CIPM 2nd International Academic Conference

Conference Theme:
The commencement of AfCFTA: Opportunities for the
work environment

Sub-theme
Virtual Work and Employee Wellbeing

Paper for presentation:

**A systematised review of the effect of virtual work on
employee wellbeing in African countries**

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Introduction

- In recent times, the world of work as we have known it, has been redefined by major trends, which have catalysed a spike in the adoption of virtual work, and in some cases almost overnight (Ben-Itzhak, 2020; Agba *et al.,* 2020).

- Various organisations have adopted remote working practices for reasons such as to:

  - promote staff safety and business continuity during the pandemic
  - cut-down on running costs
  - reduce the time spent in commuting to offices
  - improve talent retention and boost productivity (Belzunegui-Eraso and Erra-Garces, 2020).

Introduction - contd.

- Virtual work has been **associated** with both **positive** and **negative impacts** on **employee wellness** (Hill, Axtell, & Nurmi, 2022). As is the case with all workplace conditions, it has been found to **impact employees** at the **physical, mental,** and **emotional levels** and to either **enhance,** or **harm** their **well-being**.

- Therefore, due to the **growing prevalence** of virtual work in African countries, there is a need to examine its **potential impact** on **employee wellness**.

Aim & Objectives

- The purpose of this systematised review is to **examine the existing literature on virtual work and employee wellbeing in the African region from 2017 to 2022**, with a particular focus on the **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)**, which is a free trade area encompassing most of Africa.

- By synthesizing the findings from multiple studies, this review aims to **identify common themes and factors that contribute to both positive and negative outcomes for employees** who are engaged in virtual work.

Review Question - What are the positive and negative effects of virtual work on employee wellbeing in Africa?
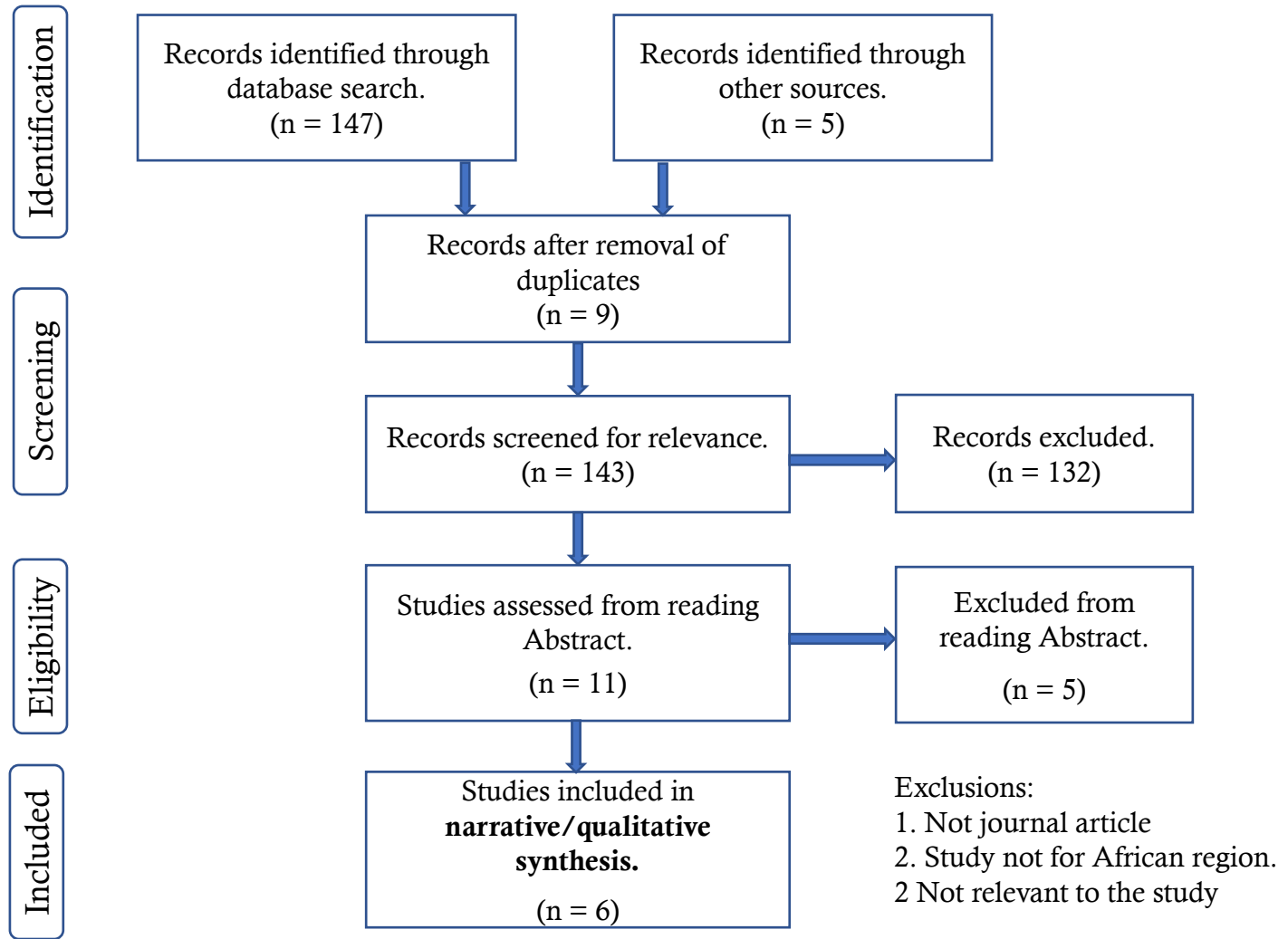
Methodology

- A comprehensive **literature search** was conducted on **eight electronic databases** namely: **Google Scholar, Google books, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, SAGE** and **Project Muse**.

- The search employed the use of a **combination** of **related keywords and phrases** such as **'virtual work', 'telecommuting', 'remote work', 'employee wellbeing', 'mental health', 'stress', 'Africa',** and **'AfCFTA' .** The search was limited to **journal articles publications** in English over a **six-year** period from **January 2017** to **December 2022**

- **Inclusion** and **exclusion criteria** were used to **identify** relevant published articles and to **reject** those articles that did not meet the review criteria.

Methodology contd.

- Initially, a total of **147 articles** were identified from the **databases**, and **5 articles** from **other sources** making a total of **152 articles**. After removing **9 duplicates**, **143 articles** were left for **title** and **abstract screening**. Thereafter, **11 articles** were retained for **full text screening** and **data extraction,** out of which **5** were excluded, leaving **6 articles** for review**.**

- **4 (67%)** of the studies were **empirical studies** (survey-based), while **2 (33%)** were **literature reviews**.

- The **quality** of the reviewed articles was **evaluated** using **guidelines** in a **framework** from the **Critical Appraisal Skills Programme** (CASP UK, 2018).

Figure 1. Flow diagram showing the process of identification, screening, and extracting of data from the obtained articles using PRISMA*

Identification

Records identified through database search.
(n = 147)

Records identified through other sources.
(n = 5)

Records after removal of duplicates
(n = 9)

Screening

Records screened for relevance.
(n = 143)

Records excluded.
(n = 132)

Eligibility

Studies assessed from reading Abstract.
(n = 11)

Excluded from reading Abstract.
(n = 5)

Included

Studies included in **narrative/qualitative synthesis.**
(n = 6)

Exclusions:
1. Not journal article
2. Study not for African region.
2 Not relevant to the study

PRISMA: Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

Table 1. Details of the second screen extraction process from full-text reviews

Extraction Type	Category	Definitions
Study information	Title, authors, publication year, journal, study type, country/region, sample size, industry of focus.	
Outcomes	Job satisfaction	Worker's contentedness with their job. Can be measured in cognitive, affective, or behavioural components.
	Work-life balance	Equilibrium between personal life and career work. How people manage time spent at and outside of work
	Work engagement	The harnessing of organisation member's selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally, and mentally during role performances.
	Organizational commitment	An employee's attachment to the organization. Includes affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment.
	Stress	State of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances
	Motivation	Set of internal and/or environmental forces that originate within individuals, and in their environment, to initiate work-related behaviours.

Table 2. Summary of articles by study characteristics

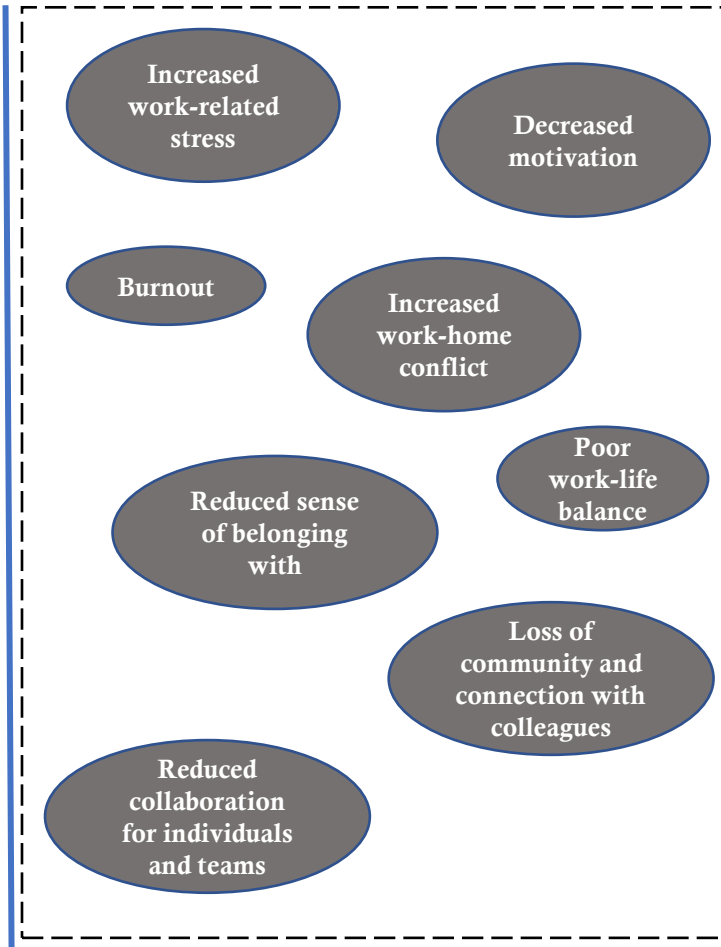| Study Design	No	Paper	Authors, Year	Sample Size	Study Focus	Measures
Survey	1.	Exploring employee well-being during the COVID-19 remote work: evidence from South Africa	Mahomed, Oba, & Sony, 2022	204	South Africa	Performance, work-life balance, work engagement, intensification, job satisfaction, organizational commitment
	2.	The changing work landscape as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic: insights from remote workers life situations in South Africa	Matli, 2020	24	South Africa	Productivity, cost saving, distractions, absenteeism/sick days, job satisfaction, stress, morale
	3.	Remote Working during the Covid-19 Global Pandemic and its Implications for Employee Motivation: Some Evidence from Nigeria through the Lens of Self-Determination Theory	Nwoko, & Yazdani, 2022	120	Nigeria	Productivity, performance, job satisfaction, motivation
	4.	The changing nature of traditional work settings and the emerging virtual work environments in Africa: the experience of Nigerian women	Imhanrenialena, Obi-anike, Okafor & Ike 2021	316 (women)	Nigeria	Performance, work-life balance, work engagement, intensification, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, morale
Literature Review	5.	Employee Engagement Outlooks in the Era of COVID-19: Implications for Human Resource Management	Eniola, 2022	63 studies	Africa	Productivity, cost saving, distractions, job satisfaction, stress, morale
	6.	COVID-19 and the World of Work Dynamics: A Critical Review	Agba, Ocheni, & Agba 2020	N/A	Africa, Arab States, Europe, Asia/Pacific	Performance, work-life balance, work engagement, intensification, job satisfaction, organizational commitment

Results

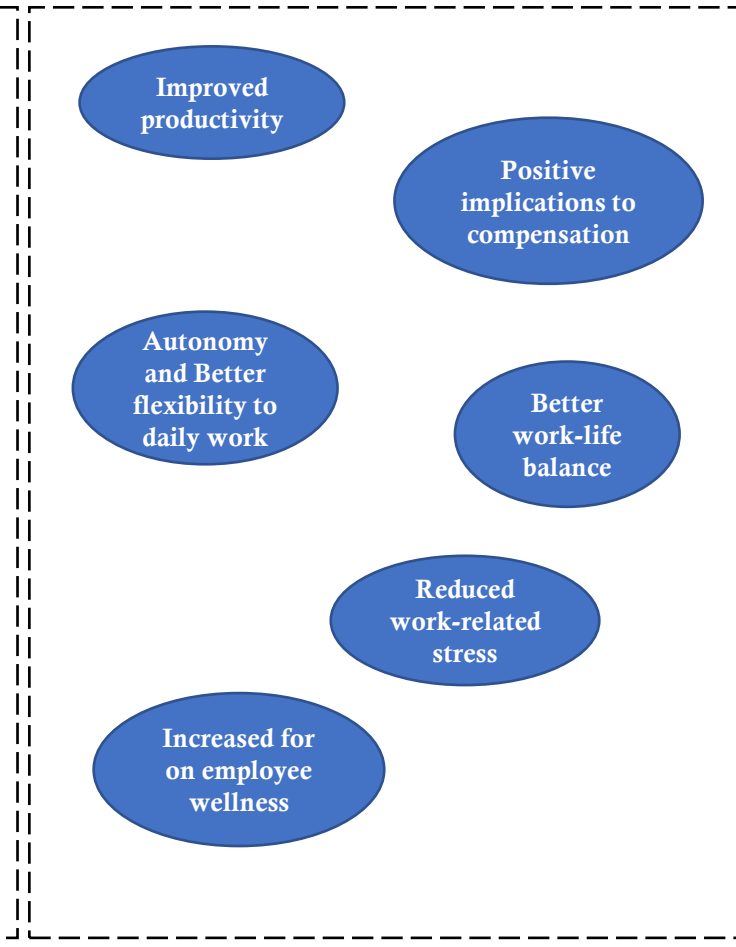| Study Design	Authors, Year	Sample Size	Country	Findings	
				Positive	**Negative**
Survey	Mahomed, Oba, & Sony, 2022	204	South Africa	Enabler of success outcomes in employee well-being include effective communication and support.	Increased work-home conflict, increased work demand and burden, reduced job satisfaction and increased burn out.
	Matli, 2020	24	South Africa	Increased cost saving for employees and employers, better work-life-balance, more productive workhours.	Increased staff personal costs, increased stress, increased disruption, increased workload and overburdened.
	Nwoko, & Yazdani, 2022	120	Nigeria	Increased motivation from support, job security, steady income and increased responsibility – decreased stress.	Work-home conflict, social isolation, and distraction were the limiting factor that resulted in decreased staff engagement and weakened motivation.
	Imhanrenialena, et al, 2021	316 (women)	Nigeria	Increased job satisfaction support.	Reduced motivation and job satisfaction where support was deemed inadequate
Literature Review	Eniola, 2022	63 studies	Africa	Support and resources related to increased work engagement and staff motivation.	Decline work-life balance. Motivation was reported to plumet with higher job demands than support.
	Agba, Ocheni, & Agba 2020	N/A	Africa, Arab States, Europe, Asia/Pacific	Cost saving for employers and employee, increased staff productivity, happier staff and less work-stress.	Social isolation, burnout, stress, low morale, decline in work-life balance

Results – contd.

Major Negative Outcomes
Perception of Support and Communication

Major Positive Outcomes
Perception of Support and Communication

Increased work-related stress

Decreased motivation

Burnout

Increased work-home conflict

Poor work-life balance

Reduced sense of belonging with

Loss of community and connection with colleagues

Reduced collaboration for individuals and teams

Improved productivity

Positive implications to compensation

Autonomy and Better flexibility to daily work

Better work-life balance

Reduced work-related stress

Increased for on employee wellness

Satisfaction with working arrangement

Discussion of Results

- The systematised review found that **virtual work** had both **positive** and **negative impacts** on **employee wellbeing**. This was **often associated** with the employee's **perception** of the **infrastructure** and **support** that underpin their remote work experience.

- The **positive impacts** include **increased flexibility, autonomy, job satisfaction and work-life balance** (Agba *et al.,* 2020; Mahomed *et al.,* 2022; Matli, 2020).

- The **negative impacts** include **social isolation, increased workload,** and **blurred boundaries between work and personal life** (Eniola, 2022; Mahomed *et al.,* 2022; Matli, 2020).

Discussion of Results – contd.

- The review found that **effective communication, provision of relevant resources** and **support** are the **determinants of positive employee wellness outcomes** (Nwoko & Yazdani, 2022; Mahomed *et al.,* 2022)

- The review also showed that **remote work holds cost-savings benefits** to both **employers** and **employees** but **creates a dynamic set of needs** that needs to be met to ensure **productivity** and **maximum engagement** (Agba *et al.,* 2020; Mahomed *et al.,* 2022; Eniola, 2022; Matli, 2020)

Conclusion

- Virtual work has the **potential for both positive** and **negative impacts** on **employee wellness**. The **positive impacts** include **increased job satisfaction, reduced commuting time,** and **improved work-life balance**. Among the **negative impacts** are **increased workload, social isolation,** and **blurred boundaries between work** and **personal life** (Agba *et al.,* 2020; Mahomed *et al.,* 2022; Eniola, 2022; Matli, 2020)

- Thus, there is a **need** for organisations **to implement strategies that promote employee wellbeing** in virtual work environments. Of particular importance is the **provision of social support**, which was found in this review to **mitigate the potential negative** impact of **work from home** arrangements on **employee well-being.**

Recommendations

- The review highlights that **AfCFTA has the potential to enhance the positive impact of virtual work on employee wellbeing**, but this **requires adequate infrastructure and policy support** to facilitate the growth of virtual work in African countries (Apiko *et al.,* 2020; Banga *et al.,* 2021).

- However, **adequate measures have to be taken to ensure employee wellbeing**, as **increased availability and competition** from workers across the continent, **who are able to work remotely**, can lead to **increased pressure and stress** in the workplace (Galanti *et al.,* 2021; Nwoko & Yazdani, 2022).

- There is a need for **policymakers to consider the impact of virtual work on employee wellbeing when implementing policies related to AfCFTA**

Further Studies

- There is a need for **further studies** on specific **policies and strategies** that can be implemented to **harness the positive impacts** of virtual work arrangements, and to **ameliorate the negative impacts on employee wellbeing** in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

- Future studies should **examine the role of technology and infrastructure in enabling virtual work** in African countries, and the **potential for remote work to contribute to the economic growth of African countries.**

Thank you

- Questions?

- Comments?

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