

The Well-Being Ledger of Hybrid Work: A Concise Job Demands-Resources Review of HRM Practices for the Post-Pandemic Workplace

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Abstract

Hybrid work which combines office work with remote and flexible working is likely to be a permanent feature of the work landscape for knowledge workers in a post-pandemic world. Hybrid work impacts health and well-being in a genuinely mixed way. Despite offering freedom and avoiding commuting, the role of telework in disrupting boundaries, increasing isolation, and inducing techno-stress are also mentioned. The review summarizes the literature from a Job Demands-Resources model perspective. Our aim is to better understand hybrid work as a job demand and job resource and how its balance is shaped by hybrid work design and management. In a review of telework, work-from-home, and flexible work arrangements we explore the well-being ledger linking HRM practices to engagement, burnout, satisfaction, performance and retention. We argue that such an outcome is contingent, and will be determined by the design of HRM within individual organizations.

Keywords: *hybrid work; employee well-being; job demands-resources; human resource management; flexible working*

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1. Introduction

The experience of involuntary remote working during the COVID pandemic has led most knowledge organizations to expect hybrid working, in which the employee spends part of the week at the local office and part of the week working remotely, perhaps from home. What started as a public health emergency has become a bargaining chip in the talent war, and the evidence that it need not negatively affect productivity is growing. As Bloom et al. (2024) show in their large scale field experiment within a firm, a hybrid schedule increases retention without a loss in performance. Definitively, though, the same period saw the negative externalities of what Franken et al. (2021) have dubbed "forced flexibility", namely, a lack of autonomy and blurring of the work-home boundary. For HRM, it is not so much whether hybrid work will remain, but how. Strategic HRM has hence been repositioned around the questions of flexibility, well-being and sustainable organization (Kess-Momoh et al., 2024). In doing so, it synthesizes the well-being outcomes of hybrid, remote and flexible working and the HRM practices that manage them. The contribution is integrative rather than exhaustive. It thus makes two contributions: bringing together a diverse, largely cross-sectional body of literature under the same explanatory model, and distinguishing between designed hybridity and that which is found in the data mainly because of the remote working required by the Covid-19 crisis, and acting accordingly.

Throughout, it connects the various findings to the overarching argument that the well-being effects of hybrid working are managerially controllable, and therefore to be treated neither as inevitable, in a positive or negative sense.

2. Conceptual and theoretical background

While the terms are not used in a consistent manner, telework, telecommuting, remote work, and working from home are used interchangeably with working at a distance (from a customary office) typically using information technology. Flexible work is also used, and may include work which is performed during flexible hours. Hybrid work extends across both in-office and remote work. Beckel and Fisher (2022) consider that the number of terms used interchangeably in the literature, despite their meaningful differences, creates a generalisability issue. There are multiple definitions of well-being (hedonic, such as life satisfaction and affect; eudaimonic and psychological; physical; and social, as in work relationships). Johnson et al. (2020) noted that technology-driven changes in the workplace can be liberating as well as depleting to employees' mental health.

Three theoretical models are most often used: The Job Demands-Resources model distinguishes between effort and health impairing demands and motivating or relieving factors that act as a buffer against strain. Jamal et al. (2021) applied the model to remote work during the pandemic, finding that demands and resources had diverging effects. Conservation of Resources theory states people are motivated to defend and acquire resources of value, so arrangements which put them at risk are stressful. Ameen et al. (2023) invoke boundary theory, particularly work-family border theory, to explain why the permeability of remote work is so important for well-being. Since most studies were conducted during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, confounding factors like childcare, fear, and lack of home office infrastructure cloud the conclusion and make it impossible to generalize their findings to real voluntary hybrid work.

3. Hybrid work as a balance of job demands and resources

Hybrid work can be a double-edged sword in that it has the potential to offer resources to employees on the one hand but demands on them on the other hand, such as autonomy in deciding where to work. Becker et al. (2022) found that job control protected employee behaviors and well-being during the transition to remote work. The lack of job control caused negative effects on employees. Additional job control factors that yielded positive outcomes were schedule control, a less draining commute, protected focus time, and work-life integration. Chandola et al. (2019) analyzed long-term UK data and cautiously found that some flexible work arrangements may be associated with lower chronic stress biomarkers, such as wake cortisol (conditional associations). Davidescu et al. (2020) link work flexibility with job satisfaction and job performance, and see it as one of the fundamental pillars of sustainable human resource management (HRM). Such resources are not located where an employee is situated, but exist because the employee has actual discretion, not merely a nominal option subject to monitoring or excessive workload.

These costs are also real. Social and professional isolation is the most often reported downside. Zoonen and Sivunen (2021) found that already-isolated and distressed individuals perceive greater isolation and distress when they rely more on mediated communication, such as email instead of FT communication (especially when FT contact is low). Telework contributes to the cross-cutting demand factors of overwork, boundaryless work, and techno-stress (Molino et al. 2020), such as the well-being costs of intensive technology use during telework, work-family conflict, presenteeism, and proximity penalties for employees who are not visible to the employer. Nemțeanu and Dabija (2023) demonstrated that telework, job insecurity, and work-life conflict negatively impacted employee behaviors and attitudes. These demands are also additive and negatively interacting: the demand of work drives techno-stress, which damages recovery and increases the perceived effort of social isolation. Since these demands are invisible to managers, who only see output levels, they may cumulate unnoticed until they trigger burnout or turnover.

Table 1. Job resources and job demands of hybrid work.

Job resources	Job demands
Autonomy	Social & professional isolation
Schedule flexibility	Blurred boundaries & overwork
Eliminated commute	Techno-stress
Work-life integration	Work-family conflict
Focus time	Presenteeism
	Visibility / proximity penalties

Thus this ledger (see Table 1) is double-sided, and the balance is tipped, for instance, by job control, which is regarded as a resource, and loneliness, which is regarded as a demand (Becker et al., 2022). The balance of communication quality and frequency helps buffer the isolation (Zoonen & Sivunen, 2021), and managerial and organizational support helps buffer strain. Individual characteristics and situations matter. Kaltiainen and Hakanen (2023) find both work mediation and non-work mediation between telework increases and well-being. In gendered societies, the same telework arrangement could benefit one worker but burden another. Additionally, remote intensity may moderate the relationship. There is evidence of a curvilinear relationship where hybrid work performs better than full-time telework. Fan and Moen (2023) found differences in subjective well-being between those currently telecommuting, those who have fully returned to the office, and those in a hybrid arrangement. Niebuhr et al. (2022) found an association between WFH and health/job satisfaction only in supportive environments. Heiden et al. (2020) have also found that telework can have both positive and negative effects on health, even within the higher control context of the academic environment. Figure 1 shows the distribution of studies reviewed in this paper by year of publication, with a clustering of evidence in the pandemic years.

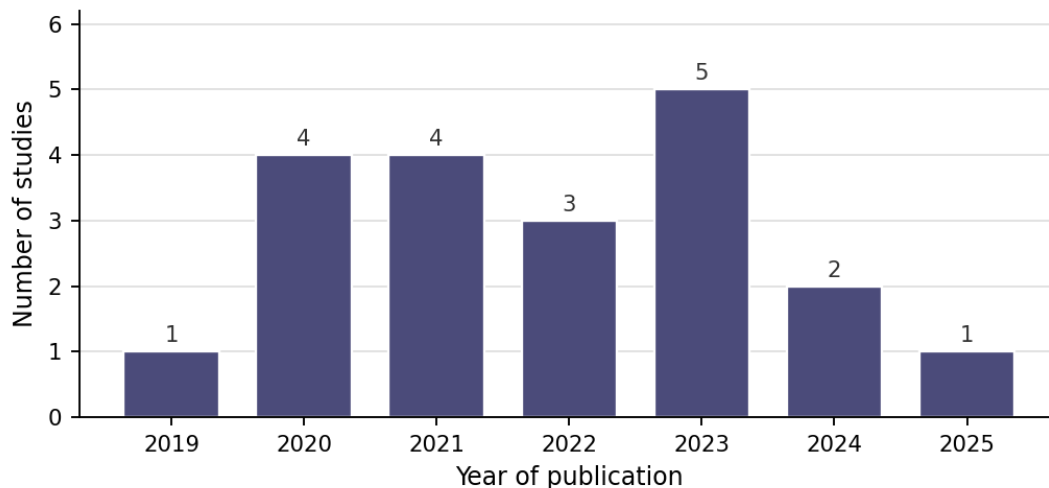


Figure 1. Distribution of the reviewed studies by year of publication (N = 20).

4. Discussion: a Job Demands-Resources framework

The JD-R model can explain why hybrid work is difficult to conceptualize. When hybrid work provides resources that match or exceed demands, it activates the motivational process, which increases work engagement, job satisfaction, job performance, and actual turnover. However, when hybrid work demands exceed resources, it activates the health-impairment process, leading to burnout and withdrawal. This is where HRM comes in: by weighing balance more carefully. In post-pandemic

Australia, Hopkins and Bardoel (2023) found that organizations were better able to design sustainable hybrid work models when well-being was treated as a design parameter, rather than an afterthought. Linking sustainability and inclusivity to well-being and organizational performance, Garcia (2025) and Chafi et al. (2021) viewed the post-pandemic office as an opportunity to create a healthier work environment rather than simply relocating the problems facing the office.

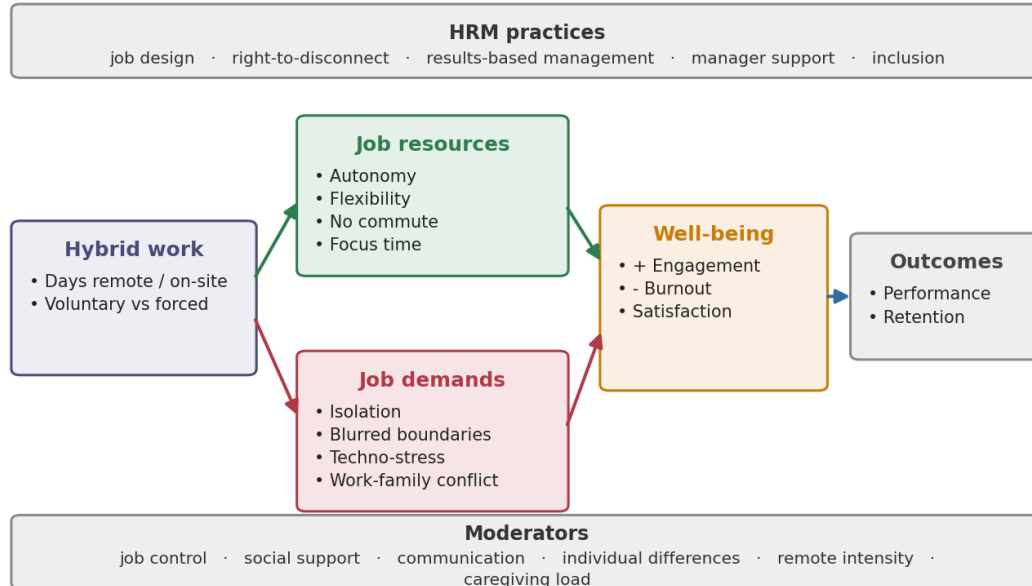


Figure 2. A Job Demands–Resources framework of hybrid work and employee well-being.

This is summarized in Figure 2, where HRM practices relate to the demands and resources in Table 1, and the JD-R paths lead to well-being and performance outcomes. Table 2 summarizes HRM practices and their intended effects. In short, job and work design seeks to shape resources and demands at the source, and not to balance resources and demands after the fact. A right to disconnect and digital tool governance reduce techno-stress and overwork. Fair access to flexibility and inclusion policies is traded off against proximity and equity, and results-based performance management displaces presenteeism forces. Since the reduction of social resources flowing from remote work is partially offset by investments in manager capability-building and well-being support, Davidescu et al. (2020), and Kess-Momoh et al. (2024) argued that sustainable HRM practices should be used strategically rather than superficially. The accompanying framework describes how such practices interact in productive and counterproductive ways. For example, a right to disconnect alone does not achieve much if performance is still measured by visible working hours. Generous flexibility distributed unequally can also reinforce the very asymmetries it was meant to level. It is bundles of reinforcing practices that tip the balance.

Table 2. HRM practices for healthy hybrid work.

HRM practice	Demand reduced or resource built	Expected well-being outcome
Intentional job/work design	Builds autonomy, focus time	Higher engagement
Right-to-disconnect	Reduces overwork	Lower burnout
Fair access to flexibility	Reduces inequity	Greater satisfaction
Results-based performance management	Reduces presenteeism	Improved performance
Manager capability-building	Builds support	Stronger retention

HRM practice	Demand reduced or resource built	Expected well-being outcome
Digital-tool & meeting governance	Reduces techno-stress	Reduced strain
Inclusion to counter proximity bias	Reduces visibility penalty	Fairer advancement
Well-being & mental-health support	Builds coping resources	Better mental health

The evidence for these linkages is mixed, sometimes contradictory; occasionally curves are involved, where there is a maximum effect at moderate levels of hybridity, or the linkages exist only in certain sectoral or supervisory circumstances. Given the reliance on cross-sectional self-reports at this crisis juncture, causal claims should be inferred tentatively, and the field would benefit from longitudinal multi-level research disentangling arrangements from pandemic confounds.

5. Implications for practice

The big lesson is that hybrid is a planned outcome, not a natural one. Instead of discussing whether to mandate office days, HRM functions should audit their own hybrid arrangements against the ledger in Table 1, and deploy the practices in Table 2 to strengthen resources and blunt demands. A critical issue is access to flexibility. When flexibility is offered too widely, the resulting inequity and proximity bias erodes trust. The key leadership lever is manager capability. Line managers represent policy in the daily experience. Their ability to lead globally dispersed teams will determine whether autonomy becomes a lever of engagement or exclusion. According to Hopkins and Bardoel (2023) and Garcia (2025), sustainability and equity principles should be integrated into the design; according to Chafi et al. (2021), the physical office should be viewed as an asset for connection and collaboration, rather than as a tool for control.

6. Limitations and future research

This review is by necessity selected and inherits the weaknesses of its sources. The most important weakness of the current evidence base is forced flexibility: remote working was imposed on participants and is thus conflated with the stresses of lockdown. Franken et al. (2021) noted that this may slightly reduce generalizability to designed hybrid arrangements. Most studies are cross-sectional, and knowledge work and professional work are over-represented in the studies. Future research should employ longitudinal and multilevel research designs following employees once arrangements are stabilized, examine a more subtle aspect of remote intensity on its plausibly curvilinear curve, and test HRM practices as manipulable HR interventions rather than as correlations with the presence or absence of remote work. Fan and Moen (2023) illustrate the potential of types of arrangement learning across time, a technique the field should employ well beyond the pandemic window.

7. Conclusion

In general, hybrid work offers autonomy, saved commuting time, and integration at the cost of social isolation, blurring of work-life boundaries, and techno-stress. The resulting impact on well-being can be positive or negative depending on the balance between these two faces. The JDR model makes that balance visible, with HRM building resources while reducing demands when the 'motivational path' predominates over the 'health-impairment path'. The evidence for that state is inconclusive, often curvilinear, and limited by its origins during the economic crisis. Confident prescription is thus premature. What is clear, however, is that well-being in the context of hybrid work is not technology luck but rather an issue of design that is entirely in the hands of HRM.

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