience are more likely to use their leave despite being on hybrid work arrangements. A p-value of 0.02($p < 0.05$), meaning the result is statistically significant and the regression coefficient of 0.238 is a meaningful result in the context of the data.

4.8.3 Sense of Belonging

A coefficient of -0.385 (38.5%) indicates a negative relationship between sense of belonging and leave utilization. As sense of belonging increases by 1 unit, leave utilization decreases by 0.385 units, holding other factors constant. A p-value of shows the result is highly statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

4.8.4 Test for Hypothesis

Figure 8:Hypothesis

Objectives		Hypothesis	
1	To examine how autonomy influences leave utilization in a hybrid work context	H ₁	There is a positive relationship between autonomy and Leave utilization in a hybrid work context.
2	To assess how employee's work experience affects their confidence and likelihood of taking leave in a hybrid work environment	H ₂	There is a positive relationship between employee work experience and Leave utilization.
3	To investigate how a sense of belonging impacts employee's willingness to utilize their leave entitlements in a hybrid work context	H ₃	There is a positive relationship between sense of belonging and leave utilization in a hybrid work context.

Table 15:Summary of findings

Hypothesis	Beta	Probability	Interpretation	Decision
H ₁	-0.057	0.033	Negative relationship	Not supported
H ₂	0.0238	0.002	Positive relationship	Supported
H ₃	-0.385	0.000	Negative relationship	Not Supported

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Discussion of the findings

This chapter presents a critical discussion of the study's findings, draws key conclusions, and offers practical recommendations based on the research objectives. The discussion is structured around the three main variables identified as influencing leave utilization in hybrid work environments: autonomy, work experience, and sense of belonging. These factors are examined through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which served as the theoretical framework for this research. The chapter concludes with actionable insights for organizations and suggestions for future studies.

5.1 Autonomy and Leave Utilisation

Aligned with the first research objective, the study explored how employee autonomy affects leave-taking behavior at ChildFund International. Findings revealed a negative correlation between autonomy and leave utilization. According to SDT, autonomy reflects an individual's ability to self-regulate and make independent decisions (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In this context, employees who had more control over their work schedules often addressed personal matters during working hours, reducing the need to take official leave. This is supported by Gajendran and Harrison (2007).

findings, who emphasized that autonomy in remote work enhances job satisfaction but can unintentionally discourage formal leave use due to increased flexibility.

However, the study also uncovered potential drawbacks. High autonomy, particularly within hybrid work models, may contribute to difficulty disconnecting from work. Employees described feeling a constant obligation to remain available, often driven by digital connectivity and blurred work-life boundaries (Derks et al., 2016). This phenomenon diminishes the restorative benefits of leave and increases the risk of burnout. These findings point to the importance of organizational policies that reinforce the right to disconnect and normalize leave taking in flexible work environments.

5.2 Work experience and Leave Utilisation

The second objective investigated the influence of work experience on leave usage. The study found a positive relationship between years of experience and the likelihood of taking leave. This outcome aligns with SDT's competence component, which highlights individuals' need to feel effective and capable in their roles. Employees with greater tenure often demonstrated more confidence in their ability to manage workloads and navigate internal policies, making them more likely to utilize their leave (Ng & Feldman, 2009).

Senior staff were more proactive in taking leave due to accumulated entitlements, task delegation abilities, and their familiarity with organizational processes. In contrast, junior employees expressed hesitancy, often driven by concerns about being perceived as less committed or lacking the confidence to step away from responsibilities (Johnsen, Ku, & Salvanes, 2020). These disparities underscore the need for targeted interventions, such as mentorship, policy education, and leadership support, to encourage younger or less experienced employees to take the leave they are entitled to thus preventing burnout and fostering healthier work habits.

5.3 Sense of Belonging and Leave Utilisation

The third objective focused on examining the role of belonging in shaping leave behaviors. Findings showed a negative relationship between a strong sense of belonging and leave utilization, which

aligns with the relatedness component of SDT. Employees who felt deeply connected to their teams and work environments reported a greater emotional investment in their roles, often resulting in reluctance to take time off (Stamper & Masterson, 2002). This is supported by Dery and Hafermalz (2016) that loyalty and engagement, while valuable, can unintentionally discourage employees from disconnecting.

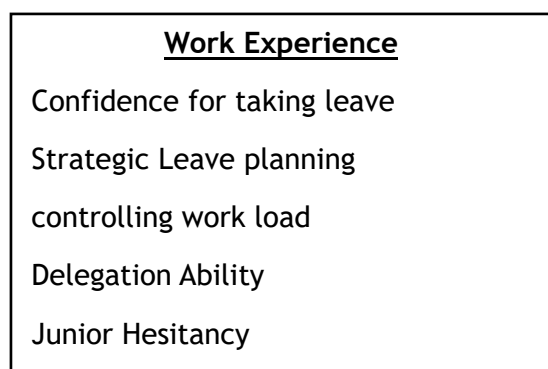
Nevertheless, the study also found that employees who felt supported and trusted by their colleagues were more comfortable taking leave. This suggests that fostering psychological safety and promoting a supportive culture one that values both inclusion and personal well-being is crucial for encouraging healthy leave behaviors.

5.4 Conclusions

The study concludes that hybrid work models significantly influence how employees use leave, with autonomy, work experience, and sense of belonging serving as key factors. These findings reinforce the relevance of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), highlighting the roles of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in shaping workplace behaviors. The results presented in Chapter Four informed the development of a revised conceptual model. According to the framework

Figure 9 New Conceptual Model

Independent Variable



Dependent Variable

From the figure above, experienced employees are more comfortable managing their responsibilities and are more likely to take leave due to policy familiarity and confidence in delegation (Ng &

Feldman, 2009). Junior employees, by contrast, often avoid leave due to concerns about career growth and perceptions of commitment (Johnsen et al., 2020).

5.4.1 Autonomy and Leave Utilization

The study reaffirms that autonomy can have unintended consequences in hybrid work environments. While flexibility is often linked to increased job satisfaction and performance (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), it can also lead to a perceived obligation to be constantly available. This "always-on" mentality amplified by digital tools undermines the ability to truly disconnect from work, ultimately reducing leave usage (Derks et al., 2016). To address this, organizations should promote a culture that supports disconnection and introduce policies that encourage employees to make full use of their leave (Kossek et al., 2014).

5.4.2 Work Experience and Leave Utilization

Work experience plays a vital role in shaping how employees manage leave in hybrid settings. Seasoned employees are typically more adept at striking a balance between professional duties and personal time. Their confidence, understanding of policies, and accumulated leave make them more likely to plan and take breaks effectively (Ng & Feldman, 2010).

On the other hand, early-career employees often struggle with leave due to a combination of uncertainty, lack of support, and fear of negative judgment. These challenges suggest the need for structured guidance, such as clear communication of leave rights, access to mentorship, and supportive management (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Allen et al., 2015). Empowering junior employees in this way is essential for promoting long-term work-life balance and organizational well-being.

5.4.3 Sense of Belonging and Leave Utilisation

A strong sense of belonging in the workplace can have a negative and neutral impact on leave utilization. On one hand, employees feel so invested in their work that they are reluctant to disconnect, particularly in hybrid settings where the boundaries between work and personal life are

already blurred (Golden, 2012). On the other hand, employees who feel a strong connection to their organization may feel more comfortable taking leave, knowing that their absence will not negatively impact their standing or relationships (Allen & Shanock, 2013). Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors towards leave utilization. By cultivating an environment built on trust and inclusivity, leaders empower staff to prioritize their well-being without fear of professional repercussions (Edmondson, 2018). A supportive leadership style reinforces positive norms, encouraging employees to disconnect and recharge.

5.5 Recommendations

The conclusions outlined in the previous section form the foundation for the following recommendations, which are aligned with the study's objectives and findings.

5.5.1 For Organizations

Promote a culture that normalizes leave taking

Organizations should actively encourage leave utilization by creating a workplace culture where time off is normalized and valued. Leaders must set an example by taking leave themselves and openly supporting others in doing the same. Periodic reminders about the importance of rest and recovery can reinforce this culture. As emphasized by Kossek et al. (2014), organizational support is essential in enabling employees to take leave without fear of negative consequences. Initiatives such as awareness campaigns and reminders about unused leave days can be especially impactful in hybrid settings, where boundaries between personal and professional time are often blurred.

Utilize technology to streamline leave management

Leverage human resource information systems (HRIS) and leave management software to simplify the process of scheduling and tracking leave. Automated reminders about leave balances and upcoming holidays can encourage proactive planning. In hybrid work models, technology plays a dual role – it can either support or hinder well-being. Therefore, digital tools should be used strategically to facilitate leave-taking and ensure visibility across teams.

Establish and enforce clear worklife boundaries

Organizations should develop policies that discourage work-related communication outside of business hours, especially during employee leave periods. This may include setting up automated out-of-office responses, blocking work-related notifications, and training teams on the importance of disconnection. As studies by Derks et al. (2016) and Gajendran & Harrison (2007) reveal, clearly defined boundaries are critical for avoiding burnout and preserving mental health in flexible work environments.

Support junior employees

Junior employees often struggle with taking leave due to anxiety about perceptions, career advancement, or workload management. Targeted interventions, such as mentorship programs and training on leave policies, can help build their confidence. Organizations should provide structured guidance to support early-career professionals in navigating the complexities of hybrid work, enabling them to take necessary breaks without guilt or concern.

Foster a supportive and inclusive work environment

Promote a workplace atmosphere of collaboration and trust, where employees feel confident that their responsibilities will be managed in their absence. Recognizing individuals who prioritize their well-being through leave-taking can further reinforce this message. While a strong sense of belonging can sometimes discourage leave, a balanced culture ensures that employees feel connected without neglecting their personal needs.

5.5.2 Areas For Future Research

To build upon the findings of this study, the following areas are recommended for further exploration

Longitudinal studies to Investigate how leave taking patterns change over time as hybrid work arrangements become more deeply embedded in organizational culture (Creswell, 2018).

Cultural Influences to explore how cultural values and norms influence leave behaviors across different geographic and organizational contexts. Cross-cultural research can uncover varying interpretations of work-life balance (Shore et al., 2011).

Leadership and leave culture to examine the role of leadership behavior in shaping organizational norms around leave-taking and employee well-being. Understanding the influence of leadership styles may help develop interventions to foster healthier workplace habits.

5.6 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on hybrid work arrangements and leave utilization in three key ways: theoretical, empirical, and practical. Drawing from Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), it explores how autonomy, work experience, and sense of belonging affect leave behavior, and what this means for employee wellbeing, work-life balance, and compliance.

Theoretical Contributions

Extension of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The study extends SDT by applying it to a hybrid work context an area underexplored in existing literature. It demonstrates that the core psychological needs of autonomy, competence (via work experience), and relatedness (via sense of belonging) can influence not only motivation and engagement, but also behavioral outcomes such as leave utilization.

Challenging the Universality of Autonomy as Beneficial. While autonomy is traditionally seen as a positive driver of engagement and well-being, this study reveals that in hybrid settings, it may lead to underutilization of formal leave due to increased flexibility and informal time management. This finding challenges the uniformly positive view of autonomy in the SDT framework.

Empirical Contributions

New Evidence from a Hybrid Work Context in Uganda. The study provides empirical data from a Sub-Saharan African context, contributing to a literature base that is predominantly Western. This

contextual specificity adds depth to the global discourse on hybrid work, especially in low- and middle-income settings where digital infrastructure, labor laws, and workplace culture differ significantly.

Revealing Underreported Leave Behaviors. Through qualitative insights, the research uncovers subtle behavioral patterns such as guilt-driven presenteeism and the informal bypassing of leave that are not easily captured in quantitative studies. These findings enhance understanding of how hybrid work influences employees' actual, not just stated, leave practices.

Practical and Policy Contributions

Informing HR Practice and Leave Policy. The findings can guide human resource managers in designing leave policies that are more responsive to hybrid work dynamics. For instance, organizations can promote a culture where taking leave is normalized and supported, regardless of work setting.

Supporting Mental Health and Compliance Initiatives. By showing that underutilization of leave can affect wellbeing and compliance with labor laws (Uganda's Employment Act Cap. 226), this study highlights the need for employee wellbeing programs that explicitly encourage adequate rest and recovery.

Evidence for Policy Advocacy

The study offers insights that could inform labor and occupational health policies, particularly in crafting hybrid work regulations that protect employee rights to disconnect and take leave.

5.7 Limitations To the Study

The study focused exclusively on employees at ChildFund International, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other sectors, organizations, or cultural settings (Bryman, 2016).

Additionally, the nature of the data collection may not fully capture evolving behaviors or long-term patterns in leave utilization, especially as hybrid work practices continue to develop.

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APPENDICES

Appendice 1: Consent Form

Title of the Research Project: Effects of Hybrid Work Arrangements on Leave Utilization Among Employees: A Case Study of ChildFund International.

Purpose

I, _____, agree to voluntarily take part in this research study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, and I am also allowed to skip any questions I don't feel comfortable answering, without facing any consequences. Additionally, I know that I can withdraw permission to use my interview data within two weeks after the interview, at which point all materials related to my interview will be deleted.

I have been given a clear explanation of what the study is about, and I have had the chance to ask any questions to make sure I understand.

I understand that my participation will involve sharing my thoughts and opinions on the topic, and I will not face any harm or negative consequences from taking part. I am aware that I won't receive any personal benefits from being part of this research. I also agree to having my interview audio-recorded, and I am assured that everything I share will be kept confidential.

I know that my identity will remain anonymous in any reports or publications resulting from this study. This means that my name will be changed, and any other identifying details will be altered to protect my privacy. It's possible that parts of my interview could be quoted in academic work, such as dissertations, conference talks, and published articles. I understand that I can access the information I've provided at any time while it is stored.

If I have any further questions or would like more information about the research, I am welcome to contact the research team.

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

Student/researcher

Teddy Aloikin

Tell: 0783993657

Email: teddyaloikin@outlook.com

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for Childfund International Employees

Dear respondent,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey. The purpose of this survey is to obtain information about how autonomy, work experience and sense of belonging predict leave utilization in hybrid work arrangements. In the topic "Effects of hybrid work arrangements on leave utilization among employees" the researcher intends to establish the effects of the three (3) variables on leave utilization. I request you provide true and objective responses to the questions in this survey. Your responses will be kept confidential and only used for this study. Do you agree? Yes/No.

SECTION A: PERSONAL INFORMATION

A.1 Duration of Leave Taken?

a). 1-5 Days b). 6-10 Days c). 11-15 Days d). 16-20 Days e). 21 and Above

A.2 What is your age?

a). 21-30 b). 31-40 years c). 41 - 50 years c). 51 years and above

A.3 What is your gender?

a). Male b). Female

A.4 Department

SECTION B. AUTONOMY AND LEAVE UTILIZATION

In the following questions under section B (1-5) you are encouraged to share your opinion about how autonomy influences leave utilization at ChildFund. Below are the options that have been provided to represent your opinion.

This is very much like me	This is like me	This is somewhat like me	This is a little like me	This is not like me	This is not like me at all
1	2	3	4	5	6

B.1 I feel that I have control over how I perform my tasks at work

B.2 I am satisfied with the level of flexibility I have regarding my work tasks.

B.3 I am comfortable taking leave when I feel it is necessary for my well-being

B.4 I feel psychologically pressured to remain connected to work even during my personal time.

B.5 I believe that technology keeps me engaged to work related activities even when I am on leave.

In the following questions (B6-8), you are encouraged to share your opinion regarding leave utilisation throughout FY24 (July-23 to June-24). Below are the options that have been provided to represent your opinion.

<i>Without fail</i>	Almost all the time	Most of the time	About half of the time	Less than half of the time	<i>Less than a quarter of the time</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6

B.6 I stuck to my leave plan throughout the year

B.7 I often request leave, when necessary, without hesitation.

B.8 I changed my work schedule instead of taking leave.

b.9 How often did you take leave

SECTION C. WORK EXPERIENCE AND LEAVE UTILIZATION

C.1 How long have you been employed in ChildFund?

- a) 1 year
- b) 2 - 5 years
- c) 6 - 10 years
- d) Above 10 years

In the following questions I would like you to share your opinion about how your work experience influences leave utilization at ChildFund. Below are the options that have been provided to represent your opinion.

This is very much like me	This is like me	This is somewhat like me	This is a little like me	This is not like me	This is not like me at all
1	2	3	4	5	6

C.2 Because of my work experience I can ably adapt to different work arrangements (e.g., in-person, remote, hybrid).

C.3 “my work experience affects my job performance while in a hybrid work setting”

C.4 “my work experience affects my leave utilization”

C.5 “my work experience has an effect on my work life balance”

SECTION D. SENSE OF BELONGING AND LEAVE UTILIZATION

In the following questions you are encouraged to share your opinion about how your sense of belonging influences leave utilization at ChildFund. Below are the options that have been provided to represent your opinion.

This is very much like me	This is like me	This is somewhat like me	This is a little like me	This is not like me	This is not like me at all
1	2	3	4	5	6

D.1 I feel like I am a valued member of my organization.

D.2 I feel included in workplace discussions and decisions.

D.3 I believe my contributions to the organization are recognized and appreciated.

D.4 I feel a sense of psychological ownership towards my organization.

D.5 I feel connected to my colleagues, even in a hybrid work environment.

D.6 I believe that my sense of belonging influences my decision to take leave

D.7 I feel that my organization promotes diversity and inclusion effectively.

D.8 I am satisfied with the support I receive from my leadership.

D.9 I believe that a supportive work environment encourages me to take leave.

D.10 I believe that my colleagues are supportive when I take leave

D.11 I believe that a strong sense of belonging enhances my overall job performance.

I am included in workplace activities while on hybrid arrangement.

THE END

THANK YOU

Appendice 3: Interview Guide

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CHILDFUND INTERNATIONAL EMPLOYEES

Interviewer name:

Participant ID:

Interview Date: _____ Time: _____

Participant agrees to be recorded Yes: ☐ NO: ☐

Gender:

Age:

a). 21-30 b). 31-40 years c). 41 - 50 years c). 51 years and above

Section A:

Thank you for taking your times to speak with with me. My name is Teddy Aloikin and I am currently conducting a follow up interview on effects of hybrid work arrangements on leave utilisation among employees. A case of Childfund International in. I am a student of a Master of Business Administration-Management Uganda Christian University (UCU). The purpose of this survey is to obtain information and understand better about the relationship between work experience and employee's confidence to take leave in a hybrid work arrangement. I request you to provide true and objective responses to the questions in this survey. Your responses will be kept confidential and only used for this study.

How long have you been working in your current role?

1. Why do you think employees with more work experience are more or less likely to take leave in a hybrid work environment or while working remotely?
2. How does the hybrid work model influence employees' willingness to take leave? Are there any noticeable trends based on work experience?
3. Can you discuss any moments where accumulated leave influenced your, or an employee's decision to take leave, whether positively or negatively?
4. Could you share why you think employee's feel confident or hesitant to take leave in a hybrid work/remote setup?
5. Can you explain how understanding of childfund's leave policy overtime influences employee's confidence in utilizing leave?
6. What factors contribute to the differences between how junior vs. senior employees in childfund approach leave utilisation in a hybrid work environment?
7. What role do managers play in shaping employees' confidence in taking leave in a hybrid work environment?
8. How can management at childfund better support less experienced employees in feeling confident about taking leave while working hybrid?

THANK YOU, THE END