

HYBRID WORK MODELS: EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT POST-PANDEMIC WORK ARRANGEMENTS

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Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic has prompted discussions on designing hybrid work models of flexible working in a post-pandemic world. Digitally savvy workers are at the core of these discussions as their digital skills not only enable the rise of hybrid work models but make them indispensable for company growth and success. The scientific literature on hybrid working models does not offer many studies either regarding remote team management needs identification or organizational readiness for the coming changes. Therefore, the objective of this study is twofold. Firstly, this study, supported by secondary data from Gartner's global employee survey, attempts to bridge this gap and complement the emerging debate on the future of hybrid work. Secondly, the objective of this paper is to devise a Hybrid Work Context Framework to help companies assess their level of readiness for the new working arrangements. In conclusion, along with formulating a set of managerial recommendations that may help design agile hybrid work arrangements, existing opportunities for reskilling and upskilling through online learning courses were evaluated and suggested. These conclusions should help managers fully exploit the newly emerging competitive business opportunities.

Key words: digital competency, digitally savvy worker, Hybrid Work Context Framework, remote team management, reskilling and upskilling courses

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Introduction

In the current digital transformation era and the protracted COVID-19 pandemic, business leaders worldwide appreciate HR management's crucial role. Without HR professionals' hard work and timely smart decisions on preparing the workforce to be digitally savvy, many organizations would be unable to operate under today's challenges. Reskilling and upskilling

of team leaders and members have become a competitive edge. This strategic approach is highlighted by many researchers (Bennett & McWhorter, 2021, Agrawal et al., 2020).

The need to work from home, which seemingly, emerged overnight in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, has confronted many myths. Many of these myths are related to the traditional “command and control” management style. Moreover, working from home has cast doubt on former business practices where this course of action was considered an employee benefit. Also, ad hoc remote work arrangements typical for the first year of the pandemic may differ from the hybrid work arrangements needed now and in the future.

The recent MIT Sloan Management Review research report, *Leadership’s Digital Transformation*, acknowledges that business is experiencing an era of “*context collapse.*” On the subject of leading a digital workforce, the authors comment: “*Leading a digital workforce is also increasingly fraught because technologies have accelerated the blurring of historical boundaries between home and work; the individual and the institutional; and shareholders and stakeholders, employees among them*” (Schrage et al., 2021).

1 Methodology, secondary data sources in context and results

This paper’s analytical section aims to dispel existing misleading myths about hybrid working that appear prevalent among members of the C-Suite. It also aims to provide insight into real-life situations in business practice and offer guidance for the future.

Owing to this study topic of global character, in their quantitative research, the authors of this paper decided to work with secondary data analysis and the Chi-Square Test of Homogeneity using the findings of reputable Gartner's global surveys, published in "*7 Myths Standing between you and a Hybrid Future of Work*" (Gartner, 2020). Gartner's research report identified seven myths about a hybrid work model. These myths stem from the oldest and most enduring myth about the workforce "*You cannot trust employees to do their jobs if you cannot see them*" (Gartner, 2020). However, the research findings suggest otherwise. Tab. 1 summarizes the most critical findings that refute the myths.

Tab. 1: A hybrid future of work (based on Gartner’s research findings)

MYTH 1	Business managers believe that the existing remote work strategy will work for a hybrid workforce.		
Data and findings	Gartner’s opinions/assumptions	Benefits / recommendations	

Existing workforce strategies were based on exceptional remote work. In the post-pandemic era, remote work will stay part of hybrid working model.	Hybrid workforce strategies go far beyond remote work. The hybrid model assumes the ability to flow through work-on-site, work interchangeably and work remotely.	Reduced operating costs; improved employee value proposition; expanded access to lower-cost talent pools.
MYTH 2 Business managers believe that employees are less productive outside the office.		
Data and findings	Gartner's opinions/assumptions	Benefits / recommendations
Higher performance of fully remote employees reported: 48% (high discretionary effort) and 41% (high enterprise contribution). n=5,002.	In reality, remote workers more often go above and beyond and report higher performance.	Creating the best conditions for the employees will boost productivity: resources (new hardware equipment), managerial and skills support.
MYTH 3 Business managers are convinced that they need to monitor and measure what the employees are doing.		
Data and findings	Gartner's opinions/assumptions	Benefits / recommendations
55% of high performers (radical flexibility given) compared to 36% of high performers (9 to 5 in the office); n=5,000.	Employees thrive when given radical flexibility and are allowed to decide where, when and how much they work.	Cost-optimized workforce footprint; strengthened employer brand; strong contributions to revenue from innovation.
MYTH 4 Business managers believe that their jobs cannot be done remotely		
Data and findings	Gartner's opinions/assumptions	Benefits / recommendations
Hybrid workforce models look beyond roles. Most jobs fall somewhere between fully portable and fully nonportable.	Evaluation of the portability of tasks.	Identification of the tasks that can be done remotely.
MYTH 5 Business managers are convinced that they need in-person contact to sustain corporate culture.		
Data and findings	Gartner's opinions/assumptions	Benefits / recommendations
Closed and open dominant mindset. Closed mindset = hybrid work is a risk; open mindset = hybrid work is an opportunity.	Collaboration, agility and trust are increasingly important cultural values in resilient organizations and don't relate to physical location.	Foster those behaviors in a hybrid model which help to create a shared purpose and deeper connections with and among full-time employees.
MYTH 6 Business managers agree to the statement that hybrid workforce models hurt DEI models (diversity, equity and inclusion initiative).		
Data and findings	Gartner's opinions/assumptions	Benefits / recommendations
Organizations with sustainable DEI initiatives report 20% change in inclusion. n=9,689.	The imperative is to remove unconscious bias in talent recruitment and development and performance management processes.	Commitment to DEI initiatives; ensure everyone is heard in a virtual meeting.
MYTH 7 A conflict of priorities between the enterprise's priorities of speed and agility and IT infrastructure mandates for reliability and agility.		
Data and findings	Gartner's opinions/assumptions	Benefits / recommendations

Resilient, future-fit organizations need “Everywhere Enterprise” strategies.

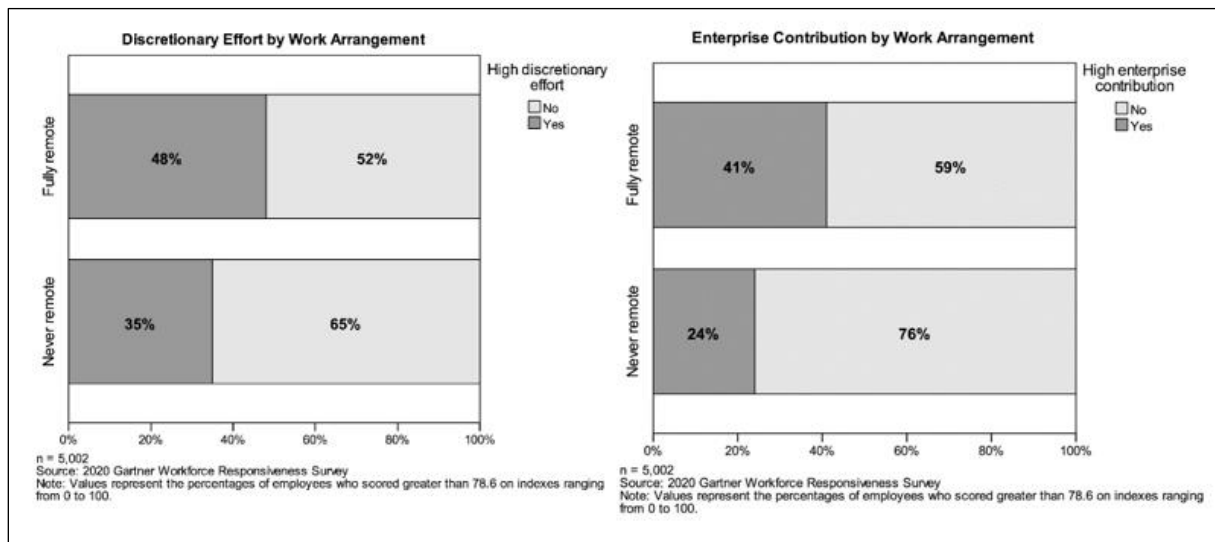
A need to define requirements, optimize performance and invest in cloud-based services able to deliver reliable service regardless of worker location.

Robust cloud-based infrastructure provides business managers the possibility to quickly shift capacity in response to disruption.

Source: own elaboration based on “7 Myths Standing between you and a Hybrid Future of Work” (Gartner, 2020).

Focusing on the myth which is highly relevant for the current business practice, i.e., that “Employees are less productive outside the office”, Gartner’s experts elaborate on two points: (1) *high discretionary effort* and (2) *high enterprise contribution*, examining separately the categories of ‘fully remote’ and ‘never remote’ workers (Gartner, 2020) – see Fig. 1.

Fig. 1: Discretionary effort and enterprise contribution by work arrangement



Source: own elaboration based on “7 Myths Standing between you and a Hybrid Future of Work” (Gartner, 2020)

To examine the topic, the authors have formulated the following hypotheses:

H1 The employees working remotely (fully remote) and employees working under standard work arrangements (never remote) reach the same levels of high enterprise contribution.

H2 The employees working remotely (fully remote) and employees working under standard work arrangements (never remote) reach the same levels of high discretionary effort.

The hypotheses were tested using the Chi-Square Test of Homogeneity, which is statistically equivalent to the Chi-Square Test of Independence. Before using this test, it is necessary to know the marginal probabilities of employees working in ‘fully remote’ and ‘never remote’ work arrangements. Although these numbers are not explicitly stated in the graphical

representation of the published research from July 2020, this study’s authors rely on the Gartner expert’s further interpretation of the study (Erben, 2021).

Based on the statistical tests performed (Tab. 2, Tab. 3), the hypotheses’ testing shows the same results for a wide range (1-99 %) of marginal probabilities. The hypotheses H1 and H2 were rejected at the level of significance < 0.01 (Sig. < 0.01).

The differences between *high enterprise contribution of employees working fully remotely and never remote*, as well as the differences between *high discretionary efforts demonstrated by employees working fully remotely and never remote*, were not only statistically rejected, but these differences represent significant findings for any business entity.

Tab. 2: High discretionary effort Crosstabulation

			High discretionary effort		Total
			No	Yes	
Count	Arrangement	Never remote	1951	1050	3001
		Fully remote	1040	960	2000
	Total		2991	2010	5001
% within Arrangement	Arrangement	Never remote	65,0%	35,0%	100,0%
		Fully remote	52,0%	48,0%	100,0%
	Total		59,8%	40,2%	100,0%
Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	84,529	1	0,000		
Continuity Correction	83,989	1	0,000		
Likelihood Ratio	84,242	1	0,000		
Fisher's Exact Test				0,000	0,000
Linear-by-Linear	84,512	1	0,000		
N of Valid Cases	5001				

Source: own elaboration based on “7 Myths Standing between you and a Hybrid Future of Work” (Gartner, 2020)

Tab. 3 High enterprise contribution Crosstabulation

			High enterprise contribution		Total
			No	Yes	
Count	Arrangement	Never remote	2281	720	3001
		Fully remote	1180	820	2000
	Total		3461	1540	5001
% within Arrangement	Arrangement	Never remote	76,0%	24,0%	100,0%
		Fully remote	59,0%	41,0%	100,0%
	Total		69,2%	30,8%	100,0%
Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	162,906	1	0,000		
Continuity Correction	162,109	1	0,000		
Likelihood Ratio	161,184	1	0,000		
Fisher's Exact Test				0,000	0,000
Linear-by-Linear	162,873	1	0,000		
N of Valid Cases	5001				

Source: own elaboration based on “7 Myths Standing between you and a Hybrid Future of Work” (Gartner, 2020)

There are strong reasons to expose the existing misleading myths about hybrid working. The so-called era of the ‘new normal’ is arriving so suddenly that it would be naive to expect to expect business leaders to begin thinking in radically different ways automatically. So, to help business leaders dispel – or at least question – the myths they believe, this study offers a framework for naming and evaluating their concerns.

The research findings imply that managers will have to modify pre-pandemic business models substantially to continue being successful. Therefore, this treatise proposes a Hybrid Work Context Framework (HWCF) as a guideline for business managers. The HWCF details the most significant areas of a hybrid work context and represents this paper's added value in terms of remote team management needs and digital competencies identification.

2 A Hybrid Work Context Framework (HWCF)

In order to complement the global survey findings with further insights and help human resource management professionals be informed about modern hybrid work arrangements and remote worker management, this paper's authors offer a **Hybrid Work Context Framework**.

Despite optimistic research findings relating to the increased efficiency of working from home (Gartner, 2020), many team leaders are still uncertain and concerned about their increased accountability for delivering results in these circumstances. Team members are expected to work remotely, crossing the boundaries of time and space. Furthermore, teams are still expected to deliver work almost at the speed of ideas and with the highest levels of creativity. In this situation, it is essential to provide systematic support based on team members' needs.

Identifying and prioritizing the critical areas for supporting teams through hybrid work arrangements is challenging. Based on the opinions of professionals and theorists specializing in organizational behavior and HR management (Ulrich, 1997; Lewin, 2021; Chamorro Premuzic, 2021; Kim, 2019; Orhan et al., 2021), this study proposes a **Hybrid Work Context Framework (HWCF)** for team leaders who, to reach and maintain high levels of agile work and deliver outstanding results, often deal with the following issues: (1) *trust*, (2) *psychological support*, (3) *social issues*, (4) *employee engagement*, (5) *security and communication*, (6) *digital skills acquisition*, (7) *cloud apps*, and (8) *compliance*. As a strategic tool, the Framework comprises eight elements of concern, ranging from trust to compliance. It can be easily

transformed into an index and re-used as a metric. The audit of the hybrid work context and the organization's readiness to adopt changes should help managers identify weaknesses in the system, both in terms of processes and people. Consequently, managers can channel their efforts and funds towards acquiring the appropriate digital competencies and people skills.

The HWCF, as a strategic management tool, includes elements of concern. Based on their analysis of each identified element of concern, the authors provide behavior models to leaders and team members in the form of a synoptic summary of the most critical findings. In an effort to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills (Knihová & Hronová, 2019), a link to one or more high-quality course(s) is included.

Tab. 4 HWCF – a strategic management tool

TRUST – What should leaders and team members do?		
Leaders	trust employees to be effective and productive	
Team members	have to be trustworthy and be able to assure their managers of this	
Opportunities for reskilling and upskilling		
Where to acquire the skills	LinkedIn Learning course	Course name: Communicating with transparency
PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT - What should leaders and team members do?		
Leaders	take care of employees' mental, physical and social wellbeing	
Team members	establish a hard line between working and private life	
Opportunities for reskilling and upskilling		
Where to acquire the skills	LinkedIn Learning course	Course name: Establishing a Well-Being Programme in Your Organisation Time Management: Working from Home
SOCIAL ISSUES - What should leaders and team members do?		
Leaders	provide help at emotional, informational and instrumental levels	
Team members	communicate promptly and provide effective feedback to team leaders	
Opportunities for reskilling and upskilling		
Where to acquire the skills	LinkedIn Learning course	Course name: Giving and Receiving Feedback
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT - What should leaders and team members do?		
Leaders	design an employee-friendly and motivating hybrid work environment free of communication overload to boost employee engagement	
Team members	being engaged, employees pass on their enthusiasm to customers	
Opportunities for reskilling and upskilling		
Where to acquire the skills	LinkedIn Learning course	Course name: Motivating and Engaging Employees

SECURITY AND COMMUNICATION - What should leaders and team members do?		
Leaders	have realistic expectations concerning potential pitfalls of virtual communication and specify technologies to be used for various tasks as well as rules to be observed	
Team members	know the communication strategy and rules in detail and respect them	
Opportunities for reskilling and upskilling		
Where to acquire the skills	LinkedIn Learning course	Course name: Business Collaboration in the Modern Workplace
DIGITAL SKILLS ACQUISITION - What should leaders and team members do?		
Leaders	in close collaboration with HR departments, team leaders motivate their team members to proactively reskill or upskill their existing skill set which they need to thrive	
Team members	appreciate and enthusiastically welcome new learning possibilities guaranteeing them a higher level of employability in the future	
Opportunities for reskilling and upskilling		
Where to acquire the skills	LinkedIn Learning course	Course name: Digital skills
CLOUD APPS - What should leaders and team members do?		
Leaders	understand cloud apps as a tool to boost productivity and facilitate teamwork in hybrid work arrangement	
Team members	learn how to incorporate cloud apps into the portfolio of their knowledge and skills	
Opportunities for reskilling and upskilling		
Where to acquire the skills	LinkedIn Learning course	Course name: Cloud apps
COMPLIANCE - What should leaders and team members do?		
Leaders	have realistic expectations concerning the potential pitfalls of virtual communication and specify technologies to be used for various tasks as well as rules to be observed	
Team members	get acquainted with the laws, regulations and codes and comply with them; when unsure while working remotely, they ask their team leader for a consultation	
Opportunities for reskilling and upskilling		
Where to acquire the skills	LinkedIn Learning course	Course name: Ethics and Compliance Courses

Source: own elaboration

The analysis reveals the following managerial implications and recommendations applicable to current modern hybrid work models: (1) managers should lead through trust and collaboration and keep learning; (2) managers should provide their employees with psychological support and mental health guidance, showing empathy and taking care of employees; (3) managers should offer social support of teams working remotely; (4) a clear communication strategy with defined rules is inevitable; (5) managers should offer their team members a helping hand in

mastering new digital skills, and (6) managers should to take care of data protection, security issues and compliance.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was twofold: firstly, to contribute to the scientific literature related to remote team management needs and organizational readiness for the coming changes in hybrid work arrangements from the viewpoint of management skills, people skills, and new digital competencies; secondly, to devise a Hybrid Work Context Framework (HWCF) as a guideline for managers based on a profound analysis of the topic and significant findings of the Gartner's global employee surveys. The study helped dispel misleading yet popular myths about hybrid work arrangements, providing much-needed insight into the real-world situation. Based on the literature review and insights into business leaders' practice, the authors of this paper devised and presented a Hybrid Work Context Framework (HWCF) that can help companies assess their readiness for the new situation.

The authors have formulated a set of managerial implications and recommendations, both for the design of agile hybrid work arrangements and relating to opportunities for reskilling and upskilling through online learning courses (Tab. 2 HWCF – a strategic management tool).

Elaborating on every aspect of future hybrid work arrangements in some detail, the paper's authors are convinced that the study serves another important goal. It involves bridging the gap between *ad hoc remote work arrangements* (typical for the first year of the pandemic) and *a thoroughly elaborated and well-thought-out basis for future hybrid work models*.

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