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The design of hybrid work for improved employee engagement and well-being: perspectives for HRD practice

Roopa Nagori†, Natalia Rocha Lawton

Coventry University

Abstract

Although hybrid work has increased and is here to stay, organizations are still experimenting with the design and the appropriate interventions required. Evidence is emerging that the well-being and employee engagement of staff has declined in hybrid work and it is necessary to understand this as a critical priority for HRD professionals. This study explores the key factors influencing the design of hybrid work for improved well-being and staff engagement through a systematic synthesis of the literature involving 78 empirical, conceptual or theoretical studies. The study identifies five distinct factors followed by key propositions for practice that offer recommendations around the following areas: A well-equipped space with appropriate workplace and time flexibility, culture and leadership development through communication and collaboration mechanisms, allocation of jobs, and tasks to prevent stress and the networks and tools to promote staff collaboration. Adequate training and interventions to avoid technostress and burnout due to digital workloads are essential for improved well-being. The article draws on international evidence to propose guidelines for designing hybrid work models. However, most evidence comes from the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. In the future, exploring other contexts and offering a more universal framework for hybrid work would be beneficial.

Keywords

hybrid working • employee engagement • wellbeing • flexible work

Introduction

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, as social distancing measures have been relaxed, the most common work arrangement for knowledge workers is now some form of 'Hybrid work' (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024) The shift in work patterns has posed practical challenges for companies' operations. Some workers are still working at their employer's office or client locations, while others have had the transition to remote work entirely(Wheatley et al., 2023).

Many larger organizations, particularly those with diverse functions, have had to address the task of integrating on-site, remote, and hybrid employee work patterns. These changes have presented challenges for people management, as there are issues related to professional isolation and the blurring of work-life boundaries. (Teng-Calleja et al., 2024; Wheatley et al., 2023).

The shift to hybrid work has led to a global debate between workers and employers, with individual workers expressing the need for flexibility and yet prominent employers remaining sceptical. While workers value working from home (WFH) a few days a week, employers still prefer them on the premises (Aksoy et al., 2022; Choudhury et al., 2022) Prominent business leaders, such as David Solomon at Goldman Sachs and Elon Musk at Tesla, have said publicly that they want workers back in the office five days a week and 40 hours a week, respectively (Choudhury et al., 2022). Politicians and business associations have noted that staff should gradually return to office working as a 'default'. Their perspectives arise from the need to support the economy and essential social and commercial activities, such as travel, hospitality, and other service industries. (Gifford, 2022; Nachmias et al., 2022). In summary, there is a notable divergence in perspectives between employers and employees regarding hybrid work arrangements. Employers often focus on productivity and the logistics of managing a diverse workforce, while employees tend to prioritize flexibility, work-life balance, and the benefits of remote collaboration. This contrast in views highlights the complexities of implementing effective hybrid work models.

†*Corresponding author: Roopa Nagori*

E-mail: Roopa.Nagori@coventry.ac.uk

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2022), a professional body for people management in the United Kingdom, believes that the pandemic has highlighted the benefits of remote work in enhancing employee well-being and work-life balance while maintaining productivity. Several authors (Deschênes, 2024; Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023; Plester & Lloyd, 2023; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024) have now argued that hybrid work has potential and to adopt it effectively, organizations must develop clear and effective strategies and policies to balance employee needs and business requirements. There is a clear opportunity to build on the lessons from the pandemic and create the conditions for hybrid work that make it more sustainable (Moglia et al., 2021; Rožman et al., 2021).

This has placed Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals at the centre of organizational design to develop a sustainable model for hybrid work. As highlighted by Pass and Ridgway (2022), it is vital to consider the impact of hybrid work on employee engagement and the role of HRD in ensuring employees and managers have the skills, knowledge and abilities to engage with organizations and teams.

Various authors (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023; Plester & Lloyd, 2023; Wheatley et al., 2023) highlight the need for organizations to manage work stress through well-being initiatives, especially in remote and hybrid work. Previous research (Bailey et al., 2017; Conway et al., 2016; Fürstenberg et al., 2020; Truss, et al., 2013b) highlights that HRD practices can significantly impact workplace relationships and influence employee outcomes, including dedication, productivity, innovative behaviour and engagement. Cooper and Lapierre (2023) believe that research is currently required on workplace interventions to increase work engagement and well-being in different job settings, including the provision of hybrid/flexible work. In addition, organizations need to be mindful of the digital divide and offer alternative means of communication, especially for employees with limited internet access or where technology skills are not as advanced. Digital poverty and lack of internet resources can indeed create significant disadvantages in a hybrid work environment (Jetha et al., 2023; Molala & Makhubele, 2021). The rise of hybrid work has profound implications for HRD professionals, particularly in people management capabilities, leadership development, communication and collaboration, productivity, and employee well-being (Arora & Suri, 2020; Gifford, 2022; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022).

As a result, HR practitioners are left with the following questions: What factors influence the design of hybrid work, and what processes and interventions are now required for improved employee engagement and well-being in hybrid work?

To address this research gap, this paper aims to explore the following key objectives: (1) To identify the opportunities and challenges in hybrid work (2) To analyse the factors influencing the design of hybrid work so employee engagement and well-being are improved (3) To offer propositions to Human Resource Development (HRD) and Organization Development (OD) for effective design of hybrid work.

These objectives address organization development needs in the current context to meet the needs for hybrid work practices. The article draws on international evidence to propose guidelines for designing hybrid work models, with most evidence from the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Method

To support the research, the authors identified 14 relevant articles on hybrid work and reviewed these papers to find existing concepts, theories, and frameworks. This helped clarify the research strategy and refine the keywords for the study (Bryman, 2015).

A systematic literature review was conducted using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) technique. The PRISMA technique is a review that uses explicit, systematic methods to collate and synthesize findings of studies that address a precisely formulated question (Prisma-statement.org, 2009). Charalampous et al. (2019) recommend this review as it is appropriate to systematically collate and then analyse all the evidence around the growing topic of hybrid work, which has a wide range of literature to explain the new working patterns. The researcher studied the approach of several experts (Bailey et al., 2017; Fletcher, 2019; Singh et al., 2023) who collected similar data and concluded that the PRISMA method would be appropriate here to ensure reliability and rigour while minimizing bias to produce high-quality research conclusions. A search strategy was created that started with scanning relevant databases that provided broad coverage of diverse studies pertinent to human resource development, organization behaviour and organizational psychology as organization development streams in the post-1990s, when flexible work started becoming popular. The keywords utilized were “Hybrid work”, “Hybrid work and Human Resource Development”, “Well-being and Hybrid Work”, “Well-being”, “Employee Engagement” and all similar and alternative terms. The databases scanned for relevant articles include ScienceDirect, Sage, Emerald, Business Source Complete and ProQuest, and these generated a first list of 680 relevant articles. These were then scanned using specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (Bryman,

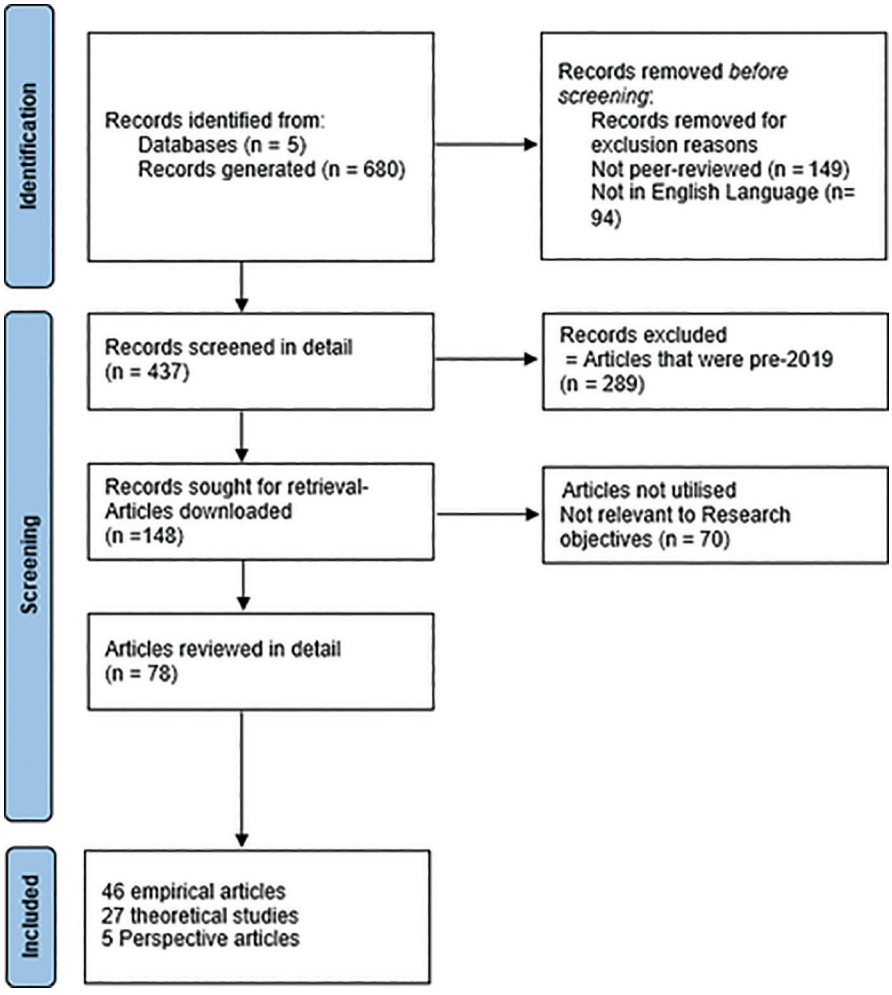

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram for the Literature Review Search.

2015; Cassell et al., 2018; Creswell, 2009). The first inclusion criteria used was that only peer-reviewed articles fully available online in English were considered, which narrowed the search to 437 initial articles.

Further, refining the inclusion criteria, articles that mentioned remote/hybrid work only post-2019 were included. This resulted in a list of 148 relevant articles in the English language being selected and the remaining 289 being excluded on grounds of time frame. The abstracts of these articles were reviewed once again for quality and relevance to the research objectives, and the articles that were not relevant to the purpose of the study and those that were not fully available online were excluded. Seventy articles were thus excluded based on relevance, quality, and availability criteria and seventy-eight articles were downloaded to be reviewed in detail.

To summarize, from the initial 437 articles that included empirical, conceptual, or theoretical studies, 78 relevant articles were identified, mostly from authors in the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union. Forty-six articles were empirical, twenty-seven were conceptual/theoretical, and five were Perspective articles. These were reviewed to uncover the manifestation of the design for hybrid work and the current state of well-being and employee engagement. Figure 1 below demonstrates the various stages of the literature review search.

Further, specific literature on Human Resource Development and other keywords was sourced from textbooks and reliable websites, mainly from professional bodies and associations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and Engage for Success (Macleod & Clarke, 2014). These online resources are valuable data mines for current research and practice in employee engagement and well-being. The researcher is aware of bias in practitioner sources, as those responsible for their

Table 1. Key Themes and Sub-Themes From Literature

Themes	Sub-themes	Evidence from Literature
Business environment and space	Sustainable policy and practice for hybrid work	Grzegorczyk et al. (2021); Nachmias et al. (2022); Saks (2022)
	Work and time flexibility	Choudhary et al. (2022); Delany (2022); Felstead and Henseke (2017); Gifford (2022); Galanxhi and Nah (2021); Moglia et al. (2021)
	Professional isolation and work support	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development(2022); Felstead and Henseke (2017); Gifford (2022); Nachmias et al. (2022)
	Positive social and physical environment Work environment	Guest (2017); Grzegorczyk et al. (2021); Saks (2022); Nachmias et al. (2022)
Culture and leadership	Perceived organizational support Perceived managerial support	Bakker and Demerouti (2017); De-La-Calle-Durán and Rodríguez-Sánchez (2021); Pass and Ridgway (2022); Robertson & Cooper (2011); Saks (2006)
	Caring human resources management Career development and learning Performance management	Charalampous et al. (2019); Gifford (2022); Nachmias et al. (2022); Saks (2022)
	Employee voice, autonomy Leader-member exchange Training and development Career development Investing in employees Health and wellness programmes	Choudhary et al. (2022); Delany (2022); De-La-Calle-Durán and Rodríguez-Sánchez (2021); Gifford (2022); Saks (2022)
Allocation of tasks	Job design Work-life balance Work intensification and burnout Hybrid work and inclusion	Felstead and Henseke (2017); Gifford (2022); Guest (2017); Saks (2022); Bakker and Demerouti (2017)
	Flexibility and inclusivity Enhancing resilience Employee autonomy	Delany (2022); Guest (2017); Pass and Ridgway (2022); Saks (2022)
Network and digital tools	Collaboration and teamworking Communication and networking Technostress Technology training	Choudhury et al. (2022); Grzegorczyk et al. (2021); Moglia et al (2021); Nachmias et al. (2022)
Wellbeing in hybrid work	Psychological wellbeing Financial wellbeing Digital wellbeing Burnout in flexible /remote work Stress Professional isolation Technology and tools Technostress Work engagement as the opposite of burnout	Bakker and Demerouti (2017); Cecchinato et al. (2019); CIPD (2022); Charalampous et al. (2019); Galanxhi and Nah (2021); Guest (2017); Gifford (2022); Nachmias et al. (2022); Monge Roffarello and De Russis (2019); Prasad et al. (2020); Robertson & Cooper(2011)
	Investing in employees, training Positive social and physical environment Employee voice Organizational support Work-life balance	Delany (2022); Guest (2017); Nachmias et al. (2022); Saks (2022)

compilation may have reasons for wishing to present a more optimistic or pessimistic set of results. Hence, the authors ensured that the data was cross-referenced with current literature sources to confirm the information's validity for the specific research objectives.

To present the key findings, the researcher utilized the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017), which helped analyse patterns and classify the relevant information under common themes. In the table below, the researcher summarizes the main findings and then identifies the significant thematic findings in the literature review.

Findings

Hybrid Working – An Emerging Framework for Flexible Working

A hybrid form of work is now stabilizing and the combination depends on the requirements of various businesses. Some may require the physical presence of staff every day, while others may ask staff to be virtually present (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024). Gifford (2022) predicted that employee expectations will drive employers to offer more hybrid work arrangements in the long term. This trend has

now affected professional and managerial positions and junior roles differently, with fewer opportunities to work in a hybrid manner available to roles such as call centre assistants and frontline staff. This has the potential to create inequalities in the workplace that need to be addressed urgently (Wheatley et al., 2023).

Employee Engagement in Hybrid Work

Employee engagement is of great interest to industry as it explores the dynamics of the employee-employer equation (Saks & Gruman 2014; Gifford & Young 2021; Sun & Bunchapattanasakda 2019). It mediates the relationship between employment conditions that affect individual and organizational outcomes through better job satisfaction and commitment (Alfes et al., 2010; Truss et al., 2013a; Truss et al., 2013b).

The term employee engagement has been interpreted in many ways. The term was introduced by Kahn (1990) as a needs-satisfying approach to the extent of physical, cognitive, and emotional presence displayed by people at work. Maslach et al., (2001, p. 417) define it as "A persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment in employees characterized by high levels of activation and pleasure". This approach belongs to the burnout-antithesis approach. Another approach presented by Schaufeli et al. (2002, p. 74), also belonging to the burnout-antithesis approach, states that engagement is "A positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption". Currently, the most widely used frameworks to measure employee engagement are the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), the Saks framework for antecedents and consequences, and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. The UWES or Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, proposed by Schaufeli et al. (2006) highlight that engagement has three facets:

1. Vigour or work-related energy, mental resilience;
2. Dedication — feeling work has significance, having pride in work; and
3. Absorption in the task — the extent to which employees fully focus on their work.

Saks (2006) explains that engagement mediates the relationships between the antecedents of engagement (Perceived Organization Support, Perceived Manager Support, and Job Characteristics) and consequences of engagement (Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour). The job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli, 2017) is a key framework that highlights the significance of job resources in countering stress due to job demands and influencing work engagement (Cooper & Lapierre, 2023). Especially in hybrid work, the JD-R model can be applied to provide employees with the appropriate job resources, such as personal and professional growth, through relevant learning and development and well-being interventions. These job resources are even more relevant for hybrid work, especially when job demands are higher, such as work intensification, blurring of work-life boundaries, role conflicts, and professional isolation (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024). To overcome these, interventions involving collaboration and communication can be especially helpful in hybrid work.

Well-Being in Hybrid Work

Well-being is a broad-ranging concept affected complexly by the person's physical health, psychological state, personal beliefs, social relationships and their relationship to salient features of their environment (WHO & The World Bank, 2017; World Health Organisation, 2019). As defined by (Charalampous et al., 2019), workplace or organizational well-being is "the overall quality of an employee's experience and functioning at work". The concept of well-being is highly complex, and to move closer to a new definition, Dodge et al. (2012) propose that well-being is the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced. Charalampous et al. (2019) define the five dimensions of well-being at work: affective, cognitive, social, professional, and psychosomatic and the long-term well-being of employees is influenced by all five dimensions (Martínez, 2021). Well-being has been discussed extensively in recent research as evidence (Braithwaite et al., 2023; Di Fabio & Cooper, 2023; Hesketh & Cooper, 2023) has revealed that physical and mental illness leads to absenteeism and loss in productivity, eroding the overall profits attained in a year. Another well-being framework suggested by Robertson and Cooper (2011), considers workplace factors such as resources and communication, control and autonomy, work-life balance, job security and change, work relationships and conditions that influence psychological well-being and organizational and individual outcomes. However, there are new aspects, such as digital skills and digital well-being(Cecchinato et al., 2019; Galanxhi & Nah, 2021; Monge et al, 2019). The well-being frameworks above have not considered these and HRD professionals must design specific strategies to overcome technostress and professional isolation, especially for hybrid work. To summarize, there is a specific need for more research and information on managing digital overload and developing inclusive hybrid careers.

Opportunities and Challenges in Hybrid Work

Although remote work has been relatively common among knowledge workers, the COVID-19 pandemic saw a big move to adopting flexible work overnight. This resulted in several benefits to employers and employees, such as better work-life balance, reduced commuting time, improved focus on health and wellbeing, and fewer office space requirements (Arora & Suri, 2020); Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020).

The last few years have demonstrated that workers with suitable jobs can operate virtually or away from the physical office with few negative implications for their productivity or performance (Aldoghan et al., 2021; Grzegorczyk et al., 2021). In hybrid work, individuals have better control over their space and time of work; they can balance their professional and personal lives (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021). Flexible working offers improved work-life balance resulting in increased employee engagement and productivity (Jiang et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2019). This results in a caring environment, improving employee experience, reducing employee turnover, and positively impacting employee retention (Saks, 2022).

Although scholars (Li & Li, 2023; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022) have highlighted the benefits of the transition to flexible working, there are also associated challenges. There are difficulties in disconnecting from work demands, separating work and private life, and even other psychosocial risks, such as isolation, which may lead to lower work engagement and productivity (De-La-calle-durán & Rodríguez-Sánchez 2021). Various researchers (Delany 2022; Pass & and Ridgway, 2022; Rožman et al., 2021) think that currently, in the work environment, levels of stress and anxiety are rising as a growing number of employees are experiencing mental health issues, influencing their productivity and satisfaction in the workplace (Johnson et al., 2020; Thomson, 2021).

According to Pass & Ridgway (2022) employee engagement dropped by 11% during the pandemic and only a partial recovery of +3% post-pandemic. Engagement is now rated lower than before the pandemic (-8%). The decrease in engagement was less severe for organizations implementing appropriate HRD practices such as employee involvement, learning and development opportunities, effective communication and collaboration practices, as well as online health and well-being initiatives. The most common cause of stress at work today is workload, which results in an imbalance in work-life balance. The other two factors featured at the top were inadequate support from management and health issues due to COVID-19 (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2022). These factors that cause stress and burnout must be addressed to improve staff wellbeing in hybrid and remote work (Gifford, 2022; Grzegorczyk et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2019).

These challenges were further confirmed by Shirmohammadi et al. (2022), who found four themes that were causing a mismatch between desirable expectations and the undesirable realities of remote work: (1) flexitime vs work intensity, (2) flexplace vs. space limitation, (3) technologically feasible work arrangement vs. technostress and isolation, and (4) family-friendly work arrangement vs. housework and care intensity. As a result of these challenges, the mental health and wellness of employees have assumed great significance in remote and hybrid work (Möhring et al., 2020; Prasad et al., 2020; Smith & Ulus, 2020).

HRD practitioners can play an essential role in helping employees overcome these obstacles by introducing the right interventions and development methods. These were the main findings from this study, which investigated the factors that influence the design of hybrid work for improved employee engagement and well-being.

Discussion

This section discusses the factors or key themes that have emerged from the literature review and transits to the propositions for HRD practitioners to design engaging hybrid work in healthy work environments.

Table 2 below presents the key themes identified from the literature that have the biggest impact on employee well-being and engagement in hybrid work.

Based on the frequencies of the sub-themes identified in the literature, it is evident that currently some factors are more impactful for the design of hybrid work and the ranking of these factors is presented below:

1. Well-being interventions in hybrid work
2. Allocation of jobs and tasks in hybrid work
3. Space or business environment of hybrid work
4. Culture and leadership in hybrid work
5. Network and digital tools used for hybrid work

This section analyses each theme in detail to discuss how these factors can influence the design of hybrid work to sustain staff engagement and well-being.

Space or Business Environment

This refers to the place and timing of work. Employees must have suitable space and time flexibility, appropriate ergonomics, comfortable and well-equipped work environment, and access to information and job resources to work efficiently from home or at work premises. Flexible work arrangements have positively impacted employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and work-life balance (Waddell & Burton, 2006; Warr & Nielsen, 2018). Allowing employees

Table 2. Frequency and Impact of Factors Influencing the Design of Hybrid Work

Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency/Impact of sub-themes	Overall Ranking of Theme
Space and business Environment	Sustainable policy and practice for hybrid work	Low	3
	Work and time flexibility	High	
	Professional isolation and work support	Medium	
	Positive social and physical environment Work environment	Medium High	
Culture and leadership	Perceived organizational support, Perceived managerial support	High	4
	Caring human resources management, Career development and learning	Medium	
	Employee voice, autonomy Training and development Career development Investing in employees Health and wellness programmes	High Medium High Medium High	
Allocation of tasks	Job design Work-life balance Work intensification and burnout	High High Medium	2
	Flexibility and inclusivity Enhancing resilience Employee autonomy	Medium Medium High	
Network and digital tools	Collaboration and teamworking Communication and networking Technostress Technology training	High High Medium Low	5
Well-being interventions in hybrid work	Psychological wellbeing Financial wellbeing Digital wellbeing Burnout in flexible /remote work Professional isolation Technostress	High Medium High High High High	1
	Investing in employees, training Positive social and physical environment Employee voice Organizational support Work-life balance	Medium Medium High High High	

to decide and have some control over their working times can significantly impact their stress levels and prevent burnout, improving the overall health and productivity of the workforce. Giving this option of greater flexibility in schedules results in better employee retention and an improved attraction of talent (Choudhury et al., 2022). Organizations are now implementing strategies where a typical day is designated for the team to come together in the workplace while allowing employees the flexibility to choose their other on-site workdays (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). Giving this time and space flexibility demonstrates the company's commitment to employee well-being and investment in diverse employee needs (Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020; Nachmias et al., 2022).

Culture and Leadership

This refers to the trust, inclusion, fairness, and support from management that employees experience in hybrid work. Developing a culture of trust and inclusion in a hybrid organization is a key area for HRD professionals to develop. One way that HRD professionals could promote this is through appropriate leadership and management development opportunities (Costanza et al., 2016; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024).

Culture and leadership development is crucial as these are the key drivers of well-being and employee engagement. There is no point in having a great programme or strategy if culture is not driving it and leaders are not fully involved. Well-being is no longer optional or a narrowly focused element of the employer brand, and it must be the focus as a business imperative. Given the above evidence of the business benefits of hybrid work, HRD professionals need to request budgets to improve their leadership skills so the appropriate culture for hybrid work is created and sustained.

Allocation of Jobs and Tasks

This refers to job design, task allocation and team members' schedule coordination. Hybrid work is here to stay (Nachmias et al., 2022) and will become the new working norm.

Allocation of roles and collaboration of tasks in a flexible, hybrid environment must be clearly defined. The potential for individual flexibility should be assessed but not at the cost of collective operations; teams need to work out how tasks and working days can be divided so the business needs are met and individual flexibility is accommodated where possible. HRD interventions that promote participation/employee voice and well-being must be carefully designed. For businesses, in general, with the right conditions, matching increased supply and increased demand for flexible jobs can lead to a new economic equilibrium in which general welfare is higher (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021).

Organizations need to closely monitor the increase in working hours and stress levels among hybrid staff. They must engage with employees, communicate effectively, and foster a growth culture that supports hybrid workers. Additionally, a robust digital infrastructure is essential to facilitate work-from-home arrangements. HR professionals should equip managers with the tools to understand the varying needs for work-time flexibility among staff and provide balanced and sustainable solutions.

Network and Tools

This refers to collaboration tools for online engagement. Digital tools help create a digital office environment where communication, collaboration, productivity, and learning are essential. It is crucial to train individuals and managers to learn emerging technologies, use them to improve teamwork and manage the workload and digital stress created by these tools. Literature is pointing toward equipping the hybrid worker and their managers with the skills and capabilities to deal with the new style of working, especially new technologies emerging for hybrid work. Consequently, as automation and digitization increase (Donnelly & Johns, 2020), so has the need for HRD professionals to provide employees with the skills and knowledge to manage new technologies and adjust to new ways of working.

HRD professionals must engage employees to become more agile and adaptive through personal development (Fletcher, 2019; Pass & Ridgway, 2022). In the hybrid model, with workers switching between on-site and remote presence, the correct digital infrastructure can help reduce the boundaries between the physical office and the virtual office (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021). It is essential that managers are equipped to identify the right digital collaboration tools for their teams and are provided with a set of rules for engagement so that individual and team communication and productivity improve.

Digital Well-Being and Technostress in Hybrid Work

When remote working becomes excessive, occupational health and safety may suffer and high levels of work intensification and professional isolation may result. The drawbacks of work-from-home practices include the tendency of employees to work for longer working hours, blurring work-life boundaries and higher workloads (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022).

Technology in remote work may influence digital well-being (Monge et al., 2021). It is important to ensure that the digital transformation does not come at the cost of staff well-being, addressing any technostress or technology overload caused by hybrid work (Gifford, 2022). This requires appropriate interventions by organizations and HRD professionals so managers and employees are equipped with the necessary tools and skills to effectively learn and manage technology for hybrid work (Witte et al., 2021).

These are some themes that are currently influencing the need for careful design of HRD processes as key drivers to improving engagement and well-being in hybrid work (Delany, 2022; Pass & Ridgway, 2022; Singh et al., 2023). To address the need for sustainable hybrid work, this paper proposes recommendations for HRD professionals around these key themes.

Practical Implications and Propositions for HRD Professionals

Holland (2019) believes that emerging technologies and globalization challenge our current ways of thinking and working, making the workplace more dynamic, complicated, and volatile. The HRD practitioner's role is to design sustainable hybrid work, working with employees and employers towards building the required systems and capabilities. The suggestions in this paper build on the previously published research in the HRD community that encourages practitioners to acknowledge the complexity of individual needs and situations in hybrid work (Gifford, 2022; Nachmias et al., 2022; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024). The need of the hour is to develop an inclusive and supportive culture that considers personalized solutions to build sustainable and healthy workplaces (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Employee mental health and well-being need to become a critical pillar in the organization's strategy; it's no longer a secondary issue. HRD can be central to this strategic change, helping organizations grow, progress, and succeed. Having a formal strategy helps employers in several ways, it helps to audit the support the organization currently offers; it identifies areas that need improvement, and it helps everyone in the business understand the approach and mission of improving employee engagement and well-being in hybrid work.

Included below are five propositions for practice, that HRD practitioners and Organization Development specialists can consider in designing more sustainable hybrid work.

P1: Provide ongoing support with the space and work hours in hybrid work
P2: Focus on culture and leadership development to improve trust and inclusion
P3: Allocate jobs and tasks to suit the new hybrid environment
P4: Provide the right collaboration tools and propose healthy rules of communication
P5: Design individual flexibility and support mechanisms for the well-being of the hybrid worker

These five propositions are now explained in detail

P1: Provide ongoing support with the space and work hours in hybrid work

In a hybrid model, workers can work remotely for a proportion of their contracted working hours within the limits of individually or collectively negotiated work arrangements (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024). Workspace and worktime flexibility must be clarified here to ensure the remote space is safe and healthy (De-La-calle-durán & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021). As highlighted by Rasool et al. (2021), the design of space must provide adequate opportunities for work-life balance and ensure that boundaries between work and personal time are respected.

Furthermore, in a hybrid world of work, it is important to clarify the equal opportunities for homeworkers and on-site workers, and equality of access to all employees, irrespective of the proportion of remote work undertaken (Gifford, 2022; Wheatley et al., 2023). Communication of career opportunities and opportunities to collaborate and network with colleagues must be planned carefully to close any gaps.

It is recommended that employees are consulted through collaboration when designing hybrid working practices. HR professionals need to develop clear and transparent policies explaining who is eligible and provide access and training for hybrid working to all employees equally. In addition, clear systems to guide and monitor decision-making for space and time flexibility must be communicated to all staff. It is essential to prioritize training in well-being and engagement for all individuals who hold leadership responsibilities. This focus is particularly necessary for the current environment. This encompasses line managers, departmental heads, and individuals at the board level, as well as budget decision-makers, as they have the potential to serve as advocates for employee well-being.

P2: Focus on culture and leadership development to improve trust and inclusion

Workplace culture and collaboration are influenced by leadership practices and interactions with teams. Leaders and managers have voiced concerns about the inconsistency in building work relationships in a virtual environment. Therefore, there is a need to foster a culture of effective online communication that encourages greater innovation. (Nachmias et al., 2022). HRD professionals must initiate open, honest conversations about the expectations of flexible work with employees, so organizations develop a culture of trust and inclusion (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Sustaining a motivated, high-performing workforce requires employers to look beyond apps and programs, especially isolated initiatives, to holistic, integrated programmes. Organizations must consider making well-being a part of their corporate strategy, incorporating them into their cultural fabric. Culture is the facilitator, and without it, employers cannot deliver the strategy (Robertson & Cooper, 2011)). The two critical elements of culture here are – the organization's culture, going beyond the cognitive (mission, vision, values) and moving through the emotional (psychological safety) as well as functional (decision-making) culture of the organization, as well as the holistic employee experience, taking into consideration the wants and needs of the workforce.

A key contributor can be the continuous learning and development of managers and leaders. The development of management and leadership practices in the past may not have adequately addressed the complexities of hybrid work environments. Consequently, learning and development initiatives must be restructured to effectively facilitate a successful and sustainable transition to hybrid work(Delany, 2022). The success of flexible work practices is not only linked to leadership development but also the ability of employees to adapt to and learn new working formats (Pass & Ridgway, 2022) and to change behaviours and attitudes to embrace a new collaborative and connected hybrid workplace. As communication through electronic media reduces the social cues that help build relationships, employers may also still see a benefit in regularly bringing together their employees in a shared space or base to ensure that team building, knowledge exchange, and corporate culture thrive. In a hybrid work environment, organizations must devise strategies to cultivate a stronger connection between employees and the organization's culture, mission, and values. In sum, if culture and leadership are inspiring, this, in turn, would result in engaged employees who demonstrate high levels of positive drive and energy and feel challenged to continuously develop the required job skills (Cooper & Lapierre, 2023). In a hybrid work environment, engaged employees will continue to invest significantly in their work despite the increasing work intensification, driven by their perceptions of a supportive culture of well-being from leadership.

P3: Allocate jobs and tasks to suit the new hybrid environment

One crucial aspect of hybrid working is the configuration of people and their tasks within specific timeframes and taking account of different locations (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021). HRD practitioners can use various mechanisms to ensure hybrid workers know how jobs and tasks are allocated. As such, HRD professionals need to assess the potential for individual flexibility while coordinating for optimal collective flexibility, establishing a regulatory framework for the allocation and co-ordination of roles. Hence, developing the manager's capability to coach and support staff working virtually is a key area of consideration here (Delany, 2022; Gifford, 2022). Other aspects that need to be considered are training for the entire team, setting targets, breaking processes down to understand the collaboration required, and coordinating for optimal flexibility (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021). Offering training and development programmes is the first step towards investing in personal growth and human capital management. Conducting a skills assessment for each employee and offering customized training programmes for hybrid work can help employees develop the required skills, enhancing their job performance and increasing their engagement (Saks, 2022).

In addition, HRD professionals can provide the required task and social support – two factors that play a key role in employee work-life balance (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022).Task support could be reinforced by sharing information among teams in a timely manner, offering relevant job aids and resources, and enabling hybrid workers to complete their tasks individually or in collaboration with colleagues. HR professionals should also set up mechanisms to provide social support to hybrid workers (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2022), ensuring that they can contact the right person virtually when required or receive timely social support from trained staff (Carver et al., 2022). Further, as highlighted by De Witte et al. (2021) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2022), HRD professionals must design training for line managers to manage flexible and hybrid teams effectively so they can seamlessly carry out the HRM practices of performance management, communication, employee development and progression in the hybrid work environment.

To summarize, organizations can improve engagement and well-being in hybrid work using a number of training mechanisms, action learning events and development planning (Pass & Ridgway, 2022). The training programme should focus on the strategies for hybrid work that can enhance understanding of the challenges and opportunities of hybrid work. It should also include a social support component to promote mental well-being. Encouraging goal setting is essential, such as creating a professional development plan. This allows employees to expand their knowledge in their areas of interest and set their own goals, promoting autonomy and a sense of control in their hybrid roles.

P4: Provide the right collaboration tools and propose healthy rules of communication

HRD professionals may encourage employers to allocate a budget to support hybrid workers and provide them with appropriate collaboration and networking tools to smooth the transition to hybrid work. For hybrid work, in particular, development strategies should focus on professional and technical competencies as well as digital dexterity (Delany, 2022) based on the role of the employee.

Digital tools help create a digital office environment where communication, collaboration, productivity, and learning are vital. With employees switching between remote and on-site presence in hybrid work, this digital landscape can be crucial in reducing the barriers of distance (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021). HRD professionals have two critical tasks here: Providing the right digital collaboration tools and setting the rules for engagement.

Providing the right assortment of tools: Collaboration tools such as online forums, community chats, and document storage are essential for smoothly blending physical and remote work. During the pandemic in 2020, organizations hurried the adoption of these technologies, however, now a careful assessment is required (Passey, 2021; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024; Widdicks, 2020). Managers should be aware that these tools in excess, are a source of collaboration stress and they should be careful not to overload employees with too many different applications.

Setting healthy ground rules for engagement: In addition to selecting the right mix of collaboration networks and tools, managers must also clarify the expectations regarding the contributions expected for each tool. (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021; PWC, 2021), the frequencies and the timings of contributing, both for synchronous and asynchronous collaboration. Excessive contribution using online tools can lead to 'technostress.' (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2022; De Witte et al., 2021). An example of technostress is increased videoconferencing, which led to a widely reported 'Zoom fatigue' during the pandemic (Fauville et al., 2021). To counter this, well-being experts suggest micro-breaks between online meetings to allow for a break to transition to another meeting (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021; Passey, 2021).

In addition, organizations need to be mindful of the digital divide and offer alternative means of communication, especially for employees with limited internet access or where technology skills are not as advanced. Digital poverty and lack of internet resources can indeed create significant disadvantages in a hybrid work environment such as: Slower communication and file sharing, limited access to information and collaboration

tools, difficulty participating in video meetings, exclusion from impromptu digital conversations or brainstorming sessions(Molala & Makhubele, 2021). In these situations, the organization should provide alternative communication channels (Jetha et al., 2023; Molala & Makhubele, 2021) such as asynchronous forums and company-sponsored internet access such as mobile hotspots or data plans for employees without reliable home internet.

Communication tools are essential when it comes to keeping workers invested in their work (Rožman et al., 2021). An organization can boost employee engagement with the help of an adequate and well-planned communication strategy using the right tools. Further, the formation and promotion of a more comprehensive support network for the younger and less experienced hybrid worker could be a talent management initiative, especially to compensate for the loss of informal learning (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024.). Organizations that offer ongoing support for hybrid work by providing the necessary tools and resources can improve the work environment at various levels:

a) Task - through allocation, autonomy, and training.
b) Interpersonal - by fostering social relationships, communication, and collaboration.
c) Organizational culture and leadership - especially during turbulence and change. Such support will be crucial for thriving in the new hybrid work environment.

P5: Design individual flexibility and support mechanisms for the well-being of the hybrid worker

Although organizations emphasize the importance of engagement and well-being, there are vast differences in how they support well-being, especially in hybrid work and in integrating it into their larger organizational strategy and culture (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024). Today's key role for the HRD professional is to develop employees and teams in hybrid work to improve engagement and productivity. With more authority over their work schedules and the freedom of flexible working, employees can reduce their commuting time and have more time to dedicate to their health and well-being.

Based on current research (Innstrand et al., 2022; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024), flexible working is challenging due to the different perspectives of some employees and managers. Some employees prefer traditional working routines, while others prefer more flexible approaches. This results in varying perspectives, and clear policies are now required to guide managers on the support that can be offered to different individuals, personalized to their needs and preferences.

In addition, investment is needed to make workplaces more suitable for hybrid working (Teng-Calleja et al., 2024). It involves designing environments that promote employee well-being and providing the necessary resources (Wheatley et al., 2023), including training on how to manage all the new technology to enable remote work so that digital well-being (Roffarello & De Russis, 2023) is managed appropriately.

Conclusion

In summary, the researcher offers five recommendations for designing hybrid work based on key themes identified in this study, which have practical implications for HRM practitioners. The key factors influencing employee engagement and well-being in hybrid work are a well-equipped and suitable space with appropriate workplace and time flexibility. Culture and leadership, along with communication and collaboration mechanisms, provide opportunities for staff to connect virtually or meet in person at the workplace. Allocation of job roles and tasks is equally important to assess the potential for individual flexibility while coordinating for optimal collective flexibility, as is managing technostress and digital well-being. There is a need to manage the network, tools that help this collaboration, and the proper training and interventions to sustain well-being.

Human Resource Development professionals must institutionalize the policies and initiatives that create the right work environment and culture for hybrid work that improves well-being (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023; Moglia et al., 2021; Wheatley et al., 2023). This will support employees' development and growth through positive and healthy interventions and continuous development of their skills and capabilities (Deschênes, 2024; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024).

A few high-impact practices that could improve well-being in hybrid work include providing resources to help people make sense of this change in work and manage the impact outside the work domain, such as work-life conflict. Training in new technology, organized in advance and available on demand, would help employees deal with technostress (Roffarello & De Russis, 2023; Sani et al., 2023). Creating regular and structured check-ins between employees and managers allows for mutual decision-making on prioritizing work and time (CIPD, 2021; Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). Providing several communication technology options besides e-mail (Gifford, 2022), such as video conferencing and asynchronous forums, can prevent social isolation. However, organizations need to be mindful here of the digital divide and offer alternative means of communication, especially for employees in locations with limited internet access or where technology skills are not as advanced (Jetha et al., 2023; Molala & Makhubele, 2021). Additional initiatives could be introduced, such as work-life balance programmes that are designed to help employees balance

the demands of their work and family life to minimize and manage work-life conflict (Krajčík et al., 2023; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024; Wheatley et al., 2023), ensuring that boundaries between work time and personal time are respected. To design an appropriate well-being strategy, more employers should consider work-life well-being as core to their broader well-being strategy. HRD professionals can play a valuable role here by improving managers' capability to support team members in improving productivity in hybrid work so employees are clear about the performance expectations, as this is mainly output-based in hybrid work (Teng-Calleja et al., 2024).

Hybrid working is here to stay, and organizations should introduce flexible work arrangements, allowing employees to choose their work hours within certain limits or work remotely if their role allows it (Wheatley et al., 2023). These working patterns should then be designed to improve work-life balance, reduce stress and technology overload, and result in better employee well-being and more sustainable HRD practices, especially for digital well-being and productivity (Cooper & Lapierre, 2023; Di Fabio & Cooper, 2023; Hesketh & Cooper, 2023). To be adaptable, agile, and productive, a hybrid workplace should create an environment where employee experience and well-being are prioritized.

Limitations of the Study

While the article highlights the study's relevance and practical application, some limitations need clarification. A critical limitation of the study is that focusing on only secondary data means there is still much to be discovered on this topic. Conducting additional interviews or employing additional data collection techniques could have resulted in a deeper understanding of the topic. Further, the researcher restricted the search to items published only in the Western context, so it may not have captured all studies related to hybrid work design from various contexts. This decision was taken for practical reasons, so the number of items to be evaluated would have been manageable. However, there is scope for future studies to evaluate other contexts.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the design of hybrid work for global HRD practitioners. Future research that encompasses a wider array of factors, validated through empirical studies, has the potential to establish a comprehensive framework for practice. This, in turn, could significantly enhance our understanding of this dynamic field.

Directions for Future Research

In summary, HRD practitioners can use this knowledge in organizational development and leadership solutions to engage the workforce in hybrid work (Nachmias et al., 2022). Employee voice, culture, and inclusion are central to the design of hybrid work, and more research can focus on these areas. Although this article cites international evidence to offer propositions for the design of hybrid work, most of the evidence is from the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. Thus, exploring and comparing other contexts may be future areas of study.

Future research avenues should explore the development of a successful hybrid work model that necessitates the establishment of a clearly defined contractual category of employment known as the hybrid work contract. This represents a significant area for further investigation. The framework for hybrid work could benefit from further investigation into several key areas: the working environment, job allocation, available networks and tools, organizational culture, and leadership styles. Conducting specific empirical research in these areas could help identify which factors have the most significant impact on the sustainable development of hybrid work across various contexts. According to Cooper and Lapierre (2023), additional research is needed to develop workplace frameworks aimed at enhancing work engagement at various levels and examining its impact on organizational well-being. Another important area to address is the need for improved post-pandemic employee engagement and well-being, which fosters a caring work environment and decent work conditions (Saks, 2022; Teng-Calleja et al., 2024). Focus on developing technologies and tools for hybrid work can enhance accessibility for everyone, regardless of their location or schedule (Di Fabio & Cooper, 2023; Grzegorczyk et al., 2021). A crucial area that requires more focus is the engagement and collaboration within virtual teams, enhancing the coordination of work schedules to boost communication and efficiency (Pass & Ridgway, 2022). In addition, there is a need to investigate and produce evidence for how digital work influences health and well-being, as 'technostress' and the influence of hybrid work on workload and work-life boundaries becomes a huge consideration for sustainable HRD practices(Jetha et al., 2023; Molala & Makhubele, 2021). More empirical evidence is needed to update and expand on the above-mentioned research areas so that HRD interventions can be evidence-based and impactful.

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About the Authors

Roopa Nagori

Roopa Nagori is an experienced human resource management and education professional. She currently serves as the Course Director for the MBA in International Human Resource Management and is a Senior Lecturer at Coventry University London. In this role, she leads course and module teams, planning and delivering HRM and professional skills courses to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Prior to her position at Coventry University, Roopa worked as a self-employed consultant with DICE Consultancy from 2009 to 2014. During this time, she collaborated with various organisations, including Catalyst Consultancy Ltd and the Open University. She designed and delivered business and management qualifications across multiple sectors, including NHS trusts and higher education institutions. Her work also involved lecturing in HRM and General Management modules, utilising e-learning tools and engaging diverse audiences through innovative teaching methods. From 2001 to 2005, Roopa served as an HR Consultant with the Productivity Standards Board in Singapore. She designed and delivered training programs to help organisations achieve prestigious certifications, such as the 'People Developer' and 'Singapore Quality Class' awards. As a project leader, she successfully guided over 50 organisations through restructuring processes to align them with international standards, including the UK's 'Investors in People' award. Roopa's extensive expertise in HR consulting and academic leadership, along with her experience in various international contexts, highlights her ability to combine theoretical knowledge with practical application, fostering growth and quality improvement in both public and private sector organisations.

Dr. Natalia Rocha Lawton

Natalia Rocha Lawton is an Assistant Professor at Coventry University. She holds a PhD in Sociology of Work from the University of Warwick. Prior to joining academia, she worked at the Secretariat of Energy for the Mexican Government. Her research has focused on the social implications of economic deregulation of the energy sector on employment relations, employee participation, gender and diversity. She has been a co-investigator on a research project on gender and development of entrepreneurial skills and economic inequality as well as Policy Associate for the Energy Policy Fellowships, Horizon 2020, European Union. She has been a stream convenor at the Gender Work and Organisation Conference on topics of employment relations, international HRM and intersectionality in the energy sector. She has been guest editor for books, journals and author for Palgrave Macmillan, SAGE, Routledge and Cambridge University Press.