**2 - Exploring employee wellbeing and remote work. Developing an organisational framework for healthy hybrid work.**

Gemma Dale1

1LJMU

**1. Introduction**

Following the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent demand for ongoing remote work (Alexander et al, 2021; Taneja et al, 2021; Chung et al, 2020) hybrid forms of work are predicted to become a core feature of the global labour market (Microsoft, 2022; Bloom et al 2021). In January 2023, 28% of UK employees were working in a hybrid way (ONS, 2023); a CIPD (2023) report found 83% of organisations were offering hybrid work. In contrast, prior to the pandemic, less than 5% of UK employees worked mainly from home; in the 40 years prior to 2020 remote work had grown by only three percentage points (Felstead and Reuschke (2021).

The outcomes of hybrid work, on both organisations and employees, are unknown. The extant literature on remote work draws predominantly from a time when remote work was undertaken by the minority, limited to specific job roles and industries, or from during the pandemic when homeworking was involuntary. Existing research has been described as ‘fragmented and variable’ (Athanasiadou and Theriou, 2021). To date, studies have not been undertaken at a scale that would enable extrapolation to generally applicable conclusions, limiting the potential for the provision of practical advice for employees or managers (Messenger, 2019).

Wellbeing outcomes of remote work, including the impact on physical and mental health (Lundberg and Lindfords, 2002; Mann and Holdsworth, 2003), the impact of remote work technologies (Gualano et al, 2023) and the demands of remote work and their impact (Ter Hoeven and Van Zoonen, 2015), are acknowledged research gaps.

**2. Literature**

Four out of five organisations who intend to offer opportunities for hybrid work post pandemic include the potential to improve employee wellbeing as a key consideration (ONS, 2022). However, the relationship between remote work and wellbeing is complex and the extant evidence contradictory. It is not possible to state conclusively whether employee wellbeing is positively or negatively influenced by remote work. Research has established remote work has the potential to have both positive and negative effects (Wohrman and Ebner, 2021); for example, remote work has been found to reduce stress levels (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007) as well as increase them (Arvola and Kristjuhan, 2015). Overall, it is suggested remote work does have a net benefit on employee health, improving it more than damaging it (Crawford, 2022), attributed in part to its capacity to provide increased autonomy and control (Taveres, 2017). Remote work is generally considered ‘more good than bad for individuals’ (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007), however it cannot be inferred that it will result in wellbeing benefits for all remote workers (Anderson and Kaplan, 2014).

**3. Research Objectives**

There is a lack of knowledge about the health and wellbeing outcomes of hybrid work as well as the factors which might influence such outcomes. Furthermore, there is a lack of evidence-based guidance for organisations in respect of supporting wellbeing in hybrid work. This study therefore aims to:

· Develop a detailed understanding of the positive and negative impacts of hybrid forms of remote work on employee wellbeing as identified by previous research.

· Explore the perspectives of employees undertaking hybrid work and its influence on their subjective wellbeing, determining the factors that influence hybrid worker wellbeing outcomes.

· Develop an understanding of how organisations are supporting the wellbeing of hybrid workers and the effectiveness of these approaches.

· Create a framework that can be utilised by organisations to ensure that hybrid work is healthy.

**4. Research Methods**

This study will adopt a pragmatic philosophy, utilising a mixed-method approach. Phase one will consist of a qualitative and quantitative survey of hybrid workers which will be analysed thematically. Phase two will consist of semi-structured interviews with senior HR professionals whose organisations undertake hybrid work. Results will be triangulated to test the efficacy and usability of the framework, a validation of which will take place with a group of senior HR leaders.

**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 work is taking place at scale. The development of the framework will enable organisations to both manage and mitigate the potential for negative impacts upon employee wellbeing, providing both insight and opportunities for action.

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