

Remote, Hybrid or In-Person? How Work Location Affects Loneliness and Employee  
Engagement

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## **Abstract**

Remote, Hybrid or In-Person? How Work Location Affects Loneliness and Employee

Engagement

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As remote and hybrid work models become increasingly common, understanding their effects on employee well-being has become essential. While previous research has linked workplace loneliness to decreased engagement and performance, the role of work location and interpersonal closeness in this relationship remains underexplored. This thesis investigates how different work settings—remote, hybrid, and in-person—affect feelings of closeness, loneliness, and engagement. Drawing on theories of social exchange and employee engagement, this study uses in-depth interviews with 26 participants. Qualitative analysis uncovered rich, context-dependent insights. In-person work supported spontaneous communication and emotional closeness, while hybrid work allowed flexibility but presented challenges in maintaining strong social bonds. Remote workers reported high autonomy but also greater difficulty in forming close relationships, which contributed to feelings of isolation. Across all work locations, structured, meaningful communication and interpersonal support emerged as key contributors to reducing loneliness and enhancing engagement. This study contributes to the evolving literature on modern work environments by highlighting the complex interplay between physical presence, technology-mediated interaction, and workplace relationships. The findings offer practical implications for organizations aiming to design inclusive and engaging work experiences in a post-pandemic world.

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## Introduction

The work landscape has changed significantly after the COVID-19 pandemic. Many organizations now offer their employees the flexibility to choose their work location. This ranges from fully in-person at a physical workplace; fully remote, a mode in which employees are working from home all five days of the week; or hybrid, a mode in which employees spend some of their workdays in the physical office and the rest of their workdays working remotely (Teevan, 2021; Cutter, 2021). This shift has not only changed where people work but also how they collaborate, connect, and form relationships in the workplace. Alongside evolving work models, modes of communication have come to play a central role in shaping the modern work experience. These communication modes range from face-to-face interactions to video calls, emails, and instant messaging. Although the increased use of technology has brought people closer digitally, it has also limited possibilities for face-to-face interaction, thereby contributing to a sense of psychological loneliness (Katz, 2020).

The concept of telework or remote work has been widely studied over the past decades. Telework refers to the use of telecommunication technology to work outside of traditional office settings, most often from home (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Hybrid work, a blend of remote and in-office work, has emerged as a dominant model post-pandemic (Gajendran et al., 2024). While these models offer valued outcomes of autonomy and flexibility, they also introduce new complexities in maintaining meaningful workplace relationships.

Much of the existing literature has focused either on the psychological benefits and drawbacks of remote work (Gajendran et al., 2024; Hill et al., 2022), or on the structural and productivity outcomes of flexible work (Harrop et al., 2025). However, what remains underexplored is how differences in work location inherently alter the modes of communication

in the workplace. It switches from face-to-face interactions in traditional office settings to video conferencing, instant messaging, and asynchronous communication in remote and hybrid set ups. These shifts in communication modes, often mediated by telecommunication technologies, may play a critical role in shaping how employees build and maintain interpersonal relationships, and in turn, how they experience closeness, loneliness, and engagement with their coworkers and others (Aron et al., 1992; Hakanen et al., 2018; Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018).

The study explores the notion that it is not simply the presence or absence of colleagues that affects interpersonal relationships at work, but the perceived depth and quality of those relationships—something that may vary based on work location and communication mode. While technology-mediated communication can foster connectivity, it can also reduce opportunities for spontaneous or informal interactions that build closeness (Riedl, 2012; Balazs, 2019). This dual effect has led to a growing concern about workplace loneliness, even in organizations that report high levels of engagement. Recent meta-analyses and reviews by McCarthy et al. (2025) and Sennott and Stewart (2025), suggest that remote and hybrid workers often face challenges related to emotional connection, despite the perceived benefits of autonomy and flexibility that they offer.

This study responds to that emerging gap by focusing on the lived experiences of employees across remote, hybrid, and in-person settings. Through qualitative interviews, it seeks to explore how work location and communication modes shape closeness and the feelings of workplace loneliness and engagement. Interviews were chosen as the primary method to effectively capture the subjective nature of interpersonal relationships and emotional experiences as these dimensions are often difficult to quantify in surveys.

## Literature Review

Over the last ten years, one of the biggest changes in organizational life has been the changing nature of work locations especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, telework or remote work, defined as the practice of working away from the office while using telecommunications technology, was a relatively uncommon practice used by a small percentage of knowledge workers (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Today however, telework has become a crucial part of work arrangements, becoming both normalized and institutionalized (Gajendran et al., 2024). As a result of the pandemic, there are now changes in the way work is carried out, and organizations now frequently offer remote and hybrid work models.

Work location in contemporary terms generally includes three primary modalities namely remote, hybrid and in-person. Remote work is defined as a work set up outside of the traditional office setting, often from home, that uses communication technologies to stay connected (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). In-person work continues to follow the traditional model where employees are physically present in an office or workplace setting, for all five days of the week. Hybrid work on the other hand, is an emerging blend wherein employees split their time between on-site and remote work, combining the flexibility of remote work with the collaborative benefits of face-to-face interaction (Harrop et al., 2025). Each of these models carries implications not only for productivity and work-life balance, but also for interpersonal dynamics and social well-being.

Research on telework has primarily focused on its impact on productivity, job satisfaction, and autonomy (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Choudhary & Jain, 2024). In recent meta-analyses conducted by Hill et al., 2022 and Harrop et al., 2025, we see that remote work is

associated with increased autonomy and reduced commuting stress, positively influencing job satisfaction and work-life balance. However, this positive framing often overlooks the nuanced social consequences of telework, particularly its impact on interpersonal relationships.

Addressing this, Gajendran et al. (2024) propose a dual-pathway model stating that while telework offers autonomy and flexibility, it simultaneously undermines collaboration and social connection. In remote settings, where casual meetings and unplanned interactions are either completely absent or severely limited, these detrimental social effects are especially noticeable (Gajendran et al., 2024).

Hybrid work arrangement has emerged as a response to the limitations of fully remote work, aiming to adapt to the changing times and act as a bridge between in-person and remote modes. It aims to retain the benefits of autonomy and flexibility while reintroducing opportunities for interpersonal connections. While this format may seem ideal, it is far from perfect. For instance, employees who are not working on the same days as their coworkers, may experience communication gaps and inconsistent access to social capital within teams (McCarthy et al., 2025). Here, social capital refers to the benefits people gain from their relationships at work. These include trust, helpful advice, and a sense of belonging, all of which are harder to access when teams are fragmented. These issues are compounded by organizational decisions regarding when and how often employees are expected to be physically present, potentially leading to uneven relationship-building opportunities. For example, if team-building workshops, brainstorming sessions, or informal after-work gatherings are scheduled on days when certain employees are remote, those individuals may miss out on key chances to strengthen bonds and contribute to group cohesion. Supporting this, in the research done by Harrop et al. (2025), authors discuss how flexible working arrangements offer benefits in terms of autonomy and

work-life balance, but can also lead to social fragmentation, where employees feel disconnected from organizational culture and interpersonal relationships.

Moreover, the implications of location of work extend beyond logistical arrangements and into the psychosocial domain. Sennott and Stewart (2025) argue that different work locations create distinct relational climates that influence the availability of emotional support, the visibility of effort, and the ability to build trust. In-person work environments often foster rich interpersonal exchanges through both verbal and non-verbal cues. On the other hand, in remote work environments, due to the increased reliance on technology mediated communication, the depth of face-to-face interactions may not fully replicate (Riedl, 2012).

### **Technology Mediated Communication**

With the evolving work arrangements, there has been an increase in the reliance and role of technology mediated communication in shaping workplace interactions. Technology mediated communication refers to the use of digital platforms to facilitate interactions between employees who are not physically together. These modes of communication range from video conferencing, text/emails, telephonic conversation to face to face interactions in an in-person work setting. While such tools have enabled continuity and flexibility in the modern workplace, they have also introduced new dynamics that affect the quality, frequency, and emotional tone of interpersonal exchanges (Riedl, 2012; Balazs, 2019).

The theoretical foundation for understanding technology-mediated communication lies in the media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986). This theory states that the medium of communication used, varies in its capacity to convey information, and richer media like face-to-face communication, are more effective for complex or emotionally nuanced interactions (Daft

& Lengel, 1986). Video calls on the other hand, while more expressive than text-based tools, still limit the transmission of nonverbal cues and spontaneity which foster relationship-building and emotional connection. This limitation becomes especially true in remote and hybrid environments where informal, impromptu interactions occurring in shared physical spaces are often replaced by scheduled virtual meetings.

Research has shown that the increasing reliance on technology-mediated communication can result in feelings of disconnection and superficiality in workplace relationships (Wang et al., 2021). For instance, employees may engage in task-oriented discussions but lack the informal social chatter that fosters trust and camaraderie. The asynchronous nature of tools like email and Slack can often delay feedback, diminish immediacy, and create misunderstandings that can ultimately reduce the quality of relationships over time (Kirkman et al., 2002).

However, the effects of technology mediated communication are not always negative. In certain situations when used intentionally and along with synchronous tools, online platforms can foster collaboration and inclusivity especially for global teams. Research by Sennott and Stewart (2025) highlights that, when organizations support employees with training and guidelines on effective virtual communication, they can mitigate its negative effects.

These benefits do not fully address the limitations in fostering relational closeness. Digital communication is often transactional and lacks the spontaneity and intimacy of hallway conversations and shared lunch breaks. For example, a quick Slack message saying, “Can you send me the report?” serves the purpose of getting information, but it doesn’t create the same kind of connection as chatting about weekend plans before discussing the report in the office kitchen. According to Riedl (2012), such interactions are essential for building interpersonal trust

and a shared sense of identity within teams. The structured nature of virtual meetings tends to focus interaction on agendas and timelines, often leaving little to no space for unplanned moments and conversations that help foster feelings of inclusion and emotional bonding.

In sum, technology mediated communication is like a double-edged sword in the evolving workplace. While it enables flexibility and connectivity across distances, it also alters the impact of workplace interactions. The quality of communication becomes more important than its frequency. Understanding the relational implications of these tools is critical to fully grasping how remote and hybrid work arrangements affect employees' experiences of connection, loneliness, and engagement.

## **Closeness**

Let us look at closeness in depth. Closeness plays a critical role in how individuals experience connection, trust, and support in the workplace. It refers to the subjective perception of intimacy and emotional proximity within relationships. Specifically, it is the extent to which one feels included, understood, and supported by others. It is the degree to which individuals perceive their relationships as overlapping with their own identity (Tajfel, 1979). Aron et al. (1992) define closeness through the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) model, wherein the closeness between two individuals is the degree to which one sees the other as a part of their own self. This perception of overlapping identities is often associated with greater emotional security, collaboration, and mutual investment.

While much of the foundational research on closeness originates from personal and romantic relationships (Aron et al., 1992; Berscheid et al., 1989; Reis & Shaver, 1988), its relevance to organizational life is increasingly acknowledged. In workplace settings, closeness is

not just about social comfort but is rather instrumental in shaping team dynamics, psychological safety, and employee performance. Close workplace relationships enable open communication, faster conflict resolution, and increased employee engagement (Methot et al., 2016). Closeness also contributes to a sense of belonging, which is known to be a basic human need and a precursor to engagement (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The development of closeness in organizational contexts depends significantly on the nature and frequency of interaction, shared experiences, and mutual vulnerability. Informal moments like the impromptu watercooler chats, shared meals, and spontaneous help, often serve as the important experiences for such relationships. These opportunities are either removed or replaced in remote or hybrid settings, however. As Hill et al. (2022) and Riedl (2012) suggest, the lack of unstructured, informal communication in virtual environments constrains the organic development of closeness. In these modes, interactions often become planned and structured, lacking the depth that fosters deeper relational ties.

Closeness is particularly important because it may underlie the connections between structural aspects of work like location and communication tools, and psychological outcomes like loneliness and engagement. While prior literature often isolates workplace loneliness and employee engagement as distinct phenomena, the role of closeness in connecting the two remains underexplored. For instance, Ozcelik and Barsade (2018) found that employees who lacked authentic connections at work were more likely to experience loneliness and disengagement, but they did not explicitly investigate the impact of closeness in this relationship.

Furthermore, closeness may also vary depending on the type of relationship in the workplace, ranging from supervisor to coworkers and subordinates. The relationship one has

with their virtual coworker would be different from the one it has with the coworker they see in office. Similarly, the type of relationship may also differ based on one's role. You are less likely to have a close relationship with your supervisor as compared to your coworker. Different work arrangements may facilitate certain relationships while impeding others. For example, hybrid workers may experience closeness with in-office peers but feel distant from remote teammates. Conversely, remote employees might develop strong bonds with certain coworkers via regular virtual collaboration but feel disconnected from the broader team. Such nuances suggest that closeness is not uniformly experienced within a work location category and is instead shaped by patterns of interaction and relational context.

In the context of this study, closeness is not the sole focus, but rather as a tool through which workplace loneliness and employee engagement are understood. Understanding how closeness operates across different work arrangements offers new insights into why some employees thrive while others struggle, even within the same work location.

## **Workplace Loneliness**

Loneliness has several definitions, but it is broadly defined as “a complex set of feelings that occurs when intimate and social needs are not adequately met” (Cacioppo et al., 2006) - an aversive psychological state. It is a subjective emotional state, not merely the absence of social contact, but rather the perceived discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships. In the context of the workplace, loneliness has been conceptualized as the distressing experience resulting from the lack of desired social connections and belonging within professional environments (Wright et al., 2006). Workplace loneliness can manifest regardless of physical

proximity to colleagues. It depends more on the quality of interactions and one's perception of being valued and socially integrated.

Recent organizational literature distinguishes between two primary dimensions of workplace loneliness: emotional deprivation and lack of social companionship (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018). Emotional deprivation refers to the absence of close and trusted relationships at work. On the other hand, social companionship refers to the perceived lack of friendly, informal social ties. Both can have varying implications, influencing psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Although remote and hybrid work settings may increase opportunities for flexibility, they often amplify emotional and social distance, especially when communication becomes purely transactional, lacking any informal exchanges (Hill et al., 2022).

Beyond emotional consequences, workplace loneliness has also been shown to influence motivational outcomes such as engagement. In their comprehensive review of over 200 studies, McCarthy et al. (2025) conclude that reduced work engagement is one of the most consistent outcomes associated with workplace loneliness. They describe loneliness as an experience shaped by the work environment and social relationships, which in turn influences how engaged employees feel in their jobs. This pattern appears in several focused studies as well. Jung et al., (2021) found that loneliness was negatively related to work engagement. This link was influenced by relationships in the workplace, particularly the ones employees had with their coworkers and leaders. When employees reported positive relationships with their leaders and coworkers, the link between their loneliness and engagement was weak. In other words, the slope between loneliness and engagement was steepest under poor leader/coworker relationships and flattened as those relationships improved, indicating a moderation effect. Basit and Nauman

(2023) reported a mediated pathway in which loneliness reduced engagement, and lower engagement was associated with higher job dissatisfaction. They also showed that this indirect pathway was weaker for employees with a stronger need to belong.

Workplace loneliness has been linked to a host of negative outcomes, including lower job performance, increased turnover intentions, and reduced affective commitment (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018; Hakanen et al., 2018). Employees experiencing loneliness are more likely to disengage from their tasks, withdraw socially, and exhibit diminished organizational citizenship behaviors. This is a major concern in remote work environments where employees are isolated from regular social interaction. As physical workspaces and spontaneous encounters vanish, opportunities for relationship maintenance and reinforcement decline, increasing the risk of perceived isolation (McCarthy et al., 2025).

Furthermore, loneliness is not always a direct function of work location but rather the quality and perceived meaning of interactions. For instance, an employee working in a crowded open-plan office may still experience loneliness if their social relationships feel transactional or superficial. Conversely, a remote worker may feel deeply connected to colleagues if interactions are frequent, supportive, and emotionally validating. This highlights the central role of perceived closeness in understanding loneliness. As Aron et al. (1992) propose in their Inclusion of Other in the Self model, individuals feel less lonely when they perceive their social ties as overlapping with their sense of self. Thus, closeness can potentially mitigate the psychological toll of physical or structural separation from others.

The shift toward technology-mediated communication further complicates the dynamics of loneliness. Video conferencing, emails, and messaging platforms, increase reach and

convenience, but replace rich face-to-face cues with filtered, intentional interactions (Riedl, 2012). These tools may sustain productivity but offer limited scope for emotional expression and casual bonding. As a result, remote and hybrid workers may find it harder to form or maintain relationships that foster a sense of belonging. Sennott and Stewart (2025) argue that although digital tools can support competence and autonomy, they often fail to meet employees' needs for relatedness which is crucial for their psychological well-being.

## **Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement is a cornerstone of organizational success and has been widely studied in relation to job performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, and overall employee well-being. Kahn (1990) proposed that employee engagement is influenced by three psychological conditions: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. He hypothesized that when these conditions are met, employees are more likely to be engaged in their work. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) developed the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, through which they further define engagement as a positive, fulfilling state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. The model suggests that job resources such as autonomy, feedback, and social support enhance engagement, while job demands like emotional strain can have a negative impact on it.

Notably, many of the key drivers of engagement like support, meaningful relationships, and psychological safety are inherently social in nature. Employee engagement cannot be meaningfully promoted without addressing interpersonal dynamics and workplace relationships. Christian et al. (2011) supports this by demonstrating in the findings of their meta-analysis study and say that engagement is influenced by social and contextual factors just as much as individual traits or job design. We can surmise that if work arrangements and communication modes disrupt

relational processes, as seen in hybrid and remote work set ups, then engagement is likely to be affected.

Emerging literature has begun to explore the direct and indirect effects of remote and hybrid work on engagement. While remote work can enhance engagement through increased autonomy and flexibility (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Harrop et al., 2025), it can simultaneously hinder it by reducing access to the relational and environmental cues that support intrinsic motivation. This dual pathway is articulated in Gajendran et al.'s (2024) meta-analysis, which posits that remote work intensity has both positive and negative outcomes. On one hand, it enables greater control over one's schedule while on the other, it reduces social embeddedness, a critical factor in maintaining engagement over time.

Furthermore, the quality of communication plays a pivotal role in the impact of work arrangement on engagement. When digital communication is high in richness, allowing for nuanced feedback and emotional exchange, it can prevent the feelings of disengagement associated with isolation. However, when communication is task-oriented, sparse or impersonal, engagement can suffer even if task completion remains high (Hill et al., 2022). This distinction is important because it underscores that engagement is not just about being productive, but about feeling connected to one's work and the people within the organization.

Closeness, as discussed earlier, is uniquely positioned in this equation. While it has been primarily studied in the context of personal or romantic relationships, its workplace relevance is increasingly evident. Employees who experience higher relational closeness with their colleagues are more likely to perceive emotional support, feel psychologically safe, and engage meaningfully with their work. Conversely, the absence of closeness may intensify feelings of

loneliness and weaken the motivational conditions required for engagement. In this way, closeness not only helps against loneliness but as a bridge toward sustained engagement.

Taken together, closeness, workplace loneliness and employee engagement are interrelated dimensions of the modern workspace. Each is shaped by the evolving work locations and technology mediated communication. Yet, despite a growing body of literature on each individual construct, very few studies examine how they intersect within specific work arrangements such as remote and hybrid settings. This lack of integrative research creates a critical gap in our understanding.

To address this gap, this study poses the following research question:

**How do location and communication modes across different work locations affect employees' sense of closeness and their experiences of workplace loneliness and engagement?**

This research question is guided by several observations in the literature. First, work location (remote, hybrid, in-person) affects how frequently and meaningfully individuals interact. Secondly, communication modes (text/email, video call, telephone, face to face) used within these locations can either facilitate or obstruct emotional connection. And lastly, closeness is shaped by both location and communication, and can shape the emotional experiences in the workplace, including loneliness and engagement.

### **A qualitative approach**

To answer the research question and address the gap in current literature, this study adopts a qualitative approach centered on in-depth interviews with individuals working in remote, hybrid,

and in-person settings. This choice is deliberate and methodologically grounded. While much of the existing research on employee engagement and workplace loneliness relies on large-scale surveys and quantitative metrics, these tools often fail to capture the nuanced and subjective nature of interpersonal closeness and emotional experience (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018; Buffardi & Erdwins, 2020). Quantitative measures may tell us how often people feel lonely or how engaged they are, but not how those experiences are shaped by their unique relationships, contexts, modes of communication or work arrangements. Through qualitative interviews, it seeks to explore how work location and communication modes shape closeness and the feelings of workplace loneliness and engagement. Interviews were chosen as the primary method to effectively capture the subjective nature of interpersonal relationships and emotional experiences as these dimensions are often difficult to quantify in surveys.

Qualitative interviews allow for a deeper exploration of individual perceptions and emotional realities. They make it possible to uncover the mechanisms through which communication, work location, and closeness intersect to influence broader workplace outcomes. Kahn's (1990) foundational work on engagement itself emerged from qualitative fieldwork that explored how psychological safety and meaningfulness affect employees' ability to bring their full selves to work. Following this tradition, the current study uses interviews to understand how individuals perceive and construct closeness in different work environments while using different modes of communication, and how these perceptions relate to their experiences of loneliness and engagement.

This approach also acknowledges the complexity and fluidity of modern work arrangements. Hybrid work, for example, is not a uniform category that has a range of configurations, from rigid schedules (e.g., three mandatory in-office days) to fully flexible

models. Similarly, remote work can range from isolated home offices to well-connected virtual teams. By engaging directly with participants in these varied contexts, this study seeks to not only map the outcomes but also the processes. It seeks to understand what the communication habits were, did it have an impact on the effectiveness of the conversation, how closeness is cultivated or lost, and how emotional well-being takes shape in different work settings.

The study also integrates insights from both established scales and emergent narratives. The Inclusion of Other in Self (IOS) scale developed by Aron et al. (1992) is used to capture participants perceived closeness with individuals from their workplace, in a visual and intuitive way. While this scale provides a snapshot of relational overlap, the interviews build on this data to explore why certain relationships feel closer than others, and how that closeness, or its lack, impacts engagement and loneliness.

Lastly, the study attends to the role of technology mediated communication not as a binary good or bad, but as a multidimensional construct. Participants are asked to reflect not only on the modes of communications they use (video calls, text/instant message, emails) but also on the richness, frequency, and effectiveness of those interactions. Riedl (2012) emphasizes that technology can both enhance and erode connection depending on context and usage. This study builds on that insight by exploring what conditions enable digital tools to foster genuine connection and when they fail to do so.

The diversity of participants, spanning industries, roles, and work arrangements, ensures that the findings reflect a wide spectrum of lived experiences. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, this study prioritizes depth, thematic richness, and transferability of insights, all of which are the hallmarks of qualitative rigor (Tracy, 2010). The goal is not to measure how

often loneliness or engagement occur, but to understand how they may be shaped, interpreted, and mitigated in different work contexts.

In doing so, the study contributes to several ongoing conversations in organizational psychology and workplace studies. It offers a more integrated understanding of how work location, communication modes, and relationship closeness converge to influence emotional and motivational states. It foregrounds the underexplored construct of closeness as an underpinning of the well-studied constructs of loneliness and engagement. Lastly, it aims to provide organizations with grounded, actionable insights on how to foster relational quality across work arrangements, to reduce loneliness and promote engagement in the workplace.

With this foundation, the following section outlines the methods used to collect and analyze data, beginning with a description of the sample and data collection procedures followed by the measures used for analysis.

## **Method**

### **Participant Recruitment Procedure**

Recruitment for the research data (collected through interviews) was built with the help of a recruitment survey. The survey provided information about work location, the people in the workplace with whom they interacted and their relationships with these people. There were also measures of workplace loneliness and employee engagement. The information received in the survey was used to develop the interview questions.

The target population for this research consisted of corporate employees working in Canada. The participants were recruited primarily online. I posted on social media platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook. I also reached out personally to people in my network who fit the study criteria.

A total of 141 people responded to the posting and filled the consent form. Of these, 25% did not respond when contacted for the survey. Of the people who took part in the survey, only responses from Canadian residents were included in the analysis to ensure consistency in workplace culture, labor laws, and organizational structures that could influence employee engagement and loneliness. At the end, 61 participants from Canada, completed the survey correctly and were contacted and asked if they would participate in a 30-minute interview. Half of them responded and scheduled an interview. Of these, four did not show up for the interview. The remaining 26 were the participants. They ranged from 22 to 45 years. The sample consisted of 46% (12) females and 54% (14) males.

### **Initial Survey**

The survey was designed to recruit participants and collect preliminary data about their

workplace relationships, use of technology, experiences of loneliness and engagement, and work arrangements.

It began with questions about the duration at their current job and their industry. Following this, they were asked about their location of work (almost always remote, hybrid or almost always in-person). To get an understanding of their work experiences better, they were asked about the highlight of their day and the best work-related experience from the previous week. To dig deeper, the next question asked them to discuss one thing that they would have liked to happen differently in their week and the impact it would have had on them. Lastly, they were asked about the days they are in office generally (none, 1-2, 2-4, more than 4) and the days they were in office physically that week (none, 1-2, 2-4, more than 4), to compare if this week was different for them. They were also asked the number of people (nobody, 1-3, 4-7, 8-10, over 10) from their organization that they interacted with in-person, in the last week.

Next, participants were asked to select and give code names to five individuals (from A to E) from their workplace that they work most closely with. These five individuals were from specific categories: coworker from the same department, coworker from a different department, a subordinate, supervisor, or "other" (such as a project manager or client). Following this, they were asked to recall their communication with them and mention the modes of communication (face to face, video conference, email/text or telephone) and the approximate number of hours, combined using the different modes of communication (less than 2 hours, 2-4 hours, 4-7 hours, more than 7 hours).

A key component of this survey was the measurement of closeness using the Inclusion of Other in Self (IOS) Scale developed by Aron et al. (1992). Closeness can be defined in different ways. It is the sum of the amount of time spent together, the variety of interactions and the

influence they have on your activities. For each of the five identified individuals, participants rated their perceived closeness using the IOS scale. The scale consists of seven pairs of overlapping circles representing varying degrees of closeness between "self" and "other." The first image in the scale displays two circles that are separate (rating of 1), while the seventh image displays two circles that almost entirely overlap (rating of 7) (refer figure 1). Participants were instructed to select the image that best represented the nature of their relationship with everyone they mentioned.

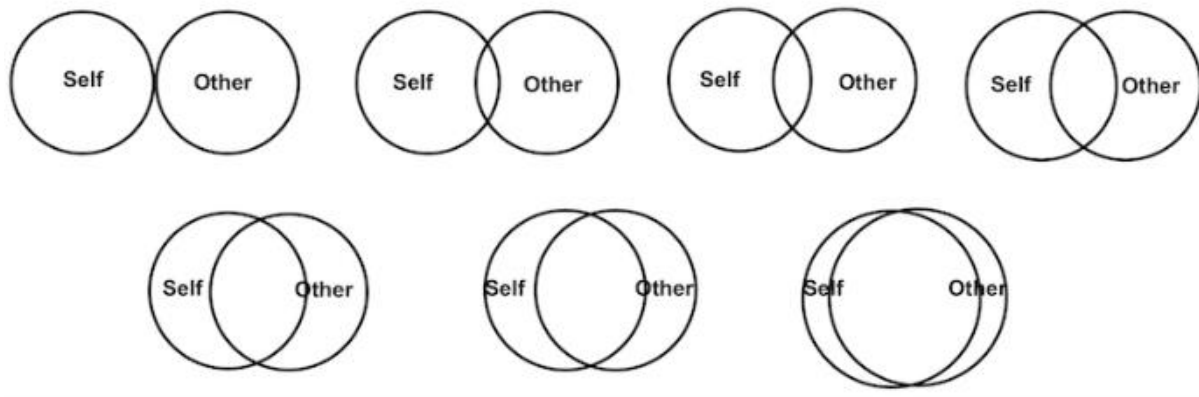


Figure 1: *Inclusion of Other in Self Scale, Aron et al. (1992)*

The IOS Scale has been widely validated and is considered a reliable and intuitive measure of subjective closeness in interpersonal relationships (Aron et al., 1992; Gächter et al., 2015). Aron et al. (1992) demonstrated the scale's construct validity across multiple experimental and correlational studies, showing that IOS scores correlate positively with other measures of closeness, such as behavioral overlap, emotional support, and relationship satisfaction. Its visual simplicity allows for cross-contextual application and minimal participant burden, making it an appropriate choice for this workplace study.

Loneliness was measured using the 16-item UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell et al, 1980), where participants rated their workplace loneliness on a scale of 1 (least lonely) to 7 (most

lonely), with some questions reverse-scored. A few examples of the questions on the scale are: “I often feel abandoned by my co-workers when I am under pressure at work; I often feel alienated from my co-workers.; I feel myself withdrawing from the people I work with.” The scale showed strong internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ).

Employee engagement was assessed using the 18-item ISA Employee Engagement scale to measure organizational engagement. Participants rated their engagement levels on a scale of 1 (low engagement) to 5 (high engagement). The reliability of the scale was measured as 0.923. A few examples of the questions on the scale are: “At my work, I feel bursting with energy. ; I am enthusiastic about my job.; and I am immersed in my work.”

The 61 participants' tenure ranged from six months to 12 years. The number of people in a primarily in-person work set up were 28, those in hybrid were 17 and 16 were primarily remote. The average job tenure for in-person participants was 46 months, that for hybrid workers was 48 months and for remote workers was 31 months. The most popular occupations were “Information Technology” (27%), “Education” (8%), “Fashion” (7%) and “Banking” (7%). The full survey is available in Appendix 1.

## **Interviews**

Based on the information obtained in the survey, the interview was designed. The interviews were conducted virtually on the Microsoft Teams platform. At the beginning of the interview, participants' consent was taken to record the meeting for later reference and data extraction.

For each participant, I asked if it was a typical week or a special week for them at work. This included the number of meetings they normally have, the people they interact with, the type and number of interactions and their tasks. They were then asked to recall the context of the interactions they had with everyone (A to E) and their role in it. I asked if there were other

people present as well, the frequency of the meeting (weekly check-in, project meeting, team meeting, etc.) and if they had a meeting with somebody else that was on a similar context or topic. After the context had been understood, I asked them to compare two meetings with similar context but different modes of communication (virtual and in-person) and discuss if they found one more effective or efficient as compared to the other. To understand their level of comfort with technology, participants were asked to discuss the impact of technology in the workplace and if they find this to be generally positive or negative. They were then asked about the importance of social interactions in the workplace and discussed their opinion in detail.

Following this, they were asked about workplace loneliness and if they or somebody in their work or personal circle recently experienced it. The methods that they use to overcome the feelings of loneliness were discussed in detail. Coming back to the five individuals they mentioned, participants were asked to describe their relationship with each of them. They were probed with questions like: Are they your friend? Do you like one another? Do you meet outside of work? I then discussed work life balance and if the boundary is strong for them or blurred. The interview ended with demographic questions about the living situation of the participant (alone, living with roommates, married or equivalent with no children, living with kids at home), their age and gender.

The duration of the interviews ranged from approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The full interview guide is available in Appendix 2.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Informed consent was obtained, ensuring participants

understood that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. To protect confidentiality, names were anonymized with the use of pseudonyms. In the survey, the participants were asked to fill in their initials. This was used to identify the respondent and match the survey to the interview. No personally identifiable information was recorded. All data was securely stored and accessible only to the research team. Ethical approval was obtained in accordance with institutional guidelines, ensuring compliance with ethical standards for research involving human participants.

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed. After the interviews were transcribed, I went through each transcript and carefully highlighted the comments relevant to the four pre-determined themes: closeness, workplace loneliness, engagement, and modes of communication. I set up four spreadsheets, one for each theme, and copied the relevant excerpts into them. Within each spreadsheet, I grouped the comments by work location; remote, hybrid, or in-person. This grouping was based on how participants had identified themselves in the recruitment survey. They had been asked to describe their work location, selecting one of three options: mostly in-person, hybrid and mostly remote. This made it easier to see both the commonalities and the contrasts across groups. As I read across the data, I compared comments, noted where participants echoed one another and where they diverged.

## RESULTS

This section has been divided into three parts based on the location of work.

### **Remote mode of Working**

This section presents the perspectives of ten employees working remotely, offering insights into their work experiences, communication methods, engagement levels, and perceptions of workplace loneliness. These ten employees shared valuable responses highlighting the advantages and challenges of working in a remote environment, during their interviews.

Amaya has been working remotely as a project manager of a Fintech Company for the last 11 years. She has been interacting with various team members primarily through video calls, emails, and messaging platforms like Teams. She maintains regular communication with colleagues and enjoys light-hearted exchanges, such as sharing memes and jokes. Despite her strong virtual engagement, she acknowledges that workplace relationships remain largely professional. She says, “In a remote setup, everything is more structured, making relationship-building harder.” However, when asked about loneliness, she said “I don’t feel lonely at work because of regular communication, but maintaining friendships beyond work requires extra effort.” She has blurred boundaries between work and life. We can understand this from her statement, “I sometimes work late in the evenings and even check my messages while I am on vacation.”

Next, we have Alyse, an experienced professional, who values the blend of professional and personal relationships at work. She interacts with her colleagues and supervisor frequently, preferring face-to-face meetings when possible. While she appreciates the flexibility of remote work, she notes that remote communication lacks the interpersonal richness of in-person interactions. She says: “We rely on tools like Slack and Zoom, which are efficient but

impersonal.” Even though her work is primarily remote, she prefers to go into the office in person when possible. She says, "Hybrid work aligns well with my introverted nature, providing solitude for focus while still enabling professional connections." She further went on to say, “For extroverts, workplace loneliness can have a negative impact, while introverts may find it positively impacting their focus.”

Christen, who has limited in-person interactions with his colleagues, primarily engages through virtual meetings. He acknowledges that technology creates barriers but calls it a useful tool. “Technology is a tool to help us stay connected, but they also create barriers.” He prefers a functional, rather than personal, relationship with coworkers and focuses more on task completion. He says, “We rarely meet outside. I met them at work (online) so I do not really hang out with them after. Just work colleagues. And I prefer to keep it like that for personal matters.” He lives alone and leads a solitary lifestyle, occasionally connecting with friends. His key quote: "I don't feel lonely working remotely; I keep interactions minimal and professional."

Next is Kirti, who is responsible for managing operations for an entire country. She has been working remotely for the last two years and typically engages in four to five calls per week. She says, “The check-ins are very, very less because the team below me and my manager, we are able to navigate through the entire business very smoothly, easily.” Her communication with colleagues is largely through emails and text, while video calls are reserved for detailed discussions. Her relationship with her coworkers and supervisors is strictly professional except for her coworker from her department who she speaks to about non-work matters. “I would say it's a good relationship. So, we have actually spent time talking about non-work stuff also. We talk a lot about work stuff as well. And we connect in our personal time also. Like, it's not too much, but it's still there. That element is still there.” She thrives in a remote work environment,

appreciating its flexibility and the ability to balance work and family life. She says: “Remote work gives me flexibility and time with my family, but for higher leadership roles, in-person presence might be important.”

Manish enjoys the flexibility of remote work but sometimes finds it isolating. He says, “There’s definitely a higher chance of feeling lonely in a remote setup. Not seeing people face-to-face makes it easier to feel disconnected, even if you’re regularly communicating online,” highlighting the challenges of maintaining closeness when physical presence is lacking. He prefers stepping outside occasionally for a change of scenery. While he values social interaction, he also appreciates the comfort of home during breaks. “I don’t like being alone, but remote work has given me personal time, even though sometimes the days feel slow.” He interacts regularly with close colleagues, emphasizing that strong work relationships enhance both personal and professional growth. He even calls his supervisor his “friend”, when asked about the kind of relationship he shares with them.

Next is Nima, who started her role in office before the pandemic, mostly communicates via emails, texts, and audio calls, after the shift to remote. Video meetings are infrequent but are part of team-building activities at her workplace. When asked to compare in-person and remote work, she says, “. I think I can give a very good example because before I started this role when I was going to office, if I compare that situation with current situation, it's much less the friends than I had made in my previous role when going to office. I mean even the number of friends was more. Friendship was deeper, I would say, than in the remote setting.” She acknowledges missing spontaneous office conversations and prefers a hybrid model to maintain a balance between social interaction and remote flexibility. “Remote work is efficient, but building

relationships takes longer compared to in-person settings. I feel more in control of my work-life balance, which keeps me motivated.”

Nimesh is an experienced remote worker who has regular project check-ins with his team and supervisor. Despite this, he feels the distance “Even though we’re in constant communication, there’s still a sense of distance.” He prefers video calls for their ability to convey facial expressions and emotions, though he respects colleagues’ privacy regarding camera use. When asked about his relationships in the workplace, he says, “You know, it's just my colleagues. I do feel like, you know, the lines are blurred sometimes when making friends with colleagues. But with my supervisor, I would say much more professional because I have to respect their position.” Over time, he has adapted to the remote setup, understanding that it cannot fully replicate in-person interactions. He says, “I miss casual office chats, but over time, I have adapted to the remote setting and its efficiency.”

Paul also works remotely but visits the office once or twice a week. He says, “You miss out on casual conversations that happen naturally in an office.” He acknowledges that virtual meetings, while necessary, are sometimes less engaging. He maintains a professional relationship with people in his workplace except for one of his coworkers who he has been friends with before they started working together. Outside of work, he maintains an active social life, ensuring a balance between work and personal time. He says, “I don’t feel lonely because of my social life outside work, but virtual meetings can sometimes be less productive.”

Paxton also works in a remote setup for the last 3 years, with a group video call every Monday. He values the effectiveness of virtual meetings but notes that in-person meetings foster a more casual and friendly environment. While remote work can feel isolating, he counters this by taking breaks and engaging in social interactions. He says, “The flexibility of remote work

keeps me more engaged. I have the freedom to manage my time, which helps with my overall well-being.” suggesting that autonomy, rather than closeness, is a key driver of engagement in remote environments. His key quote is "Remote work gives me flexibility, but it sometimes blurs the boundary between work and personal time.", indicating that a balance between both is hard to maintain in a remote set up.

Tony is a strong advocate for effective communication and rates its importance at 10 out of 10. He acknowledges technology's role in improving communication speed but prefers face-to-face interactions for their ability to convey emotions and engagement. Despite remote work's efficiency, he finds it less likely than in-person setups. He says, “Remote work is productive, but it lacks the liveliness and connection of face-to-face interactions. It’s hard to shake the feeling of isolation. You’re working alone most of the time, and that can lead to a sense of loneliness even if you’re engaged in your tasks,” highlighting the challenges of maintaining well-being in a remote environment.

Overall, these employees illustrate the varying impacts of remote work on engagement, loneliness, and workplace relationships. While some, like Kirti and Nimesh, thrive in remote settings due to flexibility and efficiency, others, like Nima and Manish, acknowledge the challenges of reduced social interaction. Employees like Alyse and Tony emphasize the importance of personal connections, even in remote work environments, while individuals like Christen and Peter prefer maintaining a more functional relationship with colleagues. The study highlights that engagement and closeness in remote work depend on individual work styles, personal preferences, and the extent of interaction with colleagues. In remote settings, closeness plays a more significant role in reducing loneliness, but engagement is primarily driven by

flexibility and autonomy. Technology has played a crucial role in maintaining workplace communication, yet it cannot entirely replace the depth of in-person interactions.

In the following section, we will look at closeness, modes of communication, loneliness and engagement in remote work settings, as discussed by participants. Please refer to Table 1 for a percentage view of positive responses for each theme.

- Closeness

Seven out of the ten participants in a remote setting reported that developing closeness with colleagues was more challenging in the absence of face-to-face interaction. While remote work allowed for frequent communication, they described these interactions as functional, and task focused. These kinds of transactional interactions limited opportunities for forming deeper bonds. Friendships that extended beyond work existed for only three participants and were almost always pre-existing rather than formed during remote work, i.e., they were friends who started working for the same organization. Without spontaneous moments such as hallway chats or shared lunches, closeness often required deliberate effort.

- Mode of Communication

All ten participants relied primarily on digital tools like video calls, emails, chat platforms (Teams, Slack), and occasional phone calls, for communication in the workplace. Five participants viewed video conferencing as the closest alternative to in-person communication since it allows for facial expressions and tone to be conveyed. Seven participants pointed out that virtual meetings still lacked the emotional richness, energy, and immediacy that in person conversations provide. All participants valued tools like email and instant messaging for their efficiency in conveying important messages and answering quick questions. But six participants described them as impersonal and insufficient for building strong workplace relationships.

- Loneliness

Half of the participants (5 out of 10) reported little or no loneliness, often because they maintained strong personal networks or engaged in frequent workplace communication. The remaining five acknowledged that remote work could create a sense of isolation, especially when non-work interactions were rare or when roles required minimal collaboration. Four of them linked loneliness directly to the absence of physical presence, describing that even daily virtual contact could not fully replace in-person connection.

- Engagement

Eight participants associated remote work with higher engagement due to increased flexibility and control over their schedules. This allowed them to work during their peak productivity hours. Of these, three participants said that they preferred the autonomy of remote work even if that came with limited social interactions. However, three participants noted that the absence of social energy and face-to-face accountability sometimes reduced their motivation. Six participants identified frequent and intentional communication, particularly through synchronous channels like video calls, as a key factor in sustaining engagement in a remote work set up.

### **Hybrid Mode of Working**

This is the response of nine employees working in a hybrid mode who participated in the interview. Let us see how they highlight the advantages and challenges associated with hybrid work, particularly concerning flexibility, social interaction, and workplace engagement.

Bhavna, a relatively new employee with only six months at her job, values the balance between flexibility and face-to-face interaction in a hybrid setup. Initially, she felt disconnected while working remotely, despite her manager's efforts to facilitate virtual introductions. When

asked about workplace loneliness, she says “So in terms of feeling disconnected, I would say yes, but feeling lonely, I’m not sure because I was new and I think people on my team also understood I’m a new person and I might need help anytime. So, when I started my job, I started it remotely, and I definitely felt I was disconnected from my team because I just started anew. But my manager made sure that I connect with people around the team.” Over time, transitioning to office days helped her build rapport with her team, especially through casual conversations. She acknowledges that video conferencing is a necessary alternative but believes in-person meetings are superior for fostering genuine connections. She even says that being surrounded by people in the office makes her feel more energized than working from home. “I feel more energized and engaged when I’m in the office. The team’s energy motivates me, and it’s easier to dive into discussions.”

Alicia, who has the flexibility to decide her office days, appreciates hybrid work for enabling a mix of focused work and social interactions. She finds online communication efficient for task-oriented discussions while valuing occasional in-person meetings for camaraderie. She says, “The planned team lunches or office events are great for maintaining that team bond—they really make hybrid work more sustainable.” She highlights the importance of workplace boundaries, noting how cultural aspects influence work-life balance. “Hybrid work fosters effective communication and allows seamless connectivity irrespective of location, ensuring I don’t feel isolated.” However, she did find an inconsistency in relationship building. “It’s hard to maintain strong relationships with everyone. I feel closer to those I meet in person more often, but some colleagues only interact with me online, and it feels distant.”

Emily, whose role involves training colleagues, enjoys the engagement that hybrid work offers. She values video calls for their immediacy and emails for documentation. While she prefers

remote work for its productivity benefits, she acknowledges the social advantages of in-person interactions. She says, “I prefer remote work for concentration, but social interactions in the office can be beneficial, though sometimes distracting.” “While I appreciate the social events on office days, they feel forced sometimes, and not everyone participates equally, so it’s a mixed experience.” suggesting that meaningful and inclusive engagement strategies are necessary to avoid feelings of forced participation. While talking about her workplace relationships, she said “Ohh I don't wanna go out a lot with my colleagues to be honest. I just wanna keep that in the workplace.”

John, a software developer, has daily meetings and values in-person sessions for structured discussions. He prefers video calls for their informality and real-time collaboration but finds in-person interactions better for non-verbal cues and socialization. Being introverted, he favors online meetings for confrontational discussions but acknowledges that non-work conversations feel more natural in person. “I feel more connected when I meet colleagues in person, even though productivity remains unaffected in virtual meetings.” On the topic of workplace relationships, he says, “Building relationships feels patchy—some people I connect with well, while others seem disconnected because our schedules rarely align.” He also mentioned that “I like what I really like about my company is the leadership style. There's no hierarchy, so everyone's opinion is heard.” Despite this, he mentions “From time to time, I do feel lonely while working at the workplace.”

Jana, whose work is autonomous and involves planning and supervision, finds hybrid work a practical balance between efficiency and social interaction. She appreciates in-person conversations for their emotional depth but acknowledges that remote work can sometimes be isolating. She says, “The one with the video conference was more hands-on, more informal, and

more productive. I feel more at ease when I meet them in person; there's more to read, more subtext.” Her home environment, including her partner and dog, provides emotional support. “Remote work can be isolating, but having personal support systems at home makes a difference.” She further adds, “When I was single, I used to feel that I was lonely before the dog, now, it's like a home.”

Jose, who specializes in troubleshooting, enjoys the autonomy of hybrid work. His relationships with colleagues vary from social to strictly professional. While he finds video calls effective, he acknowledges that some workers may experience isolation. “On remote days, I feel isolated if there isn't much communication—it can get lonely, especially without scheduled meetings.” He values hybrid work for providing a supportive social structure when needed. “I don't feel lonely due to regular client interactions, but for those with less engagement, hybrid work could be challenging.”

Samantha, with five years of experience, prefers working from the office due to the social interactions it offers. “Office days break the routine, and I find I'm more collaborative and productive when I can brainstorm face-to-face with others.” She admits that working from home can be isolating but she balances it with social activities outside of work. Her close friendships with colleagues, enhances her work experience. But, she adds, “I enjoy hybrid work's flexibility, but in-person interactions are crucial for maintaining workplace relationships.”

Simran finds hybrid work beneficial for her interactions with her manager, while she appreciates virtual meetings for work discussions, she values face-to-face conversations for deeper engagement. She appreciates the flexibility and adds, “Hybrid work lets me choose when to engage in person versus online, balancing focus and social interaction.” Remote interactions with distant colleagues feel impersonal, making it difficult to build strong connections. She says,

“Video meetings can feel like talking to a photo; in-person conversations allow for a stronger personal connection.”

Tarik values hybrid work for its blend of focus and collaboration. He sees in-person meetings as essential for engagement and team building but acknowledges the convenience of virtual meetings for global communication. He also highlights the risks of over-reliance on automation. "Hybrid work offers the best balance between autonomy and collaboration, ensuring both productivity and workplace engagement." When talking about loneliness, he says, “It’s hard to shake the feeling of isolation. You’re working alone most of the time, and that can lead to a sense of loneliness even if you’re engaged in your tasks.”

Overall, the experiences of these employees showcase the nuanced nature of hybrid work. While it offers flexibility and autonomy, the effectiveness of remote and in-person interactions depends on personal preferences, job roles, and workplace culture. Employees who have strong social structures or effective virtual communication strategies tend to feel more engaged, while those who prefer face-to-face interactions occasionally experience disconnection. We also observe that people who live alone tend to feel more isolated as compared to others who have a lot of friends and live with their pets or partners. The study reveals that hybrid work is a dynamic model that, when implemented thoughtfully, enhances both productivity and workplace well-being.

Let us now look at the participant’s experiences in hybrid mode of work. Please refer to Table 1 for a percentage view of positive responses for each theme.

- Closeness

Six out of nine participants described feeling closer to colleagues they interacted with in person. On the other hand, relationships maintained solely online were described as distant or

inconsistent. For newer employees, such as Bhavna, hybrid arrangements eased the transition into the workplace by enabling casual conversations and building rapport during the office days. However, four participants indicated that these connections were not uniform across the team, with closeness often depending on how frequently schedules overlapped for in-person days.

- Mode of Communication

All nine participants used a mix of synchronous (video calls, in-person meetings) and asynchronous (email, messaging apps) communication. Seven participants highlighted in-person meetings as superior for non-verbal cues, reading subtext, and fostering spontaneous conversations. Impromptu office cooler chats were highlighted as useful in relationship building. At the same time, six participants valued virtual meetings for efficiency, flexibility, and accessibility, especially for teams across different locations. Four participants noted that online interactions could feel impersonal, particularly when cameras were off, while in-person days provided richer social and emotional engagement.

- Loneliness

Five participants reported occasional loneliness, most often linked to remote days that did not have scheduled meetings or had minimal informal interaction. Those living alone or with limited local social networks (e.g., Jose, Tarik) were more likely to describe feelings of isolation. In contrast, participants with supportive personal environments (e.g., partners, pets, or active social lives) said these factors helped them fight the feeling of loneliness.

- Engagement

Seven participants said hybrid work improved their engagement. They attributed this to the flexibility to manage their work with autonomy, on remote days and benefiting from collaborative energy in the office. In-person days were often seen as energizing and conducive to

brainstorming and team engagement, while remote days supported concentrated, uninterrupted work. Three participants expressed that certain in-person social activities felt forced or uneven in participation, suggesting that engagement in hybrid models benefits most from organic rather than mandatory socialization.

### **In Person Mode of Working**

This is the response of six employees primarily working in-person who participated in the interviews. Their perspectives provide valuable insights into the workplace communication, engagement, and impact of in-person interactions on productivity and satisfaction.

James has been working in his current role for 6 years and has a strong preference for face-to-face interactions. He frequently interacts with his supervisor and colleagues through meetings, emails, and video calls, but finds in-person discussions the most effective, particularly for brainstorming and problem-solving. He says, "Being in the office lets us chat casually during breaks; it's not planned, but it makes a difference in feeling connected." He values workplace engagement, noting that direct interactions contribute to his overall success and satisfaction establishing meaningful relationships in the workplace. He says, "Just knowing people are nearby if I need a hand or even a chat gives me peace of mind."

Next, we have Mandy, a computer operator, who has been with her firm for six years. She interacts with 20 to 25 people daily and prefers in-person meetings over video calls due to network reliability issues. She values social interaction at work, viewing it as a way to strengthen communication and build relationships. She says, "Instant feedback makes collaboration smoother and strengthens team bonds." She finds being in an environment where people around her are working, pushes her to perform well and keep her engaged. She says, "Being in a shared space increases my engagement. When others are actively working around you, it's motivating

and creates a productive atmosphere.” ““I feel more engaged when I’m around my coworkers. I don’t feel isolated, and it’s easier to stay motivated.” She forms strong workplace relationships with colleagues on her level, although some interactions remain strictly professional.

Patrik has a highly interactive role, regularly meeting with colleagues in his department. His workload involves numerous meetings, and he finds face-to-face discussions essential for immediate feedback and efficient task completion. "In-person feedback is instant and feels more genuine. It keeps me more involved in my tasks." He believes that strong workplace relationships are crucial for career advancement, as visibility and engagement contribute to professional growth. Patrik also acknowledges that remote work may lead to workplace loneliness due to a lack of direct interaction but also says "Being physically close to colleagues doesn’t automatically mean stronger work relationships—it depends on how we interact. "Having people around helps, but it depends on the quality of interactions."" Hinting towards closeness being a factor in forming relationships in the workplace. He considers in-person work more efficient and collaborative, making it his preferred working mode.

Robin has been in his current role for five years and works in-person despite having the option for flexibility. "Bumping into people while grabbing coffee, and those small talks really help in building bonds, unlike scheduled zoom calls.” While he engages in phone and video calls for work-related discussions, he acknowledges that in-person meetings are more effective for clear communication. "Seeing someone daily, even without deep conversations, builds a comfort level that makes collaboration smoother.” Despite his flexibility, he values the structured work environment of in-person office settings, suggesting a comfort with routine and direct communication. "Regular interactions make me feel part of the team; it’s easier to reach out for help."

Soham, with three years of experience in his role, values in-person customer interactions, which he believes positively impact profitability. "I value in-person presence because it fosters better workplace interactions." His workweek is described as peaceful and productive, with increased customer interactions contributing to business performance. He maintains professional relationships with his manager, PJ, and his supervisor, MK, viewing them as essential for workplace efficiency. Soham sees technology as beneficial for record-keeping and document sharing but remains open to hybrid work models. "Remote work can be isolating, but hybrid models allow for necessary in-person interactions." Lastly, He does not perceive workplace loneliness as a significant concern, given the social interactions within the office.

Valerie has a demanding yet productive role, balancing meetings and cross-departmental collaboration. She has been in her position for two years and values face-to-face communication over emails for clarity and efficiency. "In-person meetings give off a better vibe; body language and small gestures contribute more than words." However, on the downside, she mentions "Sometimes, you feel more pressure to engage socially just because you're there, which can be draining if you're not in the mood." She acknowledges the advantages of technology in maintaining communication records and automating processes. While she appreciates the flexibility of remote work, she believes in-person presence is necessary for effective collaboration. "There's this community feeling when we're all working in the same space—it's uplifting and makes me want to contribute more." Outside work, she engages in adventurous activities and maintains a strong personal relationship with a close colleague, her "work bestie."

In conclusion, participants prefer spontaneous conversations and quick chats but some of them also felt that putting oneself out there is more difficult when everybody is physically

present. It further suggests that the physical presence of coworkers helps build a supportive work environment.

Let us now look at closeness, communication modes, loneliness and engagement in in-person work settings. Please refer to Table 1 for a percentage view of positive responses for each theme.

### **Closeness**

All six participants reported that in-person work fostered stronger workplace relationships through consistent face-to-face contact. Four participants described casual, spontaneous conversations during breaks and shared activities, as the key to building strong relationships in the workplace. Seeing people every day at the office and the ability to reach out to them when needed, were seen as contributing to a sense of belonging. Two participants noted that physical proximity alone did not guarantee closeness. They emphasized that the quality of interaction played an important role in shaping these connections.

### **Mode of Communication**

All six participants preferred in-person communication for its immediacy, clarity, and richness of non-verbal cues. Five participants highlighted that face-to-face meetings enabled instant feedback and reduced misunderstandings that made collaboration smoother. While all participants used technology such as email, messaging platforms, or video calls for documentation and coordination, they were not viewed as effective methods for building rapport or resolving complex issues. Two participants mentioned that being physically co-located made it easier to initiate conversations without the need for formal scheduling.

### **Loneliness**

Five participants reported rarely feeling lonely while working in-person and attributed this to the

steady flow of daily interactions with colleagues. Regular social contact and team visibility were described as important in fighting against feelings of isolation. One participant observed that while constant proximity reduced loneliness, it sometimes brought social pressure to engage even when they preferred solitude.

## Engagement

All six participants associated in-person work with higher engagement and motivation. Four linked this to the motivating atmosphere that the structured office environment creates along with the visible activity of coworkers. Three participants highlighted that the ease of reaching out to colleagues in person made them feel more supported and connected to team goals. One participant noted that the “community feeling” of a shared workspace increased their willingness to contribute, even when their workload was demanding.

|                 | Closeness<br>(in %) | Modes of<br>Communication<br>(in %) | Loneliness<br>(in %) | Engagement<br>(in %) |
|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Remote (n=10)   | 60                  | 50                                  | 30                   | 80                   |
| Hybrid (n=9)    | 77.78               | 55.56                               | 66.67                | 77.78                |
| In-Person (n=6) | 100                 | 100                                 | 66.67                | 100                  |

## DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore how work location and modes of communication relate to employees' sense of closeness and their experiences of workplace loneliness and engagement. The interviews highlighted that location itself matters less than expected. What emerged more clearly was that it was the quality of interaction, coordination, and relational practices that played a central role in shaping how employees described their workplace relationships. A remote worker with frequent, meaningful check-ins could feel more connected than someone who worked in person but only took part in surface-level exchanges with his coworkers.

Prior research suggests telework and hybrid arrangements deliver autonomy and flexibility but can dilute social connection (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Gajendran et al., 2024; Hill et al., 2022; Harrop, et al., 2025). The Media Richness Theory says that face-to-face and video interactions provide more social cues than text or email and that it may influence the quality of relationship (Daft & Lengel, 1986). The findings of the research, after talking to the participants, generally aligns with these patterns as we dig deeper into how communication modes within each work modality relates to closeness, loneliness, and engagement.

- Work location, modes of communication and feelings of closeness

Findings suggest that it is not the location itself, but rather the quality and design of interactions within that location, that participants emphasized when they spoke about closeness.

In remote settings, closeness required intentionality and deliberate effort. While video calls, chat platforms, and regular check-ins helped maintain professional connections, they often lacked the emotional richness of in-person communication. Interactions were often task-focused

and scheduled, which limited opportunities to deepen ties. Many remote participants kept relationships professional by preference or necessity. This may not necessarily be a problem. In fact, for roles requiring high focus and least coordination, this may be preferred. Personalities of the individuals may also have a role in this. Introvert personalities who try to keep to themselves and prefer a small social circle, may like keeping their relationships strictly professional. On the other hand, professional relationships typically offer limited emotional support and the feeling of safety in times of stress. This may ignite feelings of loneliness in employees (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018; Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008). In conclusion, it is about striking a balance and not forcing behaviors on employees but rather providing them with an environment with opportunities for forming meaningful workplace connections. Some of the practices that organizations can use include frequent 15-minute one-on-one sessions with the team members instead of monthly team meetings just for catching up on tasks. They could also establish informal rituals like virtual coffee catchups and rotating show and tell, that are on an opt in basis. And lastly, depending on the sensitivity of the topic to be discussed, different modes of communication should be used.

Hybrid workers reported that while office days accelerated rapport, remote days sometimes created disconnection or inconsistencies in relationship-building. Especially with uneven schedules and variable overlap establishing closeness with the broader team was difficult. This means that fostering closeness in hybrid settings is difficult unless teams align in-person work schedules and ensure that remote employees do not feel left out in meetings that have both in-person and virtual members. Organizations can also conduct a brief survey asking for availability for when most employees will be able to come into the office and host important

meetings on those days. Team bonding activities should also be set up on these days to ensure maximum participation.

In in-person settings, closeness was typically supported by spontaneous chats and easily accessible nonverbal cues. Participants described casual conversations, hallway check-ins, watercooler chats and “just seeing people” as ingredients that helped make connection feel natural and low effort. However, not all participants agreed with this thought. A few described how proximity does not always foster closeness. In fact, sometimes they felt forced to act a certain way and participate in conversations that they did not necessarily want, just because they were present. The goal here is to convert physical presence into meaningful check-ins. Organizations can develop micro rituals like open-door hours and shared breaks. Teams could further develop norms like quiet hours and do not disturb zones, to ensure deep work while maintaining connection.

A recent article by Cappelli and Nehmeh (2025), highlights that many hybrid work models fall short not because of the format itself, but due to a lack of intentional design. Organizations are trying to replicate the same workflow and communication structure that they followed in office, across remote and hybrid environments and this often results in confusion and weak team cohesion. This supports the present study’s finding that meaningful interactions, regardless of work location, are essential for fostering closeness and reducing loneliness. To promote engagement, organizations must go beyond offering flexibility and actively create systems that support consistent, meaningful interactions, specifically designed for the work location.

These patterns echo modality research showing the benefits of autonomy and flexibility alongside connection risks (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Gajendran et al., 2024; Hill et al., 2022; Harrop et al., 2025) and are consistent with the idea that richer media and richer moments help in building deeper connections (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Aron et al., 1992). Overall, it is the nature and quality of interactions, rather than the location itself, that plays a more critical role. This finding implies that organizations must focus not just on where employees work, but on how they communicate and build connections across settings.

- Feelings of closeness with others, loneliness and engagement

Across interviews, closeness was frequently described as helpful in fighting against loneliness, while its link to engagement varied by modality. While participants generally agreed that feeling connected to colleagues reduced emotional isolation, the strength and nature of these connections varied by context.

In remote work settings, closeness played a more prominent role in mitigating loneliness. Some Participants shared that a lack of physical presence heightened feelings of disconnection, even when virtual communication was frequent. When strong relationships were formed, with close colleagues or supportive supervisors, they provided a sense of emotional support that helped reduce loneliness. Organizations should put in effort in creating an environment for employees that fosters connection and try to maintain a positive relationship with employees, irrespective of their position in the organization.

In hybrid settings, closeness fluctuated depending on the schedule overlap the participant had and the design of the meeting. Some participants felt connected to those they saw in person but distant from the colleagues they had only known online. While in-person days offered

opportunities to connect, the inconsistency of hybrid schedules made it difficult to maintain closeness across the board. Organizations can take steps like having schedule overlap for employees in the same team and sending the schedule out a month in advance. Seeing team members consistently will likely help build a positive relationship and prevent loneliness in hybrid settings.

In in-person settings, everyday co-presence lowered loneliness for most even when not every relationship felt “close”. This suggests that regular, micro-interactions of the availability of social support when needed, can help against loneliness.

Engagement, in contrast, followed a more resource-driven pathway. Remote workers emphasized that having autonomy and control of their time contributed to them feeling energized and productive. This is consistent with the JD–R model’s emphasis on job resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) and with Kahn (1990) findings about the psychological conditions that help foster engagement. Hybrid workers reported higher engagement when collaboration was purposefully scheduled on office days. Like remote workers, they liked being in control and the flexibility of deciding their social involvement. Forced bonding exercises and events where not all employees’ participants equally, was reported as an issue with engagement practices in the workplace. Having a positive team culture and a transformational leadership style, one that fosters a sense of purpose, can help hybrid workers feel more engaged and connected in the workplace. that In-person workers highlighted immediacy of feedback and the motivating “energy” of the office as contributing factors to their engagement. Overall, our pattern aligns with research linking social support to lower loneliness (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018; Hakanen et al., 2008; Hakanen et al., 2018) and engagement to autonomy, feedback, and meaningful interaction (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Christian et al., 2011).

Overall, this research suggests that closeness is more important in reducing loneliness than in driving engagement, and that its effectiveness is context dependent. In remote settings, where social cues and informal interactions are limited, closeness plays a more protective role against loneliness. In hybrid and in-person settings, other factors — such as structure, leadership style, and team culture — may play a larger role in shaping engagement.

Broad predictors identified in previous literature do appear across all modalities but are not replicable across them. Social support and closeness tend to matter most for loneliness in remote settings, where a single strong tie could make a noticeable difference (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018; Hakanen et al., 2018). In hybrid and in-person settings, loneliness is related more to inconsistency (e.g., schedule misalignment, patchy informal contact) or personal context (e.g., living alone) than to closeness alone. For engagement, autonomy and feedback were central across all three modes. But, in remote work autonomy rose to the foreground; rapid feedback and co-presence were central in in-person work; and in hybrid work mode, engagement improved with purposeful in-office collaboration. These location-specific variations are consistent with the mixed effects of telework and hybrid reported in meta-analyses and reviews (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Gajendran et al., 2024; Hill et al., 2022; Harrop et al., 2025).

The findings partially support the idea that closeness reduces loneliness and enhances engagement but reveal that the strength and direction of this relationship vary by work location. In remote settings, closeness played a more important role in mitigating loneliness, consistent with prior research but it had little influence on engagement, which was instead driven by autonomy and flexibility. In contrast, hybrid and in-person environments showed weaker links between closeness and loneliness, suggesting that routine interaction alone does not guarantee emotional connection.

Additionally, the study found that engagement and loneliness do not always move in parallel. In hybrid settings, engagement appeared to help against loneliness even when closeness was inconsistent, while in in-person settings, casual contact created a sense of community without necessarily deepening workplace bonds. These insights suggest that proximity, closeness, and engagement are distinct but interacting constructs, and that contextual factors, such as communication mode and work structure, play a role in mitigating their relationship.

Across all three locations, a consistent theme was that workplace relationships were shaped more by interaction quality than by physical setting. This emergent discovery challenges the assumption that location drives relational outcomes in a straightforward way. Participants repeatedly emphasized the relational practices like regular check-ins, aligned schedules, inclusive meetings, and the tone of daily communication, made the difference. This extends prior work by showing that even within the same work arrangement, experiences of closeness, loneliness, and engagement could diverge depending on these relational dynamics.

### **Conceptual Implications**

The findings of this study contribute to the literature on workplace loneliness and engagement by explicitly examining how these experiences differ across in-person, hybrid, and remote work settings. While prior research has established links between closeness, loneliness, and engagement, it has often treated the work context as a fixed or homogeneous backdrop. Existing frameworks such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) and the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) model (Aron et al., 1992) do not fully account for how the location of work can affect the relevance or impact of these relational and psychological factors.

The present study challenges these assumptions by showing that the same interpersonal construct of closeness can have different effects depending on where and how employees work. For example, closeness showed reduced loneliness in remote settings but had minimal importance in in-person environments. Similarly, engagement was influenced more by autonomy and flexibility in remote roles, whereas in-person workers benefited from immediate feedback and co-presence. These findings suggest that closeness, loneliness, and engagement must be understood not just in isolation, but in relation to the broader spatial and structural conditions of work. By comparing these variables across work locations, this study advances the understanding of workplace well-being as a context-sensitive and relational phenomenon.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings of this study help to address some of the complex challenges that organizations face as they continue to navigate a flexible and evolving work environment. As hybrid and remote models become more embedded in organizational practice, it becomes increasingly important to understand how employee experiences of connection and motivation differ by location. This study highlights that closeness does not operate in the same way across settings, and that traditional assumptions such as, physical proximity leading to stronger relationships or closeness directly boosting engagement, may not hold true in all cases.

For example, in remote work environments, organizations may need to be more intentional about how they foster social connection and emotional support among employees. While digital communication tools can support task-related collaboration, they are often insufficient for building deeper relationships. This suggests a need for structured yet informal

interactions, such as virtual coffee chats, mentorship pairings, or team rituals that simulate the spontaneous bonding that occurs in physical offices.

In hybrid settings, the findings reveal the risk of fragmented relationships and uneven access to connection. Organizations should avoid assuming that hybrid automatically offers the best of both worlds. Instead, they should focus on designing inclusive hybrid practices, such as clear scheduling norms, synchronous collaboration opportunities, and consistent team-wide engagement, to avoid creating social silos based on when and where people work. Having a set schedule with days that team members are going to be in office, a month in advance, would give members something to look forward to and plan meetings that require discussions on those days so that everybody is equally involved. Providing employees equal engagement opportunities irrespective of their work location, in mixed media meetings, where team members are present online and in-person, fosters a sense of belonging and encourages participation.

Even in traditional office environments, the results indicate that proximity alone does not guarantee strong engagement or reduced loneliness. Leaders should look beyond presence and instead focus on cultivating psychological safety, team culture, and feedback loops that support meaningful interactions and a sense of belonging. Having a team culture that encourages participation and has set boundaries wherein one doesn't feel the need to talk just because of physical presence, is crucial in an in-person office environment. Encouraging employees to give and receive feedback positively will likely create a safe environment for employees to feel connected and engaged to the team and the organization. Creating a feedback loop of weekly one on ones and planned team meetings can create a sense of psychological safety and a feeling of belongingness (Newman et al., 2017).

Ultimately, this study emphasizes that organizations need to move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches to workplace engagement. By tailoring communication strategies, relationship-building practices, and leadership styles to fit the realities of different work models, organizations can better support employee well-being, inclusion, and performance.

### **Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research Directions**

The findings of this study should be interpreted with consideration for its limitations. While interviews provided rich, real-time insights, they did not allow for tracking changes in closeness, loneliness, or engagement over time. Longitudinal studies could help determine whether these experiences fluctuate with changing work arrangements or career stages. In addition, while this study explored how closeness functions across locations, future research may consider examining team dynamics, leadership style, or digital communication norms. The career stage (newcomer vs. five years in the company), leadership style (inclusive coaching vs. directive), and digital communication norms (camera expectations, response-time targets, one on one meetings) would likely have an impact on the feelings of closeness and loneliness in employees.

While the qualitative research method provides richer insights and practical experiences of loneliness, closeness, modes of communication and engagement across different work locations, the exploratory design of this research limits me from proposing causal relationships among themes. Future studies could build on these patterns by employing longitudinal and mixed method designs to examine how these relationships unfold.

It is also important to acknowledge the possibility of subjective bias. I selected interviewees, designed the questions, and interpreted the quotes. While the aim was to let participants' voices guide the analysis, these choices inevitably shaped the data that emerged.

Transparency about these subjective decisions strengthens the credibility of the analysis, while also marking a limitation of qualitative, single-coder approaches.

Another limitation is that while the research provides valuable insight into how work location may be linked to experiences of closeness, loneliness, and engagement, the sample size was modest, and participants were limited to corporate employees in Canada. As such, the results may be constrained by cultural and geographic factors. In addition, self-selection bias may have occurred, as participants who were more interested in discussing workplace relationships may have been more likely to participate in the interviews.

The design, while offering depth, also introduced variation in how participants discussed their work environments. Not all individuals worked in the same industries or had similar access to communication tools or leadership support, which may have affected their experiences of closeness and engagement. Similarly, differences in organizational culture, job roles, and personal living arrangements (e.g., living alone versus with family) may have shaped how participants responded to remote, hybrid, or in-person work. Future research could focus on more controlled samples, such as employees within a single organization or industry, to better isolate the influence of work location.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis examined how work location (remote, hybrid, in-person) and communication modes (face-to-face, video, messaging, email) shape employees' closeness with coworkers, workplace loneliness, and engagement. Using in-depth interviews with Canadian corporate employees, communication mode was central in this relationship. Face-to-face interactions conveyed richer cues and spontaneity; video calls helped but felt structured; text and email were efficient yet

rarely built deeper ties. Schedule alignment, meeting design, and team norms mattered more. Practically, organizations should design for connection within each modality (e.g., reliable overlap days in hybrid, light informal rituals for remote, clear boundary norms across all). In conclusion, aligning modes of communications with work modalities may play a role in fostering closeness, minimizing workplace loneliness and encouraging engagement in employees.

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## Appendix 1

*Survey Flow Block: General Questions (7 Questions) Standard: Closeness Questions (6 Questions) Standard: Closeness Scale (7 Questions) Standard: Engagement Questions (1 Question) Standard: Loneliness Questions (1 Question)*

*Q1 How long have you been working at your current job?*

---

*Q2 What industry do you work in?*

---

*Q3 What is your current work arrangement?*

*o Almost Always In-person*

*o Hybrid*

*o Almost Always Remote*

*Q4 What was the highlight of your day today?*

---

*Q5 What was your best work-related experience in the last week? Please describe in a few sentences.*

---

*Q6 What was the one thing you wish that would have happened differently? How would it have made a difference to you personally? Please describe in a few sentences.*

---

*Q7 How many days a week do you go to your office in person?*

- o None*
- o 1-2*
- o 3-4*
- o More than 4*

*Q8 Please identify 3-5 people you work MOST closely with. Do not write their names, but please use a code name—their initials or a pseudonym that you will recognize.*

- o A* \_\_\_\_\_
- o B* \_\_\_\_\_
- o C* \_\_\_\_\_
- o D* \_\_\_\_\_
- o E* \_\_\_\_\_

*Q9 Which of the following best describes your relationship with each of the people mentioned from A to E?*

- o Coworker from the same department*
- o Immediate Supervisor*
- o Subordinate*
- o Coworker from another department*

*o Other*

*Q10 For each person mentioned above, use the checklist to report how you communicated with them in the last 7 days. You might want to refer to your calendar to recall details of the meetings or communication. Please check all that apply.*

*o Face to Face*

*o Videoconference*

*o Email/Text*

*o Telephone*

*Q11 For each person mentioned above, select the approximate number of hours that you communicated with them in the last 7 days. (Combine all modes of communication you used.) You might want to refer to your calendar to recall details of the meetings or communication.*

*o less than 2 hours*

*o 2-4 hours*

*o 4-7 hours*

*o more than 7 hours*

*Q12 How many days did you work from office in the last week?*

*o None*

*o 1-2*

*o 3-4*

*o More than 4*

*Q13 Beyond the individuals mentioned in A to E, how many people from your organisation did you interact with in person in the last 7 days?*

*o Nobody*

*o 1-3*

*o 4-7*

*o 8-10*

*o over 10*

*Closeness can be defined in different ways. It is the sum of amount of time spent together, the variety of interactions you have with them, and the influence they have your activities.*

*Q14 How close is your relationship with each person mentioned in A to E?*

*o A*

*o B*

*o C*

*o D*

*o E*

*Q15 Please select how much you agree to the following statements on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).*

*o I work with intensity on my job*

- o I exert my full effort to my job*
- o I devote a lot of energy to my job*
- o I try my hardest to perform well on my job*
- o I strive as hard as I can to complete my job*
- o I exert a lot of energy on my job*
- o I am enthusiastic in my job*
- o I feel energetic at my job*
- o I am interested in my job*
- o I am proud of my job*
- o I feel positive about my job*
- o I am excited about my job*
- o At work, my mind is focused on my job*
- o At work, I pay a lot of attention to my job*
- o At work, I focus a great deal of attention to my job*
- o At work, I am absorbed by my job*
- o At work, I concentrate on my job*
- o At work, I devote a lot of attention to my job*

*Q16 Please select how much you agree to the following statements on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).*

- o I often feel abandoned by my co-workers when I am under pressure at work.*
- o I often feel alienated from my co-workers*

- o I feel myself withdrawing from the people I work with*
- o I often feel emotionally distant from the people I work with*
- o I feel satisfied with the relationships I have at work*
- o There is a sense of camaraderie in my workplace*
- o I often feel isolated when I am with my co-workers*
- o I often feel disconnected from others at work*
- o I experience a general sense of emptiness when I am at work*
- o I have social companionship/fellowship at work*
- o I feel included in the social aspects of work*
- o There is someone at work I can talk to about my day to day work problems if I need to*
- o There is no one at work I can share personal thoughts with if I want to*
- o I have someone at work I can spend time with on my breaks if I want to*
- o I feel part of a group of friends at work*
- o There are people at work who take the trouble to listen to me*

## Appendix 2

### Interview Questions

*For the interview, the selected participants will be sent a link and asked to book a 1-hour slot for their interview. Once they complete the booking, they will be sent the survey and will be required to provide it back to me at least 24 hours before the interview. This will give me time to analyze the answers provided and adjust the situational questions for the interview.*

*1. Was this a typical week or a special week? (in terms of the number of meetings, people you met/interacted with, your tasks) (With respect to the situational questions based on the people you met)*

*2. Can you describe the subject matter of this (online/ office/ \*time\*) meeting you had with person A/B? (Is it something new/something that came up or a planned subject matter meeting) (Were there other people also present at this meeting) (What was the person's role) (Are there any other people, from A to E, that you spoke to about the same subject matter)*

*3. In your view, did the fact that one was in person and the other was video conferencing, have an impact on the effectiveness of the meeting? Please explain.*

*4. In general, how do you think technology has affected workplace communication? (Would you say the impact is largely positive? Largely negative?)*

5. *In your opinion, how important is social interaction for you at work? Why?*

6. *In recent times, there have been a lot of conversations in the media about the impact of hybrid and remote work on workplace loneliness. What has been your experience or the experience of your coworkers? (Did you experience loneliness this week? What did you do when you felt lonely/ somebody you were speaking to was lonely)*

7. *How would you best describe your living situation?*

☐ *Alone*

☐ *Living with roommates*

☐ *Married or equivalent, no kids*

☐ *Living with kids at home*

8. *Do you have hobbies or activities that you do with other people? Tell me a little about it.*

9. *How would you describe your relationships with A to E? (do you like one another? Are you friends? Do you meet outside of work?)*

10. *Do you feel there is still a boundary between work time and free time or has it blurred?*

*Gender: Age:,*