Workers Explain Various Elements of a Successful Hybrid Work-life Harmony

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Abstract

While a significant number of employees want a hybrid workplace solution where they can combine onsite and remote work, many employers require their employees to work exclusively onsite. This discrepancy can partly depend on the prevailing knowledge gap regarding success factors for performance and work-life balance (WLB) in the hybrid work context. To fill this knowledge gap, we used a reflexive thematic analysis to investigate suggestions of success factors for collaboration, work-related health and WLB in 33 hybrid workers. The success factors suggested by our participants were formed into four themes: (i) Combining onsite and remote work environments supports work effectiveness, (ii) Socialization and collaboration onsite and remotely facilitate work engagement, (iii) Suitable ICT-solutions, digital maturity, and structured communication facilitate work engagement and effectiveness, and (iv) Workplace flexibility, empowerment and personalized strategies facilitate work-related health and WLB. Overall, our results indicate that employees find that the hybrid work model can be optimal since it overcomes the shortcomings of onsite and remote work environments, respectively. Our results also suggest that a sustainable hybrid work-life can be achieved through a combination of common strategies at the organizational level and individual strategies at the personal level.

Keywords: Sustainable Work-Life; Success Factors for Hybrid Work; Work Engagement; Work Effectiveness; Work-Life Balance

Introduction

The hybrid work model has become an integral part of the modern workplace, significantly influencing work-life balance (WLB), particularly in the IT sector. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation, compelling organizations to adopt remote and flexible work arrangements to ensure business continuity. As companies shift towards hybrid work

models, the interaction between digitalization and human resource management (HRM) has gained prominence, emphasizing the need for policies that support both employee well-being and organizational efficiency. The hybrid model, which combines remote and office-based work, offers greater flexibility, potentially improving WLB by allowing employees to better manage personal and professional responsibilities. However, this transition also introduces challenges such as blurred work-life boundaries, increased occupational stress, and potential inequalities in workload distribution, particularly among female employees. Studies indicate that gender disparities in WLB persist, as incongruence between supervisor and employee expectations can negatively impact women's ability to balance work and family commitments. Research also highlights the dual impact of hybrid work arrangements—while they contribute to job satisfaction and flexibility, they may also exacerbate work-life conflicts if not properly managed. Scholars suggest that WLB is not just an individual concern but a crucial determinant of employee engagement, organizational commitment, and productivity. Given these complexities, organizations must implement structured policies addressing digital burnout, remote collaboration challenges, and fair workload distribution. Ensuring equitable access to hybrid work benefits for all employees, regardless of gender or job role, is critical for fostering a sustainable work environment. Further research is needed to evaluate the long-term implications of hybrid work models on employee performance, mental well-being, and organizational outcomes, especially in technology-driven industries where work dynamics are rapidly evolving.

Employees Describe Different Facilitators for a Good Hybrid Work-Life

During the COVID-19 pandemic, several organizations allowed, or even requested, that their employees work from home to an extent not seen previously in modern times. However, nowadays, organizations struggle to bring back their employees to work full-time onsite again (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2022), some of which implement drastic strategies such as termination threats or salary cuts if employees refuse to return (Tabahriti, 2022). However, remote work (i.e., working from home, a café or anywhere else outside the onsite office) and hybrid work (i.e., a combination of onsite and remote work) have been a positive experiences for many workers who claim that it has improved their work-life balance (WLB) and increased their efficiency (Ipsen et al., 2021). As such, employees are reticent to let go of the newfound benefits of hybrid work.

At the same time, employers' concerns may be justified, given the lack of knowledge regarding success factors for performance and health in a hybrid work environment. Indeed, even if experiences of hybrid work have been positive from many employees' points of view (Ipsen et al., 2021), implementing this work solution may be hasty without the necessary empirical evidence showing that a hybrid work solution is appropriate for both the employer (who want to ensure work engagement and effectiveness) and the workers (who want WLB). In fact, although there is a large body of knowledge on the success factors that contribute to a good work environment onsite (Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, 2020b; Swedish Work Environment Authority, 2016) and remotely (e.g., Charalampous et al., 2019) *respectively*, we are still lacking evidence on what contributes to a thriving *hybrid* work environment. This is particularly true in the aftermath of the pandemic, during which a substantial number of workers gained significant experience with this work solution, which has changed many people's views of how work can be organized optimally. In addition, combining the onsite and remote work models into a hybrid work solution creates a new work environment with its own challenges and possibilities. For instance, frequently switching from one work environment to another, perhaps even asynchronously with other colleagues, brings a new element of flexibility but also of variation and uncertainty. Consequently, previously established success factors for onsite respectively remote work do not necessarily apply to the more fluid hybrid workplace. Thus, before determining whether and, if so, how the hybrid work model can contribute to performance and WLB, experiences and perceived success factors must be investigated in hybrid work environments specifically (Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, 2020a, 2021b)

Traditionally, good work environments have been characterized by outcomes such as high work engagement and effectiveness (Bakker et al., 2008; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and by WLB (Godbersen et al., 2022). Interestingly, these aspects are also among the most important factors that employers and employees raise as arguments against (employers fear diminished engagement and effectiveness) or for (employees claim to have a better WLB) continued hybrid work (e.g., Ipsen et al., 2021; Tabahriti, 2022). As such, we now turn our attention to these factors.

Work Engagement and Effectiveness

Work engagement refers to a positive work-related state within an employee that outwardly exhibits itself as motivation, which promotes task performance and fulfilment of the

organization's explicit goals (Bakker et al., 2008; Li et al., 2022; Schaufeli et al., 2006). Employees with high work engagement experience high energy, absorption and dedication to their work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Several aspects can facilitate work engagement, such as a high level of psychological empowerment, which is supported when employees perceive a sense of meaning, a sense of competence, self-determination, and impact at work (Monje Amor et al., 2021). Importantly, research shows that work engagement promotes work effectiveness (Spence Laschinger et al., 2009), a positive outcome that manifests itself as the qualitative and quantitative results of an employee's work performance (Grant et al., 2013). Indeed, work effectiveness is facilitated when employees perceive their managers support them and are given a high degree of autonomy and flexibility (Butler et al., 2007; Glass & Noonan, 2016; Grant et al., 2013). Therefore, managers who stimulate employees' engagement and effectiveness through support and empowerment also facilitate commitment and performance, enhancing organizational goal fulfilment (Boamah & Laschinger, 2015).

Although the positive relationship between engagement and effectiveness has been thoroughly explored for onsite work (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2018; Salanova et al., 2005), knowledge gaps remain in the particular context of the hybrid workplace (Li et al., 2022). Indeed, in a hybrid work environment, experiences of engagement have to occur both with (when working onsite) and without (when working remotely) the physical presence of a manager or co-workers (Müller & Niessen, 2019). Although managers and co-workers are present physically when employees work onsite and digitally when working remotely, it is unclear whether this is sufficient (or necessary) to reach satisfying engagement in a hybrid work context. Thus, employers' worry that work engagement and effectiveness are negatively impacted during hybrid work might be justified. At the same time, it may be that engagement can be reached through different mechanisms in hybrid work environments, for instance, by having a greater sense of freedom, control, and flexibility. Therefore, the employees' claim of improved efficiency might also be valid.

Work-Life Balance

The concept of work-life balance (WLB) refers to "an individual's subjective appraisal of the accord between his/her work and non-work activities and life more generally" (Brough et al., 2014, p. 2728). WLB can be increased by reducing the impact of work life on non-work life activities but can also be increased by reducing the impact of non-work life demands on work

activities (Becker et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2013). For instance, when working from home or a nearby office hub, travel time to and from work can be reduced considerably,

WLB is particularly important when exploring facilitators for performance and well-being in a hybrid workplace solution since the physical boundaries in this work environment shift from being present (when working at the office) to being symbolic (when working remotely). While it may be easier to separate work from non-work life when working onsite, more responsibility is put on individual employees when it comes to reaching a healthy balance between work and non-work activities when working remotely (Schieman & Young, 2010). This changing self-regulation responsibility means that another task is added to employees' list of responsibilities (Barber et al., 2019; Barber & Santuzzi, 2015), which might have adverse effects on WLB.

In addition, creating clear boundaries and self-regulation can become more difficult since information and communication technology (ICT) is a normal part of many workers' lives today. While ICT allows employees to stay connected with their organization and colleagues virtually regardless of where they work (Eurofond, 2020; Kossek et al., 2006), it also blurs the boundaries between work and private life, especially when work is conducted at home (Mazmanian et al., 2013). As such, some research shows that ICT affects employees' perceived WLB negatively (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Park & Jex, 2011), in part due to disruptions in recovery caused by, for instance, incoming communication outside work hours (Santuzzi & Barber, 2018) which makes it challenging to keep away from work-related thoughts (Barber et al., 2019; Barber & Santuzzi, 2015; Santuzzi & Barber, 2018). As such, a work model where the clarity of boundaries between work and leisure are constantly changing

meaning more time is available for non-work activities. However, when work is conducted onsite at the office, family issues can be left behind (e.g., when another parent takes care of a sick child at home), thus reducing the impact of non-work activities on work activities (Peters et al., 2004). and where they may be disrupted through ICT might not be as supportive of WLB as claimed

However, the ICT studies presented here were conducted before the pandemic, and employees' digital maturity has changed drastically since 2020 (Müller et al., 2022). Thus, the massive transition to hybrid work may have led to new ICT strategies to support productivity and WLB when onsite and remote work are combined. It may also have led to a

better understanding and respect for one's own and other's boundaries, thus not affecting WLB as much as it used to. Therefore, there is a need to reexamine WLB, especially in relation to ICT use and specifically in a hybrid work context.

Review of literature

Author(s) & Year	Study Title	Key Findings
Felstead et al., 2002	Opportunities to work at home in the context of work–life balance	Public sector and large organizations support remote work. Unionization rates are lower.
Perrons, 2003	The New Economy and the Work–Life Balance: Conceptual Explorations and a Case Study of New Media	New media expands work boundaries but gender disparity remains.
Kumari, 2012	Employees' Perception on Work Life Balance and Its Relation with Job Satisfaction in Indian Public Sector Banks	Strong correlation between work-life balance and job satisfaction in public sector banks.
Den Dulk & Groeneveld, 2013	Work–Life Balance Support in the Public Sector in Europe	Institutional pressure is a key driver for work-life balance support in the public sector.
Kluczyk, 2013	The Impact of Work-Life Balance on The Wellbeing of Employees in The Private Sector in Ireland	Work-life balance impacts employee well-being; work-family conflict is a major stressor.
Purohit, 2013	A Comparative Study of Work Life Balance in Various Industrial Sectors in Pune Region	Companies increasingly view work-life balance initiatives as necessities.
Sigroha, 2014	Impact of work life balance on working women: a comparative	Longer workweeks and work-life balance struggles impact women's

	analysis	personal lives.
Tewathia, 2014	Work-Life Balance in the IT Sector: A Case Study of Delhi	IT workers in Delhi struggle with work-life balance; gender factor is significant.
Yadav & Dabhade, 2014	Work Life Balance and Job Satisfaction among the Working Women of Banking and Education Sector - A Comparative Study	Work-life balance correlates with job satisfaction; education and banking sectors compared.
Padmanabhan & Kumar, 2016	Work- Life Balance and Work-Life Conflict on Career Advancement of Women Professionals in Information and Communication Technology Sector, Bengaluru, India	Work-life balance and work-life conflict significantly affect women's career advancement.
N. Sharma & Nayak, 2016	Study on Work Life Balance and Organisation Policy in IT Sector in NCR	Work-life balance policies exist in IT but are insufficient; female workers face greater stress.
Menaria & Chaudhary, 2017	A Study on Work Life Balance of Moonlight Women Employees in IT Sector in Pune Region	Women employees face significant work-life balance struggles due to dual responsibilities.
Murthy & Shastri, 2019	Special Issue, February 2019 for National Conference On Technology Enabled Teaching And Learning In Higher Education	IT industry stress levels are high; work-life balance measures like flexi schedules are being implemented.
Oosthuizen et al., 2019	Work-life balance, job satisfaction and turnover intention amongst information technology employees	Work-life balance influences job satisfaction and turnover intention in IT employees.
Aranjan	Assessing Work-Life Balance	Work-life balance significantly

Pandu, 2020	among IT & ITeS Women Professionals	impacts women professionals' happiness and family life.
Balamurugan & Sreeleka, 2020	A Study on Work Life Balance of Women Employees in IT Sector	Women employees' work-life balance is affected by job satisfaction, working hours, and conditions.
Chaudhuri et al., 2020	Work–Life balance policies and organisational outcomes – a review of literature from the Indian context	Companies prioritize family-friendly work-life balance policies to attract and retain talent.

The Landscape of Working Women in Asia and Around the World

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the global labor market, leading to a dramatic increase in women's participation in the workforce. Historically, women were more likely to work part-time or in low-paid positions, with less opportunity for management and leadership positions. In European countries, women account for over 50% of the US labor force, but underrepresentation, underpayment, and discrimination persist. In Spain, female employment increased from 32.5% in 1995 to 56% in 2007, closing the gap with other European countries. The preference theory, which relates to women's heterogeneous lifestyles, has been used to understand their choices and choices regarding work-life balance. In Asia, women's participation in the labor market has increased, with China having the highest percentage at 41% of GDP. However, dropout rates have accelerated, with 40% to 45% of entry-level job turnovers being by women. The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups found that 65% of women in the labor force are single, indicating a need for better work-life balance for career-women.

Previous studies show that most businesswomen in Myanmar are married women, and women now play a leadership role in the family's financial stability. However, they face obstacles such as persistent stereotyping and the belief that women lack necessary skills for effective leadership. In Taiwan, women's work participation rates have increased significantly over the past 40 years, with 51.5% of the female population eligible to work in 2021. However, many women feel extra pressure to prove themselves on the job due to their gender. Work stress is inevitable, and the quality of work factor and quantity of work factor

are the most powerful predictors of perceived stress and job satisfaction. In China, women account for 61.07% of the workforce in 2022, with the average wage for urban men being 22.5% higher than for women in 2019. However, a large-scale comparative study found no significant gender difference in job satisfaction or work-life balance, suggesting more gender equality in family responsibilities. Gender discrimination in the workplace is common in China, from interview stages to potential promotions.

Current Study

Although a hybrid work solution has the potential to offer a work environment where employees can be productive and healthy, there are also several caveats. Thus, there is a need for a current, in-depth understanding of which aspects positively affect organizational and psychosocial hybrid work environments (Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, 2020b, 2021b). In order to gain a better understanding of the current situation, we conducted a qualitative study to investigate employees' suggestions for how hybrid work can be organized to support collaboration, work-related health, and WLB.

Conclusion

The hybrid work model has significantly reshaped work-life balance, particularly in the IT sector, offering flexibility while introducing new challenges. While hybrid work improves job satisfaction and productivity, it also blurs work-life boundaries, increasing stress, especially for women balancing professional and domestic responsibilities. Research highlights the need for structured policies addressing digital burnout, workload distribution, and gender disparities to ensure equitable benefits. Organizations must adopt sustainable hybrid work strategies to enhance employee well-being and engagement. Future studies should explore the long-term effects of hybrid work on employee performance, organizational success, and evolving workplace dynamics in the digital era.

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