Unravelling the Complexities of Hybrid Work Environments: A Suggestive Framework for Employee Performance in Evolving Work Environment

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Abstract

As the global workforce adapts rapidly to the paradigm shift caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, hybrid working solutions have emerged as a promising strategy for balancing remote and in-office work. The implementation of hybrid work models has gained significant attention as firms endeavour to find a harmonious equilibrium between remote and in-office work arrangements. Although these models offer increased flexibility and improved work-life balance, they also introduce novel obstacles. This paper explores the complexities surrounding the implementation and long-term viability of hybrid working models, illuminating the obstacles that impede their success.The paper focuses on the psychological effects on employees caused by the blurring of the lines between work and personal life, increased feelings of isolation, and a deteriorating organisational culture. It investigates the necessity of redefining leadership strategies, nurturing a supportive work environment, and ensuring equitable treatment of both remote and in-office employees.This conceptual study centres around the complexities associated with the hybrid working approach. This academic discourse will analyse pertinent theoretical frameworks in organisational studies and their intricate interconnections. The objective of this research is to propose a distinctive framework.

Keywords: *Hybrid Work Model, Employer- Employee Disconnect, WFH, Productivity Paradox, Accountability, Accountable leadership*

Introduction

Hybrid working models are ways for companies to set up their systems so that workers can split their work hours between working from home and being at the office. Although hybrid employment is relatively new, flexible work schedules have been experimented with for decades.

1960s Germany has a labour deficit. Christel Kraemerer created "flextime" (sometimes called "flexitime") to meet the growing demand for workers. Her statement suggests replacing inflexible start and end hours in many professional scenarios with a more flexible framework. Staggered work hours may help reduce the labour shortage by attracting more housewives and moms. (Rubin,

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The 1973 US faced the OPEC oil embargo, the Clean Air Act, and "gridlock." Former NASA engineer Jack Nilles (1974) wrote a book titled "The Telecommunications-Transportation Trade off". Pre-internet satellite offices inspired the term. The goal was to help people work from smaller, closer-to-home offices to save transportation and energy use. Foresight and innovation have changed work and travel.

In the late 1990s, AT&T garnered considerable interest with the implementation of an innovative "alternative workplace" (AW) model, enabling 100,000 employees to serve as early adopters of this novel strategy. This innovative action brought attention to the benefits associated with the contemporary practise popularly known as "remote work." The company's endeavour has generated heightened attention towards the advantages and potentialities of remote work arrangements. (Ellison, 2004).

The emergence of the hybrid work model may be traced back to the early 2000s, a period that coincided with the advent of reliable home internet connectivity. It can be ascribed to the remarkable advancements in technology, particularly the internet and communication tools ("Hybrid-working-evolution," 2022). Before the advent of the hybrid work model, the prevailing framework of work involved a conventional office-centric approach, where individuals were required to fulfil their occupational responsibilities within a specifically designated physical office environment.

Given the increasing prevalence of remote work and the availability of advanced virtual collaboration tools, organisations have initiated inquiries into alternative work arrangements. The notion of authorising employees to partake in remote work or telecommuting has attracted considerable interest owing to its myriad benefits, such as heightened flexibility, improved work-life balance, and access to a broader pool of talented individuals.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which first appeared in the early months of 2020, played a pivotal role in facilitating the extensive implementation of the hybrid work model. Considering the urgent need to mitigate the spread of the virus, a multitude of organisations found themselves compelled to swiftly implement remote work arrangements. The data collected from this rigorous investigation into the implementation of remote work has demonstrated that not only is it a feasible alternative, but it also holds promise for generating positive results in terms of maintaining productivity levels (McKinsey Global Institute, 2020).

It is widely acknowledged within the industry that remote and hybrid work arrangements have become a permanent fixture (Hamingson,2023). There exists a multitude of perspectives regarding the impact of remote work on both the characteristics of work itself and the productivity of employees. Emerging within the realm of employee productivity are discernible patterns and significant concerns pertaining to motivational factors. Currently, there is a focus on examining these trends in terms of human behaviour rather than from an organisational standpoint.

'Productivity Paradox' Of Hybrid

The productivity paradox of hybrid working refers to the phenomenon where despite the popularity and widespread adoption of hybrid work arrangements, there is little evidence of a corresponding increase in productivity. The term "productivity paradox"(Brynjolfsson, E.,1993) was first used in the context of information technology, where organizations invested heavily in IT but saw little improvement in overall productivity. Hybrid work arrangements, despite their anticipated advantages of enhanced flexibility and improved work-life equilibrium, have not necessarily yielded heightened productivity.

The phenomenon commonly referred to as the productivity paradox, alternatively known as the Solow computer paradox, has been extensively discussed in the literature (Triplett, J. E., 1999).

One notable observation in the field of business process analysis is the counterintuitive phenomenon where increased investment in information technology (IT) may lead to a decrease in worker productivity, as opposed to the expected increase. According to a survey conducted by Microsoft, most managers express scepticism regarding the feasibility of establishing trust in a remote work environment. The survey reveals that a mere 12% of business leaders possess unwavering confidence in the productivity of their hybrid workforce. The survey found 87% of employees perceive hybrid working as productive, despite productivity paranoia, a fear experienced by managers and high-ranking individuals about their subordinates' work effectiveness (Teevan et al., 2022). The current management-employee disparity is causing a divide among employees, with 73% questioning the effectiveness of management's decision to resume on-site work(Microsoft, 2022. A substantial majority of corporate leaders, specifically 82%, express considerable apprehension regarding the task of ensuring employees return to physical office locations.

Motivation Challenge

Leary's research extensively explores the sociometer concept of self-esteem. The formulation of this theory can be traced back to its genesis as a response to a range of psychological phenomena, including social emotions, interpersonal and intrapersonal behaviours, self-serving biases, and reactions to experiences of rejection (Leary, M. R., 2005). The Sociometer theory suggests that individuals prioritize maintaining their social status and self-esteem due to the crucial role social relationships play in their survival and overall well-being. Isolation or lack of social support can lead to a decline in self-esteem and motivation levels, as it lacks positive feedback and validation typically obtained from social connections.

According to a recent Gallup (2021) survey conducted during the pandemic, there has been a notable decline in employee engagement levels, accompanied by a corresponding increase in active disengagement. Consequently, the ratio of engaged employees to actively disengaged employees has reached its lowest point in the United States over the past decade. The post-pandemic period has given rise to two notable phenomena: Quiet Quitting and the Great Resignation. According to a recent Gallup study, more than half of the employees in the United States exhibit characteristics

of disengagement and potential resignation. The monthly rate of employee resignations has surpassed 3%, reaching its highest point in over two decades. This figure represents a 25% increase compared to the levels observed prior to the onset of the pandemic (Gandhi & Robison, 2021).

Diminished Collaboration and Communication

There is a potential decrease in collaboration and communication among team members during hybrid work arrangements Huang et al. (2021) argue that the implementation of remote labour has the capacity to limit spontaneous interactions, hence impeding the exchange of ideas and constraining the process of innovation. Based on the research conducted by O'Connor et al. (2020), individuals engaged in remote team environments had challenges in actively engaging in casual conversations. Conversations hold a crucial role in fostering the growth of interpersonal connections and facilitating the emergence of novel cognitive frameworks. Brockmeier et al. (2021) claim that the lack of in-person interaction and the dependence on digital communication tools can potentially give rise to misinterpretations and misunderstandings, hence impeding the efficacy of collaborative endeavours.

Erosion of Work-Life Boundaries

The blurred boundaries between work and personal life in hybrid working settings provide notable difficulties. Based on scholarly study, it has been observed that remote workers often encounter difficulties in effectively setting limits, leading to extended work hours, heightened levels of stress, and a decline in overall well-being (Golden, 2020). The presence of constant accessibility and the expectation of fast reaction can have a detrimental impact on work-life balance, resulting in feelings of exhaustion and reduced levels of job satisfaction (Daher, 2021). Furthermore, the absence of a clear delineation between the physical spaces of work and home can provide challenges in terms of psychological disengagement from work-related responsibilities (Allen et al., 2015).

Disparities in Employee Engagement and Performance

Hybrid working, while its inherent flexibility, can give rise to discrepancies in employee engagement and performance. Research findings suggest that individuals who engage in remote work may encounter sensations of isolation and detachment from their colleagues, leading to a detrimental impact on their levels of motivation and dedication (Laforet et al., 2020). The phenomenon has the potential to result in a decline in collaborative efforts, team unity, and overall effectiveness (Buckley et al., 2017). In addition, it is worth noting that differences may arise among employees based on their access to suitable remote work environments, hence intensifying pre-existing social and economic inequalities (Kossek et al., 2021).

There exists a discourse surrounding the advantages and disadvantages of hybrid work arrangements, accompanied by endeavours to modify the behaviours of both employees and managers. There is a prevailing acknowledgement that the transition in behaviour towards hybrid working is enduring, and there are constructive proposals being put forth to enhance infrastructure

and technology in order to facilitate collaboration. The ongoing issue of a disconnect between leaders and employees regarding productivity persists, resulting in a continued state of employee disengagement.

Organisations must re-evaluate their traditional approaches to work, communication, and collaboration if they are to thrive in the current environment. This includes instituting comprehensive remote work regulations, providing necessary technological assistance, rethinking office layouts to accommodate hybrid teams, and cultivating a work environment that places a premium on results over physical presence.

Methodology

The primary focus of this conceptual inquiry revolves around the intricacies linked to the implementation of a hybrid work approach. The purpose of this scholarly discussion is to critically examine the current body of literature and fundamental theoretical frameworks in the subject of organisational studies. The main objective of this study is to present a comprehensive framework that can successfully enhance employee performance.

Literature Review &Discussion

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a profound effect on the dynamics of office culture, leading to a swift transition towards remote work and collaborative project methodologies among knowledge workers. Yang and colleagues (2023) emphasised several key factors that have garnered attention during this period of change, including job conditions, family obligations, the practicality of home office environments, and related topics. In the preceding two years following the initial epidemic, a multitude of organisations have implemented a variety of measures aimed at facilitating the reintegration of employees into the physical workplace.

In the context of corporate culture, there is a prevalent focus on the nuanced elements of workplace functionality. The notion of "work-life" posits that the workplace functions not only as a professional setting, but also offers social prospects and access to facilities that may be lacking at one's personal residence (Smith, 2022).

As society progresses towards a future characterised by hybrid work patterns, it is anticipated that significant transformations may occur within the realm of workplaces. Nevertheless, employees articulate the necessity for alterations within the existing professional milieu prior to wholeheartedly accepting the concept of hybrid employment (Gensler Research Institute, 2021).

According to De Paoli and Ropo (2015), the authors propose that the level of familiarity among team members has the potential to cultivate a sense of trust inside the team. According to O'Hara et al. (2011), the cognitive processing of sensory information and interpersonal connections are significant factors that influence individuals' reactions to their environment. De Paoli and Ropo (2015) argue that managers place significant emphasis on the necessity of early face-to-face meetings with newly onboarded team members in order to develop a shared understanding and

facilitate productive collaboration.

The research analysis conducted by Papagiannidis and Marikyan (2020) highlights the importance of consistent and effective communication in fostering rapport and facilitating collaboration within geographically separated teams. According to Adamovic (2022), a suggested approach to address social isolation and enhance attitudes towards remote work is the implementation of regular meetings between managers and personnel. The presence of coworkers contributes an additional dimension to the work environment, enhancing the exchange and coordination of information.

According to Kegel's (2017) literature study, the physical environment of a firm and the experiences of its employees have a substantial influence on various aspects such as productivity, cooperation, creativity, human resource management, and overall performance. The aforementioned factors also exert an influence on employee engagement, productivity, subjective well-being, and overall job satisfaction. Therefore, the impact of the physical environment on organisations' strategies to foster employee identity and interpersonal interactions remains consistent.

According to Adamovic (2022), the utilisation of communication technology in hybrid work setups can result in undesired outcomes such as heightened workloads, compromised work-life equilibrium, and fatigue.

According to the findings of Tanpipat et al. (2021), a study conducted on a sample of 414 Thai office workers affected by the pandemic, it can be inferred that in remote work arrangements characterised by limited coworker interaction, the perceived productivity of individuals is more strongly influenced by the quality of communication and collaboration resources and the overall work environment, as opposed to the individual's personal communication skills. The outcomes of the study highlight the importance of efficiently managing the emotional dimensions of the work environment, specifically in relation to sustaining employee motivation. The presence of strong motivation empowers individuals to maintain their commitment to a collective, especially in the face of heightened job obligations. The authors' commentary regarding Kamara et al. (2020) suggests that the impetus behind this motive is not exclusively influenced by institutional norms, but also by individual variables.

Based on the aforementioned facts, it is apparent that it is imperative for management to establish a conducive climate that fosters employees' ability to freely express their genuine identities within the workplace. This particular cultural environment enables employees to execute their tasks with limited supervision, hence requiring other elements of the work environment, such as the physical workspace, to offer avenues for employees to express their authentic selves, assume accountability for their work, and exert influence on their working conditions.

Manca (2022) posits that the efficiency of a workforce is influenced by the phenomenon of social clustering. The workplace culture significantly influences employees' expectations, behaviours, and interpersonal dynamics with their colleagues. The book posits that team dynamics can be influenced by social events, encompassing both those occurring within and outside of the work

context.

The significance of notions such as proximity, individuality, territory, diversity, and heterogeneity in moulding individuals' emotions and behaviours in the workplace, social circles, and cultural environment has been demonstrated (Forooraghi et al., 2020).

The study of organisational theories provides a structured method to understand the relationship between organizational contexts and employee behavior, aiding in decision-making, efficient management, and creating productive work environments, prompting a reassessment of existing frameworks within a hybrid working model.

The Job Characteristics theory, (Hackman and Oldham,1976), lays emphasis on the intrinsic motivation that stems from the core nature of job duties. In the realm of hybrid employment, organisations have the capacity to establish job positions that provide heightened levels of independence, a diverse array of competencies, and significant duties. The hybrid model offers individuals the opportunity to exercise autonomy and assume significant responsibility. However, a key obstacle lies in the identification of skills that are compatible with the hybrid model. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), introduced by Deci and Ryan (1985), delves into individuals' inherent psychological drives and requisites. As technological and social progress shapes the landscape, SDT underscores autonomy, competence, and relatedness as pivotal motivators. Hybrid work arrangements afford businesses the opportunity to foster intrinsic motivation through avenues for skill development, task autonomy, and virtual relationship cultivation, thereby preserving a sense of community among organizational members.

The hybrid work paradigm emphasizes autonomy, a key element in Self-Determination Theory and Job Characteristics Theory, which contributes to intrinsic drive, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. However, the performance conundrum arises when the correlation between freedom and improved performance is not always clear, as multiple factors influence the performance paradox in hybrid work arrangements, despite the perceived sense of autonomy.

Effective communication in hybrid environments is crucial due to the limitations of in-person communication and increased reliance on digital technologies. This can hinder information transmission, inhibit cooperation, and disrupt alignment, impacting team and individual effectiveness. Autonomy can lead to isolation and disconnection, while absence of regular face-to-face encounters can result in diminished motivation, engagement, and performance.

The successful execution of hybrid work necessitates the cultivation of heightened self-discipline and proficient time management abilities. In the absence of appropriate techniques, employees may encounter difficulties in efficiently managing their time, resulting in a decline in productivity and performance levels.

The Social Exchange Theory, rooted in the cost-and-reward construct, elucidates the intricacies of social interactions and relationships. Blau's seminal work in 1964 paved the way for this theory,

highlighting the reciprocity that characterizes employee-employer dynamics. The theoretical framework of social exchange theory is based on the fundamental concepts of cost and reward. According to this theory, individuals participate in social interactions with the anticipation of achieving mutual advantages. Historically, these interactions have taken place in physical office environments, characterised by in-person communication, collective experiences, and perceptible signals. In the context of the hybrid paradigm, it is important to note that physical closeness is no longer a fixed variable. As employees transition between remote and in-office work environments, there is a need to reassess the dynamics of social relationships and the exchange of resources.

The Transactional-Transformational Leadership Theory, as conceptualized by Burns (1978) and refined by Bass (1985), accentuates the diverse facets of leadership styles. Transformational leadership, marked by its emphasis on inspiring collective vision and personalized attention, emerges as a cornerstone for motivating and engaging teams operating within hybrid contexts. The Transactional-Transformational Leadership theory enhances employee performance by combining transactional and transformational approaches. It promotes accountability and rewards for both remote and in-office staff, using regular check-ins, performance indicators, and explicit instructions. Transformational leaders use charismatic communication, intellectual stimulation, and individualized concern to connect individuals across locations, fostering innovation and a cohesive workforce.

Demerouti et al.'s (2001) Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R Model) scrutinizes the interplay between job attributes and employee contentment. Striking a balance between professional demands and available resources is paramount. The JD-R Model also offers valuable insights for effectively managing job demands within hybrid work environments. The implementation of appropriate organisational methods, such as the establishment of realistic goals, the provision of assistance, and the promotion of work-life balance, plays a pivotal role in minimising the adverse consequences associated with heightened job expectations. The model places significant emphasis on the significance of fair workloads and enough resources in establishing a conducive work environment. This can provide guidance to organisations seeking to improve employee well-being and performance in hybrid work environments.

Adams' Equity Theory (1965) casts light upon the equitable distribution of resources. The Equity Theory, originally posited by psychologist John Stacy Adams in 1963, is a widely recognised psychological theory that examines the correlation between individuals' perception of fairness and their motivation within the context of the workplace. According to the theory, individuals evaluate the equity of their inputs (such as effort, contributions, and talents) and outcomes (including rewards, recognition, and opportunities) relative to those of their peers. The resultant perception of fairness or unfairness significantly impacts individuals' motivation and conduct.

The Equity Theory, a combination of Adams' and the Job Demands-Resources Model, focuses on the importance of fair resource allocation in employee experiences and well-being. It aligns with

the JD-R Model, which emphasizes the balance between work demands and resources to boost employee motivation and satisfaction. In hybrid work arrangements, fair allocation of resources, including technical assistance, skill enhancement opportunities, and information availability, significantly influences employee perceptions of equity. Recognizing diverse demands among remote and in-office employees and distributing resources equitably promotes inclusion and a healthy psychological contract. However, disparities can undermine trust and dedication, hindering job satisfaction and performance.

The JD-R Model is a beneficial framework for managing the balance between job demands and resources in the context of hybrid work. In order to effectively support employees, organisations must proactively address stress-inducing causes and provide necessary resources, as the needs differ between remote and in-office environments. The model places significant importance on the maintenance of equilibrium between energy-depleting demands and energising supplies, which is in perfect alignment with the Equity Theory's objective of achieving fairness. The distribution of resources to meet job demands plays a significant role in fostering a pleasant work environment, hence enhancing employees' perception of fairness and their overall level of involvement. The reciprocal relationship between Adams' Equity Theory and the JD-R paradigm offers a comprehensive framework for enhancing the effects of the hybrid work paradigm on employee well-being and performance.

Schein's (1985) Organizational Culture Theory delves into collective beliefs, values, and norms that shape organizational dynamics. Nurturing a culture grounded in trust, effective communication, and collaborative efforts transcending physical barriers underpins success in hybrid contexts, galvanizing employee participation and alignment. The function of organisational culture in moulding employee behaviours, attitudes, and interactions is of paramount importance. Organisational culture includes common points of view, values, and standards. In the context of the hybrid work period, it is of utmost importance to prioritise the establishment and maintenance of a unified and inclusive organisational culture. The primary difficulty resides in cultivating a culture that surpasses geographical boundaries, utilising technology to enable effective communication, and fostering a lasting sense of community irrespective of employees' actual whereabouts.

Collectively, these diverse organizational theories converge to form a robust and all-encompassing framework for comprehending and navigating the intricate challenges and potential benefits inherent in the hybrid working landscape.

The present comprehensive evaluation of literature concludes by highlighting the intricate nature of hybrid work arrangements and their impact on organisational dynamics and employee experiences. The importance of organization culture in defining workplace conditions and fostering employee satisfaction remains indisputable as firms adopt hybrid models. The advancement of work-life balance necessitates a re-evaluation of social opportunities and the

availability of facilities.

The challenges posed by ambiguous boundaries, differences in performance, and isolation require the implementation of effective communication, discipline, and adaptation. This analysis closes by highlighting the significance of adopting a comprehensive approach that incorporates various theories and aspects in order to promote the well-being, contentment, and performance of employees within the ever-changing context of hybrid work arrangements.

Findings and Conclusion

Our research indicates that traditional theories, while valuable in their own right, may not provide comprehensive solutions to the complex challenges posed by the hybrid workplace.

The hybrid working solutions currently in place do not adequately address the complexities of productivity, employee motivation, and organisational structure. This insight prompted us to propose a novel framework that transcends conventional theory: the cultivation of Accountable Leadership. Following is the proposed framework:

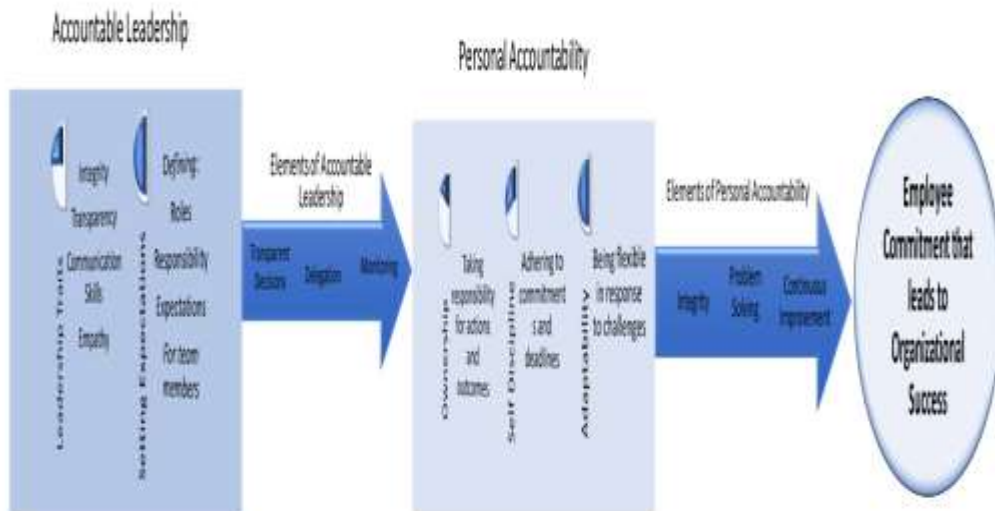### Fostering Organizational Culture of Accountability

Figure 1

Our framework posits that when organisations cultivate a culture of Accountable Leadership, they encourage the growth of leadership qualities in their employees. This, in turn, fosters trust, which is an invaluable commodity in the hybrid workplace. As trust grows, it serves as the foundation for increased productivity.

Accountable Leadership is not simply a management philosophy; it is a profound cultural transformation that permeates every aspect of an organisation. It enables people at all levels to

assume responsibility for their actions, decisions, and responsibilities. In this culture, leadership is not confined to hierarchical positions but rather emerges organically from within the organisation. They lead by example rather than by title. Our research demonstrates that as employees become accountable leaders, their intrinsic drive and motivation to excel in their roles increases. The geographic barriers and organisational silos inherent to the hybrid work model are eliminated by a culture of trust fostered by accountable leadership.

In conclusion, although the difficulties posed by the changing nature of labour are formidable, they are not insurmountable. Our research provides an innovative viewpoint that transcends conventional organisational theories. By promoting Accountable Leadership, organisations can unlock the latent potential of their workforce, instil trust, and achieve unprecedented levels of productivity. The path forward is obvious: it requires the fortitude to embrace change, the sagacity to cultivate leadership at every level, and the dedication to a culture of accountability. As the nature of work continues to evolve, organisations that heed this call will not only endure, but thrive in this new era.

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