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Hybrid workers describe aspects that promote effectiveness, work engagement, work-life balance, and health

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ABSTRACT

While a significant number of employees want a hybrid workplace solution that combines onsite and remote work, many employers require their employees back to the conventional office. 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 explore the 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 promotes work engagement, (iii) Suitable ICT-solutions, digital maturity, and structured communication promote work engagement and effectiveness, and (iv) Workplace flexibility, empowerment, and personalized strategies promote 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.

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, several organizations allowed or even requested their employees to work from home to an extent not seen previously in modern times. Nowadays, many employees request workplace flexibility, while some organizations struggle to bring back their employees to solely work at the office (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2022). Within a time of discrepancy between employers' and employees' preferences for workplace flexibility, the aim of the current study was to explore this discrepancy and which aspects are perceived as promoting decent and productive working conditions when employees combine onsite and remote work.

Working outside the conventional office setting, originally known as telecommuting (Nilles, 1975), has prevailed for almost fifty years. Today, telecommuting is better known as remote work and includes work from home (WFH) or elsewhere outside the conventional office (Halford, 2005; Ipsen et al., 2021; McPhail et al., 2024). Similarly, in a hybrid work arrangement, employees work from different locations (i.e., remotely) but also onsite at the conventional office (Halford, 2005; Xie et al., 2019: see Table 1S in the Supplemental Materials for a list of the definitions of the various terms presented here). Susan Halford (2005), one of the earliest scholars to describe the concept of hybrid work, suggested that information and communication technology (ICT) would impact future working practices regarding when, where, and how employees work. At that time, hybrid work was described as a virtual way of working through a 'hybrid workspace'. As predicted by Halford, the concept has evolved to include spatial hybridity, where employees' autonomy and flexibility to divide their time between workplaces through multi-locality work is possible (McPhail et al., 2024). Accordingly, the debate regarding how hybrid work arrangements affect work practices and collaboration within organizations has been ongoing for a long time within research and organizations (Halford, 2005).

Recent studies have found that both hybrid work and solely working remotely have been positive for

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employees' work-life balance (WLB) and efficacy since perceived autonomy and flexible working hours are essential aspects of health and well-being in today's working life (Gibson et al., 2023; Ipsen et al., 2021). Still, several organizations want to bring their employees back to the office (Gibson et al., 2023), while many employees want a hybrid workplace solution. Some employers have even implemented drastic strategies such as termination threats or salary cuts if employees refuse to work onsite on a full-term basis (Tabahriti, 2022). Despite this debate, hybrid work is described as a new global norm (Allen et al., 2024), and efforts today should rather be spent on how to promote a sustainable hybrid working life. For instance, to keep the benefits perceived by both the organizations and employees with onsite and remote work respectively, there is a need for transparent policies regulating the degree of workplace flexibility, that is, when and how much time employees may work onsite and remotely (Allen et al., 2024; Shao et al., 2024). Indeed, experts believe forcing employees to work onsite full-time will not improve culture or collaboration (Gibson et al., 2023), contrary to what many organizations believe.

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. As such, there is a need for evidence-based policies that are suited to this new reality (Allen et al., 2024). 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 variation and uncertainty. Consequently, previously established success factors for onsite respectively remote work do not necessarily apply to the more fluid hybrid work. 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, 2021)

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 promote 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 promoted 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 promote commitment and performance, enhancing organizational

goal fulfilment (Boamah & Laschinger, 2015). Furthermore, employees have reported that they can work just as efficiently, or even better, at home as they can onsite (Chatterjee et al., 2022; Gibson et al., 2023). Nonetheless, despite the growing literature on effectiveness during remote work, there is a lack of understanding of the conditions that foster employees' efficiency within a hybrid work context.

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 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, 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).

WLB is particularly important when exploring performance and well-being in a hybrid workplace solution since the physical boundaries in this work environment shift from being present (when working onsite) 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 (Eurofound, 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 and where they may be disrupted through ICT might not be as supportive of WLB as claimed by many employees.

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.

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. Accordingly, there are several questions related to how organizations could support a sustainable working life for the benefit of both employers and employees (Chatterjee et al., 2022). Consequently, this study will address the 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, 2021). In order to gain a better understanding of the current situation, we conducted a qualitative study to explore employees' suggestions for how hybrid work can be organized to support collaboration, work-related health, and WLB.

Method

Participants

A total of 33 participants where 88% identified as women ($M = 46$ years, $SD = 9.05$, Range: 31-63 years) and 12% as men (M = 38 years, SD = 4.80, Range: 31-42 years), participated in the study. Forty-two percent of participants had children (aged 0-18 years) living at home (see Table 1 for more information on the participants' demographics). Inclusion criteria were to be 18 years or older and mainly conducting work remotely or with a hybrid workplace solution (i.e., not mainly or exclusively working onsite, nor exclusively working remotely) at the time of data collection. Participation was anonymous and voluntary. No compensation was given for participation. All national and international laws and ethical regulations were followed. Within the results, quotes are presented with a participant number (P#), gender identity (Male, Female) and age (e.g., P3, Female, 31). For participants with children at home (aged 0-18 years), this is also specified (e.g., P12, Male, 42, With children at home).

Data collection procedure and material

Data collection was conducted through an online survey created in the survey platform Qualtrics. The survey was distributed through a shareable post on the Psychology department's Facebook site, via a link on the university home page, and through purposive sharing of the link within different networks. Participants were first informed about the study via an introduction letter (i.e., information about anonymity, voluntariness, the aim of the study, and data management procedures). After that, each participant actively consented to participate in the study and accepted the data management procedures (by checking in boxes for each statement) before participating.

The survey (presented in Swedish) contained close-ended questions related to the demographics above and open-ended questions about hybrid work. The open-ended questions covered the pros and cons of hybrid work (two questions: *Describe what you consider the main [benefits of/challenges with] remote/hybrid work?*). Additionally, questions were asked about what contributed to a sustainable hybrid work-life (five questions: *Please describe what contributes to a good hybrid work environment overall). Describe success factors for [collaboration/achieving good physical and mental health] during hybrid work. Describe what [contributes to social belonging/you consider contributes to a good balance between work and leisure] during hybrid work.*). Furthermore, questions were asked regarding whether there were any changes in perceptions after the transition into remote and hybrid work (two questions: *Has the outbreak of COVID-19 changed your [perceptions of what promotes a good organizational and or social work environment/work-life balance], if so, how?*). Data extracts for quotations were translated from Swedish to English by the authors.

Data analysis

In this study, a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was used. RTA offers a flexible method to analyze qualitative data, allowing the investigation of patterns across the dataset to understand the thoughts and experiences expressed within participants' narratives. Accordingly, experiential RTA quotations are used illustratively to show examples of the narratives and not as case-by-case evidence for the aspects presented within the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In this study, we conducted the RTA by following the

Table 1. Full Demographics of the Sample.

			Children			Main Workplace	
	Gender *n* (%)	Age *M* (range)	Yes (living at home)	Yes (not living at home)	No children	Hybrid	Remote
Male	4 (12%)	38 (31-42)	3	0	1	3	1
Female	29 (88%)	46 (31-63)	11	6	12	17	12

six phases suggested by Braun and Clarke (2019, 2022). Specifically, in the first phase, the first authors familiarized themselves with the dataset by reading the data several times to understand the depth and breadth of the content. During this phase, the first authors took notes and created ideas for coding the material. In the second phase, initial coding was conducted by downloading the data into a Word document, which was used to systematically generate codes and code labels, a process that went back and forth several times. After that, codes were organized into overarching themes. In the third phase, potential candidate themes were created, with codes analyzed, and clusters created. In the fourth phase, coherent patterns across the dataset were formed, and themes were refined through active discussion between the authors. In the fifth phase, the authors further refined and defined the themes by writing a detailed analysis of every theme, keeping the narrative in mind by re-reading the whole dataset. Doing so created boundaries of what was included and not within each theme. In the sixth phase, the authors produced the current report of the analyzed dataset (see Table 2 for an overview of the analysis process).

Research positioning is important in RTA since researchers use their knowledge and experiences in the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Accordingly, we would like to highlight all authors' long personal experiences working remotely with a hybrid workplace solution. In our daily work, we collaborate via ICT, and we also meet our colleagues on-site as well as digitally. During the pandemic, our institution quickly transitioned to full-time remote work. Furthermore, two of the authors have children growing up with their mothers "working from home". Therefore, in addition to the theoretical knowledge of the field, we also brought our personal experiences and a constructivist worldview into the RTA. We used a deductive approach when exploring the data on a semantic (e.g., surface, explicit) and latent (e.g., underlying, implicit) level.

Results

The aim was to explore which aspects employees perceived as supporting a sustainable hybrid work-life, including collaboration, work-related health, and WLB. When the participants reflected on their time as hybrid workers, their expressed success factors were formed into four themes, namely (i) Combining onsite and remote work environments supports work effectiveness, (ii) Socialization and collaboration onsite and remotely promote work engagement, (iii) Suitable ICT-solutions, digital maturity, and structured communication promote work engagement and effectiveness, and (iv) Workplace flexibility, empowerment, and personalized strategies promote work-related health and WLB.

1. Combining remote and onsite work environments supports work effectiveness

Participants described a general enthusiasm about a new way of organizing work, which, when managed correctly, brought the best out of two worlds. Through hybrid work, participants' initiative and competence were perceived to be of greater importance in solving their work-related tasks, such as planning when and where to conduct different tasks. A participant said: "I'm able to plan my time when I should be in the office and not. So, I have the opportunity to gather the meetings I need to have onsite for certain days and work from home on other days" (P1, Male, 31, With children at home). Further, participants described that they could dedicate time for cognitively demanding assignments during remote work: "The possibility of being able to choose where I work based on the tasks. If the tasks require focus, I like to choose remote work so I can sit in an ultimate [undisturbed] work environment" (P7, Male, 37).

Relatedly, participants expressed downsides with the social aspects of onsite work, such as colleagues and/or managers entering their office unannounced and disrupting their work, which was not a problem during remote work: "Work can be started and finished without a lot of other things coming in between. Home is a quiet workplace where I can work when I have the energy and focus, it is not dictated by the needs of others" (P19, Female, 46, With children at home), and "Now I realize that remote work works much better than office work. When I work at home, I do twice as much and feel less stressed" (P9, Male, 40, With children at home). However, there were also participants expressing that, during remote work, sick relatives or children at home interrupted their work, thus decreasing their work effectiveness. In such situations, onsite work was a better alternative for a calm work environment. Thus, the flexibility and multilocality of the hybrid work environment allow one to choose where to work for maximal efficiency depending on the task and current situation (at home and work).

Although participants agreed that workplace flexibility, empowerment, and the use of their competence increased their work effectiveness, they differed in how working time should be distributed between

Table 2. Process Overview of the RTA.

Data Extract	Code	Theme
I'm able to plan my time when I should be in the office and not. So, I have the opportunity to gather the meetings I need to have onsite for certain days and work from home on other days.	Perceive control over planning	1. Combining Remote and Onsite Work Environments Supports Work Effectiveness
The possibility of being able to choose where I work based on the tasks. If the tasks require focus, I like to choose remote work so I can sit in an ultimate [undisturbed] work environment.	Possibility to choose workplace based on work tasks	
Work can be started and finished without a lot of other things coming in between. Home is a quiet workplace where I can work when I have the energy and focus, it is not dictated by the needs of others.	Be able to choose undisturbed work environment	
Start-up meetings at the beginning of the week.	Start-up meetings	2. Socialization and Collaboration Onsite and Remotely Promotes Work Engagement
Determine times/days for meetings and co-working that can take place remotely and/or at a workplace.	Create new meeting-structures	
Scheduled meetings both with and without an agenda in group/department/function/etc. to collaborate.	Schedule meetings to promote cooperation	
In my workplace, we booked 'Teams-coffee breaks' so that we had coffee break Team meetings that were not conversations about work.	Introduced digital coffee	
[I] see a greater need for the 'watercooler talk'. I've never been a socializer at work, but I have a much greater need to socialize now. I see how important this is to achieve a good formal collaboration.	Newfound value of social interactions	
For the social work environment, I think it would be incredibly nice to avoid all energy-consuming and concentration-disturbing moments - small talk, etc., in coffee rooms, corridors, copy rooms, etc. We must try to change the deeply rooted norm that you can only get to know each other and be a good colleague if you are physically seen daily.	Avoid onsite cold talk	
Teams works great, with chats, channels, and whiteboard for workshops, as well as office365 with live coworking in documents. […].	Digital technology as a bridge to cooperation	3. Suitable ICT-Solutions, Digital Maturity, and Structured Communication Promote Work Engagement and Effectiveness
Teams and Zoom have worked well, but knowledgeable and helpful meeting leaders are required both in terms of technology and responsiveness/attention so that all participants have the opportunity to participate and speak up.	Digital inclusion	
Good e-culture. Everyone is aware that it is a requirement. You read emails, respond to chats and are active in the digital channels required by the organization.	Good e-culture in the workplace	
Shared [communication] rules, cameras and large screens in conference rooms, a leader who clearly includes all, to jointly dare to speak about how we want it and pay attention when something does not work, clear instructions and materials with information about what is expected to happen during the meeting and what participants have to prepare.	Set common communication rules	
When I have handled the emails, I eat breakfast, get dressed and shower during [my] breaks. I manage to go for a walk at lunch, and, after work, I feel like going out to work out.	New forms of exercise	4. Workplace Flexibility, Empowerment, and Personalized Strategies Promote Work-Related Health and WLB
Maybe I turn on the computer at home early and work at home part of the morning, go to work and have lunch with my colleagues and work there for a few hours and then go home 'a little too early' to spend time in the outdoors for a while and then work for a little while in the evening instead.	Productivity is maintained Workplace flexibility supports WLB Workplace flexibility supports productivity Combine onsite and remote work during workday support social belonging	
Fatigue from staying in front of a screen for a long time.	Reduce screen fatigue	
To get a mental preparation, I 'go to work' by walking 5-10 minutes around the block before I start work […] and have an alarm on my phone so I get a signal when it's time to stop working.	Set WLB strategies	
Shut down the computer completely when the workday is over. If possible, put the work screen away from the home's social areas.	Put away work equipment - maintain boundaries	
I can alternate the working day with free time, which makes me more energetic, making it easier to take advantage of the wellness hour.	Alternate work and wellness activities	
Increased access to exercise, recreation, and working out at home during breaks and lunchtime when working from home. For example, I have been able to work out much more, which makes me more energetic because it is easy to lace up my shoes and take a shorter run between meetings, which is difficult at the office.	Training is more accessible	

onsite and remote work. On the one hand, participants suggested they should be free to choose the amount of remote and onsite work, respectively. On the other hand, participants suggested that this should be regulated at the organizational level since they perceived certain parts of work, for instance, socialization and collaboration, should mainly occur onsite.

2. Socialization and collaboration onsite and remotely promotes work engagement

Participants gave advice that could benefit the psychosocial work environment when colleagues work from different places and are at the office asynchronously to overcome the challenges that the remote part of work could pose (e.g., collaboration, loneliness). One piece of advice regarded having structured and regular digital meetings to promote collaborations and to bring the workgroup together, regardless of whether the employees worked onsite or remotely. Many participants suggested setting a day and time when the workgroup could meet digitally: "Start-up meetings at the beginning of the week" (P18, Female, 45, With children at home), and "Determine times/days for meetings and co-working that can take place remotely and/or at a workplace" (P12, Male, 42, With children at home). Also, participants expressed that a mix of unstructured (e.g., social) and structured (e.g., information and collaboration) digital meetings can improve the psychosocial work environment, thus promotes employee's performance and well-being: "Scheduled meetings both with and without an agenda in group/department/function/etc. to collaborate" (P3, Female, 31). Participants described those unstructured digital meetings, such as using a digital coffee room where employees could meet as they usually would onsite, were favourable for socialization and promoted spontaneous talk and collaboration: "In my workplace, we booked 'Teams-coffee breaks' so that we had coffee break Team meetings that were not conversations about work" (P8, Female 39). According to our participants, digital coffee breaks could be key to inclusion and reduce loneliness and social isolation. Yet, participants also emphasized that digital coffee breaks should be voluntary and based on individual socialization needs.

Furthermore, there were participants expressing a need for social interactions onsite since meeting their colleagues was something they seemed to value even more when not meeting them five days a week. As such, when working onsite, participants expressed appreciation for regular meetings with their colleagues since it promoted their work engagement and reduced feelings of loneliness: "[I] see a greater need for the 'watercooler talk'. I've never been a socializer at work, but I have a much greater need to socialize now. I see how important this is to achieve a good formal collaboration" (P11, Female, 41, With children at home). When working onsite, respondents perceived they could be more available for their colleagues, conduct meetings with customers or clients, and be creative together.

However, there were also participants challenging the norm of meeting colleagues and being social. This group of participants expressed that the removal of non-performance-oriented social interactions would be a success factor since social interactions mainly depleted their time and energy resources, thus lowering their efficiency:

> For the social work environment, I think it would be incredibly nice to avoid all energy-consuming and concentration-disturbing moments - small talk, etc., in coffee rooms, corridors, copy rooms, etc. We must try to change the deeply rooted norm that you can only get to know each other and be a good colleague if you are physically seen daily. Just because that norm is true for the majority, it is not for everyone, and we who are not this way should also be entitled to a good social work environment and thrive at work. Before the pandemic, I was really about to look for something different [job], just to avoid "socializing" with colleagues all the time. (P24, Female, 50)

Thus, for participants needing to contact their colleagues for collaboration or socialization, this could be achieved by using ICT strategies during remote work and by working onsite. However, for participants who did not need to contact their colleagues, especially to socialize, it was clear that remote strategies and onsite social meetings should be implicitly and explicitly voluntary.

3. Suitable ICT-solutions, digital maturity, and structured communication promote work engagement and effectiveness

According to the participants, suitable ICT solutions, digital maturity, and structured communication can support hybrid work collaboration, work engagement, and effectiveness. The key is to use ICT that supports social interactions and work performance. For instance, suitable ICT can support onboarding and "get to know the team activities" and ongoing collaborations: "Teams works great, with chats, channels, and whiteboard for workshops, as well as

office365 with live coworking in documents. […] Use GIFs in teams to add some emotion to the two-dimensional space and use personalized team backgrounds" (P16, Female, 42, With children at home). However, providing suitable ICT is not sufficient on its own; participants also emphasized the importance of equal and adequate digital maturity within the workgroup to ensure that employees efficiently can use the range of digital tools provided. Accordingly, within a hybrid work context, all employees should be able to collaborate both onsite and remotely. Beyond educating employees in ICT, participants also expressed the importance of the managers' e-skills: "Teams and Zoom have worked well, but knowledgeable and helpful meeting leaders are required both in terms of technology and responsiveness/attention so that all participants have the opportunity to participate and speak up" (P33, Female, 63). Accordingly, participants highlight the importance of ensuring that both managers and employees have the necessary knowledge to support hybrid interaction efficiently.

Additionally, participants expressed that structured communication and a good e-culture become increasingly important when alternating between onsite and remote work, for instance, to show when they are available for interactions. When colleagues work remotely, it can be challenging to determine if they are available or busy (e.g., in a meeting elsewhere, taking a sick day, or even being on vacation). Therefore, to make communication more accessible and efficient, participants mentioned that it should be clarified within the team which digital solutions are used for which interactions and set rules to show one's availability status. Relatedly, to avoid misunderstandings when using ICT, the communication should be particularly clear and structured: "Good e-culture. Everyone is aware that it is a requirement. You read emails, respond to chats and are active in the digital channels required by the organization." (P21, Female 46, With children at home). Subsequently, to promote hybrid collaboration and avoid misunderstandings as well as frustrations, ensuring that everyone is included when setting standards and structures for hybrid meetings was suggested as a success factor:

> Shared [communication] rules, cameras and large screens in conference rooms, a leader who clearly includes all, to jointly dare to speak about how we want it and pay attention when something does not work, clear instructions and materials with information about what is expected to happen during the meeting and what participants have to prepare. The meetings should also contain many breaks or be short. (P26, Female, 54).

4. Workplace flexibility, empowerment, and personalized strategies promotes work-related health and WLB

Participants pointed out several positive effects of hybrid work on their health and WLB. When working remotely, they perceived reduced stress and increased WLB. For instance, remote work meant reducing the time-consuming commute back and forth to the office. Participants expressed that saving time by working locally was good for their effectiveness as well as for their WLB by increasing flexibility in when and where to work, thus letting the work and life domains be intertwined: "When I have handled the emails, I eat breakfast, get dressed and shower during [my] breaks. I manage to go for a walk at lunch, and, after work, I feel like going out to work out." (P27, Female, 56). Although the workday was conducted either onsite or remotely for more respondents, employees living near their onsite office enjoyed the flexibility of hybrid work by combining onsite and remote work during the workday to optimize the positive effects of hybrid work on WLB:

> Maybe I turn on the computer at home early and work at home part of the morning, go to work and have lunch with my colleagues and work there for a few hours, then go home 'a little too early' to spend time outdoors for a while, and then work for a little while in the evening instead. Or work from relatives' homes when I want or am needed there. (P27, Female, 56).

However, to other participants, the increased flexibility and lack of clear boundaries was a threat to their WLB since they struggled to take regular breaks and suffered from the lack of ergonomic office equipment: "Fatigue from staying in front of a screen for a long time." (P25, Female, 52, With children at home). For such participants, the added responsibility of creating structure when working remotely did not appear to improve WLB but instead affected their work environment negatively. However, this seemed true for participants who lacked clear strategies to create WLB during the remote part of hybrid work. Indeed, even participants needing clear boundaries suggested strategies to preserve the benefits of hybrid work. They stressed the importance of setting clear routines, such as starting their workday at the same time and by cleaning up their workplace at home to mark the end of the workday: "To get a mental preparation, I 'go to work' by walking 5-10 minutes around the block before I start work […] and have an alarm on my phone so I get a signal when it's time to stop working" (P7, Male, 37),

and "Shut down the computer completely when the work day is over. If possible, put the work screen away from the home's social areas" (P23, Female, 48, With children at home).

Regardless of the strategies used (i.e., embracing the flexibility or setting a clear structure), participants also expressed that the remote breaks became more varied, gave them more energy, and supported their WLB better. For instance, instead of sitting around a coffee table and talking to their colleagues, they could throw in a load of laundry, prepare dinner, or incorporate more exercise into their daily lives, which was considered beneficial for their work-related health. For example, participants expressed that they used the so-called wellness hour (i.e., a weekly hour for work-related health activities paid by the employer) to a greater extent when working remotely: "I can alternate the working day with free time, which makes me more energetic, making it easier to take advantage of the wellness hour" (P18, Female, 45, With children at home). In addition, participants described that their breaks, such as lunch breaks (which previously solely were devoted to eating) now also were used for wellness activities such as exercising:

> Increased access to exercise, recreation, and working out at home during breaks and lunchtime when working from home. For example, I have been able to work out much more, which makes me more energetic because it is easy to lace up my shoes and take a shorter run between meetings, which is difficult at the office. (P6, Female, 36, With children at home).

Consequently, a few participants expressed scepticism about the implicitly "mandatory" onsite breaks with colleagues because these breaks did not offer them optimal recovery. In contrast, when working remotely, participants appreciated the opportunity to take regular breaks when needed to practice a recovery activity of their choice.

Since employees seem to appreciate the benefit of a hybrid work model on their WLB, but because they have different strategies to reach work-related health and WLB, for hybrid work to be a success factor, they request that employers meet individual needs, as well as support employees in developing and using their own strategies (which seems to be particularly important for those lacking strategies) for a sustainable work-life within a multi-locality work context. As such, it seems that the support of managers and employers in a hybrid work environment should be given to create strategies tailored to individual needs rather than to control how and where employees work.

Discussion

To bring more understanding of employees' increasing requests for hybrid work (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2022; Ipsen et al., 2021), we qualitatively investigated their suggestions of success factors for a sustainable hybrid work-life, including collaboration, work-related health, and WLB. Overall, our results support previous findings (e.g., Lund et al., 2020; Maurer, 2021), showing that employees want to continue working with a hybrid workplace solution. Interestingly, even when using broad and open questions about hybrid work, participants repeatedly related the combination of onsite and remote work to enhanced work engagement, effectiveness, and WLB.

To begin with, a key result of this study was that the onsite and remote workplaces complete each other by solving issues found in each work environment, hence supporting positive work outcomes in a better way. Importantly, participants did not claim that either of these environments (onsite or remote) was sufficient on their own, but rather that the combination of both environments is the major strength of the hybrid work model. For instance, work effectiveness was reported to be better due to a specific characteristic of hybrid work: the freedom to choose where to work based on the task. In a hybrid work model, participants could optimize their effectiveness by working remotely when conducting tasks requiring high levels of concentration or cognitive resources and working onsite when conducting tasks requiring collaboration and co-creativity. Accordingly, since combining onsite and remote work promotes positive work outcomes, hybrid work can be fruitful for both employers and employees. In addition, when participants express that hybrid work gives them more control and their competencies come in handy, they highlight aspects of importance for enhanced psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). Furthermore, in line with previous research, enhanced work flexibility and empowerment perceptions were related to work engagement and effectiveness (Butler et al., 2007; Glass & Noonan, 2016; Monje Amor et al., 2021).

Additionally, to promote co-creation, the balance between onsite and remote work must be orchestrated skilfully to lay a solid foundation for collaboration. Thus, even if ICT tools can be a communicational saviour in times of crisis (Eurofound, 2020), participants held the importance of having regular onsite interactions with their colleagues. For example, there should be room for structured and unstructured onsite and remote meetings to promote good

onboarding and a strong sense of social belonging within the workgroup. It is established that social interaction is important for employees' work engagement and goal fulfilment (see, e.g., Bakker et al., 2008; Li et al., 2022; Schaufeli et al., 2006). Nevertheless, the responses provided by our participants are divided when it comes to social interactions with colleagues. As such, social interactions (both onsite and remotely) are not a straightforward success factor for work engagement. Indeed, some participants perceived social interactions (onsite or online) as energy-draining and superfluous. Subsequently, employees' different preferences for collaborative and social interactions can be challenging and stressful for managers (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014; Kevin Kelloway et al., 2003; Nielsen et al., 2017). An easy solution, at least for the managers, may be to forbid multi-locality and require employees to return to the office full-time (Tabahriti, 2022). However, based on the responses from our participants, this solution may create dissatisfaction, which could negatively affect engagement and commitment. Therefore, it will be important for future research to investigate if and how managers and employees in hybrid workplaces can reconcile these conflicting needs and demands and whether these solutions create a work environment superior to the traditional onsite and/or remote work solutions.

Another key result was that hybrid work, particularly its flexibility, appeared to strengthen employees' work-related health and WLB, which was mainly achieved since remote work meant more spare time due to reduced commute. Participants used these extra hours for exercise, prolonged sleep, socialization, and to bring their life-puzzles together, often by intertwining work and private life matters throughout the day. However, there were also participants reporting that this extra spare time was spent on work, particularly for those lacking strategies to set clear boundaries to compensate for the increased flexibility of the hybrid work model. As the employer (at least in several Western countries) has an extended legal responsibility for occupational safety and health issues (combined with participants expressing difficulties in reaching a reasonable work level when working remotely), more research is needed to understand how employers can foster their employees' well-being and WLB in a hybrid work solution. Otherwise, there is a risk that the beneficial effect that hybrid work has on health and WLB becomes a liability to some employees.

Nevertheless, our main results were that participants experienced increased WLB during hybrid work, which is in contrast to previous research relating flexible work to unclear work-life boundaries issues (Glass & Noonan, 2016; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Schieman & Young, 2010), and to perceptions of being constantly available (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, 2020b). Since people nowadays tend to be digitally available most of the time, it could be that employees have grown accustomed to being constantly reachable and that this is part of a "new normal" in society. This is exemplified in our sample by participants who preferred to interlace work and recovery without taking traditional working day hours into consideration. For such employees, the rigid 9 to 5 onsite work structure may be more harmful to WLB than intertwining work and recovery throughout the day. However, participants who needed clear work-life boundaries had another strategy, namely applying onsite work routines when working remotely, such as "walking" to work or "leaving the office" by putting all work-related items out of sight at the end of the day. By maintaining onsite routines during remote work, employees could instead effortlessly create clear boundaries between work and private life, which is in contrast with research on remote work showing that the strive for WLB during remote work causes an extra burden (Barber et al., 2019; Barber & Santuzzi, 2015). Note, however, that our results support the notion of an added burden for employees seemingly lacking a strategy (either flexibility or structure). Nonetheless, although our results of enhanced WLB mainly go against previous findings, they might not be surprising considering that employees' remote work experiences and digital maturity grew tremendously during the pandemic (Müller et al., 2022). These new ways of either broadly and voluntarily interlacing work with private life or applying onsite work-life boundaries in workplaces despite their locality challenges the traditional predictors for WLB and even the ways of measuring WLB (e.g., clear boundaries). Hence, for future research, it is essential to re-evaluate the psychometric properties of WLB instruments and how to measure WLB qualitatively.

At the same time, the contrasting needs of different respondents highlighted a challenge that managers in a hybrid work solution will likely face, namely, to meet these varying needs that are at times contradictory. One solution suggested by our participants was implementing an explicit communication plan, as it provides information regarding when and through which channels employees should interact

with the team. Subsequently, clear communication policies can support the need for clear boundaries for some while providing a space within which those who prefer flexibility can operate without trampling on the boundaries of others. However, this can only be possible if employers strive for increased digital maturity in terms of improved skills and knowledge of ICT tools and ICT etiquette. Even if this seems straightforward on a theoretical basis, on an applied level, meeting different needs can counteract one another, such as setting clear boundaries, which will support some employees yet reduce the flexibility for others and vice versa. Accordingly, since employees differ in their need for work-related boundaries, further research is needed to understand how, for instance, communicational routines and the distribution between onsite and remote work can be formed to support all employees' WLB.

Although our results indicate that hybrid work has improved many employees' productivity, health and WLB, more research is needed to determine whether our participants' advice does, in fact, have positive effects. In addition, as with all research, our study had limitations. Since our sample consisted of 33 participants who were mainly female, the results should be used as a catalysator for reflections and further investigations. Furthermore, we did not collect information on the participants' occupations, locations, or workplaces. As such, it will be important to explore if the results generalize to different occupations, demographics, geographical areas (e.g., urban vs. rural), and types of organizations (e.g., public vs. private). Finally, as the enthusiasm for the newly found advantages of hybrid work might fade away in the long run when more experience is gained in different contexts, it will be crucial to investigate the long-term effects of adopting a hybrid workplace solution.

Hybrid work research gained new attention during the pandemic, with ongoing discussions about how the organizational and psychosocial hybrid work environment should be formed in the future. Investigating how to create decent work conditions when implementing a hybrid work model permanently is essential. Therefore, we addressed the need for more knowledge regarding how to promote effectiveness, work engagement, and WLB within hybrid work contexts.

Conclusion

A hybrid workplace solution seems to bring out the best of onsite and remote work, thus promoting a more sustainable working life. Accordingly, this study suggests that hybrid work can be positive for employers and employees since it tends to promote work engagement, effectiveness, and WLB, at least when matched adequately to employees' preferences and life situations. However, more research is needed to determine how best to implement the hybrid work model in different contexts, how to reconcile different needs, and which work activities are optimal to conduct onsite versus remotely when using a hybrid work model.

Disclosure statement

The authors report that there are no competing interests to declare. All national and international laws and ethical regulations were followed, and data are available upon reasonable request.

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Data availability statement

The data set on which this paper is based can be obtained from the first author upon reasonable request through xx-mail address.

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