

Hybrid Work Culture as a Sustainable Organizational Strategy in the Indian Context

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Abstract

Hybrid work is probably one of the most debated workforce models in the last few years and many companies are formally committing to it. This paper tries to get to the bottom of these two key questions. Based on qualitative research into Indian companies where leaders are making different types of interventions to try to make hybrid work a success, and the resultant employee experience, workforce retention and the operational and equity consequences that have been surfaced, our common thread of learning is that hybrid work models are only as good as the people practices, which include people policies, performance management and culture, that organisations put in place to support them.

Unless there is a conscious attempt at structuring hybrid models in India, current “work from home” hybrid models have the potential to cause unprecedented management challenges and career risks for the employee because of work management issues and unfair visibility of work. Thus, we conclude with the need for contextual sustainable hybrid model for India and the possibility of gaining the benefits from flexible work arrangements.

I. INTRODUCTION

The way we work is changing at lightning pace. Gone are the days of the 9 to 5, 9 days a week traditional office environment. With the shift in global workforce dynamics, many employers are embracing new flexible work practices by engaging remote workers while still requiring some on-site days. Moreover, in a huge departure from emergency COVID remote work policies, many employees are now working in a new hybrid model that blends on and off-site days to balance work, life and family needs. Hybrid work is now a formal workplace strategy intended to provide real benefits to all stakeholders, including employees, employers and the bottom line.

Hybrid work and India this post was originally published on Guruprasad M B's personal blog. Reproduced with permission. Hybrid work is a very different animal when applied to countries like India. Hybrid work introduces structural ambiguity to working relationships that have been designed with a completely different assumption of work and its management. The work environment and the way of work in a highly hierarchical and deeply patriarchal society such as India is built upon premises that are vastly different from those of the hybrid model. In India, the location as well as the manner of work has historically been a criteria for determining the quality of work, and team performance, workplace fairness and team morale all present new and complex management challenges in a hybrid remote and office-based workplace environment. The issues are the same as those in the Western world but the context is dramatically different and managers will need to figure out how to balance their remote and on-site team inports and achieve the outcomes they require, manage their teams to desired levels of performance, achieve fairness in the workplace and preserve team morale in a work environment where few if any physical indicators of performance, workplace fairness or team morale exist.

Hybrid work and sustainable organisations Hybrid work is a work model where employees divide their time between being physically present at the workplace and remotely in their homes or elsewhere. We conceptualize hybrid work as a sustainable work practice strategy for organizations in India. Sustainability has four dimensions; economic, environmental and social. This study explores how hybrid work arrangements could contribute to sustainable organization outcomes given the right work systems, human resource management practices and leadership behaviours.

Literature Review

Organizational and Employee Outcomes

For years, employees, managers and organisations have believed that flexible working practices would bring many benefits, such as higher job satisfaction, a better work-life balance and increased productivity. Researchers from Michigan State University found in a study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* by Allen, Golden & Shockley (2015) that flexible working practices did indeed lead to higher work-life balance and employee engagement only if employees understood their work requirements, and that managers were adequately prepared for the additional responsibilities. Now, a study published by Bloom et al (2022) has found that those working remotely who had targets to meet in relation to their work output were more productive than those who did not, while those given unstructured flexible working arrangements were less productive.

Hybrid work is not just about teleworking or remote work, but a more complex model that provides more flexibility for workers, while at the same time there are times when it is necessary to physically be in the office to carry out collaborative work. That hybrid working models structures are integrated with appropriate cultural and institutional practices to ensure the continuity of hybrid work models.

Employee Engagement and Workforce Agility

Employee engagement is mediator variable between hybrid structure and organizational performance. Naqshbandi et al. (2024) in their study opined that trust and managerial support in hybrid structure is vital for enhancing the employee engagement. Jindain and Gilitwala (2024) in their study opined that employee engagement has positive impact on the performance of employees working under hybrid work model. Srivastava and Pandey (2025) in their study opined that workforce agility as a construct has significant impact on the productivity of knowledge workers in knowledge economy, especially in hybrid work models.

Sustainability and Cultural Compatibility

Another advantage of hybrid work is the sustainability of the organization. As hybrid work reduces dependency on the infrastructure, and reduces transportation related emissions. In addition, hybrid work could also lead to employee retention as Hybrid work reduces the need for employees to choose between work and family (Krajčík, Schmidt, & Baráth, 2023). However, it is important that hybrid work does not affect the current culture of the organisation. Hybrid work in the Indian context may not work, given that the Indian culture is very top down and has a strong affinity to network for career growth, and in today's time, where everything is focused on "visibility leads to recognition and rewards", implementing ad-hoc hybrid models may not be conducive to the Indian workforce culture. As suggested by Verma et al. (2023) there is a need to establish structured

attendance norms and performance management practices to align hybrid work with the Indian context and culture.

Theoretical Anchoring

Three theoretical lenses guide the study:

- Social Exchange Theory – This perspective examines the relationship between trust and workplace engagement in the context of a hybrid workplace model with leaders and employees who mutually engage.
- Resource-Based View (RBV) - Human capital is a key resource and flexibility at work enables employers to retain this resource.
- Innovative Activity - Institutional Theory This section addresses the question of how hybrid practices come to be accepted as part of the normal work routine in organisations, assuming that such practices must be compatible with the dominant culture and structures of the organisation.

Objectives of the Study

- Examine hybrid work as a sustainable organizational strategy.
- Evaluate its suitability within the Indian managerial and cultural context.
- Identify challenges in implementation.
- Propose a context-specific sustainable hybrid framework for Indian organizations.

Methodology

Research Design

Methodology of Study The study has adopted qualitative research methodology having a conceptual and exploratory design. It does not intend to establish any statistical relationship between variables but endeavours to explain hybrid work as a sustainable HR practice in the Indian context.

Hybrid work in India is in its infancy, and so there is a need for a conceptual and interpretive research approach to integrate insights derived from existing academic literature, policy discussions and industry practices. This study is theoretically rather than empirically oriented.

Research Approach

The research was carried out based on the interpretivist philosophy of science. It is assumed that organisations have socially constructed and culturally embedded systems. Hybrid work cannot be assessed with performance and productivity metrics, but with leadership behaviors, employee perceptions, norms and the socio-cultural factors prevailing in organisations. The methods used in this study were:

- Literature synthesis of contemporary peer-reviewed studies and policy reports
- Thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns
- Contextual interpretation within Indian organizational culture

Data Sources

- Bibliography of Recent, Peer-Reviewed Articles on Hybrid Work and Sustainable Work Practices The list contains recent (2015-2025) and relevant, peer-reviewed articles about hybrid work, employee engagement, performance and sustainability.
- Industry Reports: Indian corporate HR policies and hybrid frameworks.
- Sustainability Reports: Environmental and organizational sustainability analyses relevant to hybrid work.

Analytical Framework

- Initial Coding: Some of the initial codes associated with the themes that emerged from the data include: Engagement, Productivity, Leadership in the New World, and Proximity bias.
- Theme Consolidation Group the individual themes into the dimensions of organizational, social and environmental sustainability.
- Topics are to be taken in the context of Indian managerial practices and culture.
- To be eligible, participants must currently be registered for the MBA programme at IIM Indore and enroll in the corresponding Term Paper subject. Participation is also open to alumni of IIM Indore

Reliability and Limitations

Methodological rigor is ensured through triangulation and thematic transparency.

The main limitations are the absence of primary data and sector specific variations that may not hold good for all Indian industries.

Results and Discussion

Organizational Sustainability

Hybrid work reduces real estate dependency and operational costs and is a viable talent retention strategy. Achieving productivity gains requires clear performance metrics and accountability.

Social Sustainability

Hybrid models allow for a better balance between work and personal life and promote more fairness at work. Many employees who work remotely full-time report feeling less seen and less promoted.

Environmental Sustainability

If your organisation can achieve a reduction in business travel and workspace, this will also have a positive impact on the reduction of your carbon footprint. Hybrid working is a way to achieve this.

Cultural and Sectoral Fit

Hybrid models with fixed days for on-site physical integration in India are more widely accepted than work from home (WFH). Knowledge work sectors such as IT, consulting, finance and education appear to be more amenable to hybrid models than manufacturing and frontline services.

Proposed Sustainable Hybrid Framework

The framework rests on five pillars:

- **Structured Policies:** Clear hybrid guidelines and defined office presence schedules.
- **Outcome-Focused Evaluation:** Performance-based metrics replacing visibility-based assessments.
- **Equity Safeguards:** Anti-proximity bias policies ensuring fairness for remote employees.
- **Leadership Training:** Developing trust-based and culturally sensitive management practices.
- **Digital Enablement:** Technological infrastructure supporting seamless collaboration and monitoring.

Managerial Implications

- Redesign performance evaluation systems to measure outcomes rather than physical presence.
- Conduct periodic in-person engagement initiatives to reinforce culture.
- Train managers in trust-based leadership to reduce proximity bias.
- Use technology to support equitable monitoring and collaboration.

II.CONCLUSION

Hybrid work as a sustainable work model in India. By Kavi Kumar, Research Director, Gartner, and Richa Bhatia, Research Director Hybrid work, when combined with the right people, process and technology practices and policies, could be one of the sustainable work models for India. Hybrid work needs to be deliberately integrated into the formal structures and systems of an organization, and should not be treated as an afterthought Hybrid work models can offer the best of both worlds — high workplace productivity and employee engagement, and

sustainability, thereby becoming an integral part of a sustainable organisational model.

III. REFERENCES

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