

Hybrid Working and Work-Life Balance: A Qualitative Study

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> Introduction

Hybrid working has emerged as one of the most significant changes in the modern workplace, combining remote work with traditional office-based work. Initially adopted as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, hybrid work has evolved into a long-term strategy for many organizations seeking to balance operational efficiency with employee flexibility. Advances in digital communication technologies and changing employee expectations have further accelerated the adoption of hybrid work models across industries. As organizations continue to redefine the future of work, understanding the impact of hybrid working on employees has become increasingly important (Allen et al., 2015).

One of the most widely discussed aspects of hybrid working is its influence on work-life balance. Work-life balance refers to an individual's ability to effectively manage work responsibilities alongside personal, family, and social commitments. Hybrid working offers employees greater flexibility in deciding where and, in some cases, when they work. Reduced commuting time, increased autonomy, and greater control over daily schedules can improve job satisfaction and overall well-being (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). However, these advantages are often accompanied by challenges such as blurred boundaries between work and personal life, increased digital connectivity, extended working hours, and reduced face-to-face interaction with colleagues (Allen et al., 2015).

The experiences of employees in hybrid work settings vary depending on organizational culture, managerial support, family responsibilities, and individual work preferences. While some employees find hybrid working empowering and beneficial, others struggle to maintain clear boundaries between professional and personal responsibilities. These differing experiences highlight the need to examine hybrid working from the perspective of employees themselves rather than relying solely on organizational outcomes or productivity measures (Guest et al., 2013).

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A qualitative approach provides an opportunity to explore employees' lived experiences in depth and to understand how they perceive the opportunities and challenges associated with hybrid working. By focusing on employees' personal narratives, this study seeks to provide meaningful insights into how hybrid work influences work-life balance and employee well-being. The findings may help organizations develop more effective hybrid work policies that support both organizational performance and employee satisfaction (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

> Literature Review

The concept of flexible working has received considerable attention over the past two decades, with hybrid working becoming one of the most widely adopted models in the post-pandemic workplace. Hybrid work combines remote and office-based work, allowing employees greater flexibility while maintaining opportunities for collaboration and organizational engagement. Researchers have increasingly examined how this model affects employee productivity, well-being, job satisfaction, and work-life balance (Allen et al., 2015).

Previous studies have found that hybrid working offers several advantages for employees. Flexible work arrangements reduce commuting time, lower transportation costs, and provide employees with greater autonomy over their daily schedules. This flexibility enables individuals to better manage family responsibilities, childcare, education, and personal commitments. Many researchers have reported that employees working under hybrid arrangements experience higher job satisfaction, greater motivation, and improved psychological well-being because they have more control over how they organize their work (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

Despite these benefits, the literature also highlights several challenges associated with hybrid working. One of the most common concerns is the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life. Employees often remain connected through emails, messaging platforms, and virtual meetings beyond regular working hours, making it difficult to disconnect from work. This constant connectivity can increase stress, emotional exhaustion, and the risk of burnout. Digital fatigue caused by prolonged online meetings and continuous screen time has also become an important concern in hybrid work environments (Allen et al., 2015).

Another significant issue identified in previous research is social isolation. Employees who spend extended periods working remotely may experience reduced interaction with colleagues,

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weaker professional relationships, and a lower sense of belonging within their organizations. These challenges can affect collaboration, teamwork, and employee engagement. Some studies also suggest that hybrid workers may experience inequalities in career development opportunities if they are less visible than colleagues who spend more time in the office (Guest et al., 2013).

Researchers consistently emphasize the importance of organizational support in determining the success of hybrid working arrangements. Effective communication, trust between managers and employees, clear expectations regarding working hours, access to digital resources, and employee well-being initiatives contribute significantly to positive hybrid work experiences. Supportive leadership encourages employees to maintain healthy work boundaries while promoting collaboration and flexibility (Allen et al., 2015).

Although existing studies have provided valuable insights into hybrid working, much of the research has focused on productivity, organizational performance, or large-scale quantitative surveys. Comparatively fewer studies have explored employees' personal experiences through qualitative methods. A qualitative approach allows researchers to understand how employees interpret their everyday experiences, the meanings they attach to work-life balance, and the factors that influence their well-being in hybrid work environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thematic analysis is particularly suitable for identifying recurring patterns in participants' experiences and interpreting the meanings they assign to those experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, this study adopts a qualitative approach to explore employees' lived experiences of maintaining work-life balance while working in hybrid arrangements.

> Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To explore employees' experiences of work-life balance in hybrid working environments.
- To identify the benefits and challenges associated with hybrid work.
- To understand how organizations can better support employees working in hybrid settings.

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➤ **Research Methodology**

• **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of employees' experiences. A qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate because the study aimed to understand participants' personal experiences, perceptions, and interpretations rather than measure relationships between variables.

• **Participants**

A purposive sample of 10 employees working in hybrid roles across different industries was selected. The participants represented a variety of professional roles and had been working under hybrid arrangements for at least six months. This criterion ensured that participants had sufficient experience to reflect meaningfully on the opportunities and challenges associated with hybrid working.

• **Data Collection**

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. Participants discussed their experiences of balancing work and personal life while working in hybrid arrangements. With participants' informed consent, interviews were recorded and later transcribed to ensure accurate analysis.

• **Data Analysis**

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. Initially, the interview transcripts were read several times to develop familiarity with the data. Meaningful statements were then coded according to recurring ideas and experiences. Similar codes were grouped into broader categories, from which major themes emerged. The final themes represented shared patterns across participants while also reflecting differences in individual experiences. Thematic analysis was selected because it provides a systematic yet flexible method for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data.

➤ **Findings**

Four major themes emerged from the analysis.

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- **Theme 1: Flexibility Improves Work-Life Balance**

Most participants described hybrid working as providing greater control over their daily schedules.

One participant stated:

"Working from home twice a week allows me to spend more time with my family while still meeting my work responsibilities."

Employees appreciated reduced commuting time, flexible scheduling, and increased autonomy.

- **Theme 2: Blurred Boundaries Between Work and Home**

Several participants reported difficulty disconnecting from work.

One participant explained:

"Because my laptop is always nearby, I often continue working after office hours."

Many employees experienced longer working hours and difficulty maintaining personal time.

- **Theme 3: Importance of Managerial Support**

Participants emphasized that supportive managers positively influenced their work-life balance.

Employees appreciated supervisors who respected working hours, trusted employees, and communicated expectations clearly.

One participant noted:

"My manager encourages us to log off on time, which helps maintain a healthy balance."

- **Theme 4: Employee Well-being**

Hybrid working improved overall well-being for many participants by reducing commuting stress.

However, some employees experienced loneliness and reduced social interaction with colleagues.

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Several participants recommended regular team meetings and mental health initiatives to strengthen workplace relationships.

➤ **Discussion**

The findings demonstrate that hybrid working provides significant flexibility, enabling employees to better manage professional and personal responsibilities. These findings align with previous research suggesting that flexible work arrangements increase job satisfaction and employee autonomy.

However, hybrid working also creates challenges, particularly in maintaining clear boundaries between work and home life. Employees often struggle to disconnect from work, increasing the risk of stress and burnout.

Managerial support emerged as a key factor in promoting healthy work-life balance. Organizations that establish clear communication, flexible scheduling, and employee well-being initiatives are more likely to create successful hybrid work environments.

➤ **Conclusion**

Hybrid working has become an important feature of modern organizations. This study explored employees' experiences of work-life balance within hybrid work arrangements through a qualitative approach. The findings indicate that hybrid work offers increased flexibility and improved well-being while also presenting challenges related to work-life boundaries and social isolation.

Organizations should develop supportive leadership practices, clear hybrid work policies, and well-being programs that help employees maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life.

➤ **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, organizations should establish clear hybrid working policies that define employees' working hours, communication expectations, and performance standards. Clear guidelines can help employees maintain healthy boundaries between their professional and

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personal lives while reducing the risk of overwork and burnout. Managers should encourage employees to disconnect from work after official working hours and foster a culture that respects personal time.

Organizations should also invest in employee well-being by providing access to mental health resources, wellness programs, and employee assistance initiatives. Regular check-ins between managers and employees can help identify work-related challenges at an early stage and provide opportunities for support. In addition, managers should receive training on leading hybrid teams effectively, promoting trust, maintaining open communication, and ensuring that both remote and office-based employees are treated fairly.

To reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen collaboration, organizations should organize regular in-person meetings, team-building activities, and opportunities for informal interaction among employees. These initiatives can improve communication, teamwork, and employees' sense of belonging within the organization. Providing appropriate digital tools and technical support is equally important to ensure that employees can work efficiently regardless of their location.

Finally, organizations should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their hybrid working policies by seeking employee feedback through surveys, interviews, or focus group discussions. Continuous assessment will enable organizations to identify emerging challenges and adapt their policies to meet employees' changing needs. By adopting flexible, employee-centered practices, organizations can create a sustainable hybrid work environment that supports productivity, enhances employee well-being, and promotes a healthy work-life balance.

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