

# Exploring employee wellbeing and remote work. Developing an organisational framework for healthy hybrid work 2024

**Gemma Dale**

Faculty of Business and Law, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool L3 5UG, UK

Email address: [G.L.Dale@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:G.L.Dale@ljmu.ac.uk)

## 1. Introduction

The demand for remote forms of work increased following the global pandemic (Alexander et al, 2021; Taneja et al, 2021; Chung et al, 2020). Hybrid work, a mix of in-person and remote work, was predicted to become a core feature of the labour market as a result (Microsoft, 2022; Bloom et al 2022). By Summer 2024, around 29% of working days were undertaken from home (Barrero et al, 2024).

Hybrid work is an emerging and a largely unexplored working arrangement. Although extant research has previously examined the relationship between remote work and employee wellbeing, there is a lack of in depth understanding about employee wellbeing whilst undertaking hybrid work specifically. Four out of five organisations who intend to offer hybrid work have included in their rationale its potential to enhance employee wellbeing (ONS, 2022). Accordingly, it is important to understand how hybrid worker health can be enabled and supported by organisations, as well as address the gap in current literature by developing a detailed understanding of how hybrid work influences health.

## 2. Previous Research

The relationship between remote work and wellbeing is complex and research findings have been contradictory. Both negative and positive health outcomes have been observed (Wohrman and Ebner, 2021; Arvola and Kristjuhan, 2015). Positive health outcomes include improved sleep and nutrition (Franklin, 2023), increased leisure time (Gimenez-Nada et al., 2018), increased exercise (Barrero et al., 2023) reduced fatigue (Montreuil and Lippel, 2003) and higher energy levels (Bosua et al., 2012). Conversely, remote work has been associated with negative health outcomes including sedentary behaviour (Almarcha et al., 2021), increased musculoskeletal problems (Jodi et al., 2022) isolation and loneliness (Montreuil and Lippel, 2003; Ahrendt, 2020) and a greater frequency of negative emotions (Mann and Holdsworth, 2003). Overall, it has been established that remote work is generally 'more good than bad' (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007) for employee health, although this may not be true for all workers (Anderson and Kaplan, 2014).

## 3. Research Objectives and Methods

This study investigated the personal experiences of hybrid workers through a qualitative survey. Findings were analysed thematically. A second phase consisted of semi-structured interviews with HR professionals whose organisations employ hybrid workers. The research aimed to produce a practical framework that can be used by organisations in order to effectively support the wellbeing of these workers, mitigating potential risks to health. Results were triangulated to test the efficacy and usability of the framework, a validation of which will take place with a group of senior HR leaders.

#### 4. Findings

Findings indicate that employees who undertake hybrid work experience both positive and negative effects on their wellbeing; hybrid work arrangements therefore have the potential to act as a job resource or job demand. These benefits and challenges can be experienced simultaneously. Employees experience improved work life balance, improved physical and mental health and more time that they utilise for exercise, wellbeing activities and time with friends and family. Conversely, they may also experience isolation, work extensification, difficulties in switching off and ‘blurred boundaries’, as well as musculoskeletal issues resulting from inadequate work stations. Findings also indicate the importance of organisational culture in hybrid work and its relation to health; hybrid workers identify that unsupportive environments and managers, as well as low trust working environments can have a negative influence on employee health.

The study further identified organisational and employee actions that can support healthy hybrid work that will be of value to organisations offering these working arrangements. Individual employee strategies include time and boundary management, changes to the home working environment, taking breaks / switching off and maximising in-person time with colleagues when working in the office. Organisations can enable healthy hybrid work by providing ergonomic support for homeworking, providing autonomy and choice around the hybrid balance and providing clear organisational level support for hybrid work arrangements.

Figure 1, below, provides a visual representation of the key findings from the study.



Figure 1: visual representation of key findings

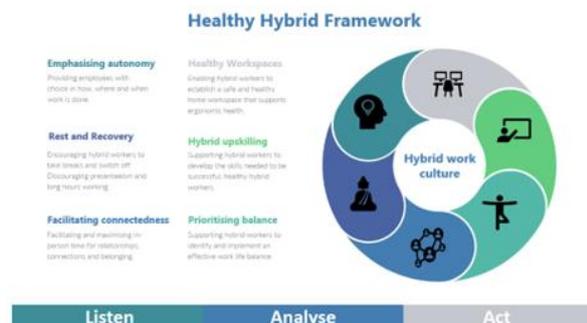


Figure 2: healthy hybrid work framework overview

#### 5. Practical importance of the study

This study will advance knowledge on the issue of employee wellbeing and hybrid work in a future of work where remote and hybrid work is taking place at scale. The development of the framework will make a contribution to practice through the provision of evidence based yet practical guidance for organisations, helping them to manage and mitigate the potential for negative impacts upon employee wellbeing, and maximise hybrid worker health. Through this framework, organisations can make hybrid work, healthy work. Figure 2, above, provides a summary representation of the framework and its individual elements; the full framework is accompanied by detailed guidance for organisations and HR professionals.

## References

- Alexander, A., De Smet, A., Langstaff, M. and Ravid, D., 2021. What employees are saying about the future of remote work. *McKinsey & Company*.
- Almarcha, M., Balagué, N. and Torrents, C., 2021. Healthy teleworking: towards personalized exercise recommendations. *Sustainability*, 13(6), p.3192.
- Anderson, A.J., Kaplan, S.A. and Vega, R.P. (2015) The impact of telework on emotional experience: When, and for whom, does telework improve daily affective well-being?, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 24(6), pp.882-897.
- Arvola, R. and Kristjuhan, Ü. (2015) Workload and health of older academic personnel using telework, *Agronomy Research*, 13(3), pp.741-749.
- Bloom, N., Han, R. and Liang, J. (2022) *How hybrid working from home works out*, Working Paper Number. w30292), National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Barrero, J.M., Bloom, N. and Davis, S.J (2024), SWAA Updates July 2024 available at [https://wfhresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/WFHResearch\\_updates\\_July2024.pdf](https://wfhresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/WFHResearch_updates_July2024.pdf) Accessed 17th July 2024
- Chung, H., Seo, H., Forbes, S. and Birkett, H., 2020. Working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown: Changing preferences and the future of work.
- Gajendran, R.S. and Harrison, D.A. (2007) The good, the bad, and the unknown about telecommuting: meta-analysis of psychological mediators and individual consequences, *Journal of applied psychology*, 92(6), p.1524.
- Gimenez-Nadal, J.I., Molina, J.A. and Velilla, J. (2018) Telework, the timing of work, and instantaneous well-being: evidence from time use data (No. 11271), IZA Discussion Papers.
- Mann, S. and Holdsworth, L., 2003. The psychological impact of teleworking: stress, emotions and health. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 18(3), pp.196-211.
- Microsoft (2022) 'Hybrid work is just work. Are we doing it wrong? Work Trend Index: Pulse Report'. Microsoft, Available at: [https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work-is-just-work?utm\\_source=pocket\\_mylist](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work-is-just-work?utm_source=pocket_mylist) [Accessed 29 September 2022]
- Montreuil, S. and Lippel, K. (2003) Telework and occupational health: a Quebec empirical study and regulatory implications, *Safety Science*, 41(4), pp.339-358.
- Office of National Statistics (2022), Is hybrid working here to stay? Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/ishybridworkingheretostay/2022-05-23> [Accessed 28th August 2023]
- Taneja, S., Mizen, P. and Bloom, N., 2021. Working from home is revolutionising the UK labour market.
- Wöhrmann, A.M. and Ebner, C. (2021) Understanding the bright side and the dark side of telework: An empirical analysis of working conditions and psychosomatic health complaints, *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 36(3), pp.348-370.