

EXPLORING HYBRID WORK MODELS: ENABLERS, CHALLENGES, AND ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES

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ABSTRACT

Hybrid work models have become increasingly prevalent in response to changing workforce demands, offering improved performance, autonomy, and better work-life balance. This paper synthesises recent academic and practitioner literature on the types of work suited to hybrid arrangements, the enablers of successful implementation, and the challenges faced by organisations in adopting these models. It highlights key factors such as organisational culture, leadership, digital infrastructure, and the role of human and non-human actors in shaping hybrid work outcomes. It incorporates empirical examples to identify which sectors are substantively addressed and outlines practical team-level strategies, including communication coordination and collaborative performance metrics that support effective hybrid collaboration. It also identifies critical gaps in the literature, including the need for more sectoral tailoring, attention to team dynamics, and longitudinal research on the sustainability of hybrid work models. It concludes with directions for future empirical work and offers practical recommendations for organisations seeking to optimise hybrid work environments. The findings suggest that hybrid work models must be tailored to the nature of the work and the organisational context to maximise their potential.

Keywords: Hybrid Work Models, Leadership in Hybrid Work, Employee Productivity, Employee Well-Being, Digital Tools and Infrastructure

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INTRODUCTION

The adoption of hybrid work has significantly reshaped how contemporary organisations manage people, resources, and work itself (Gratton, 2021; Stoker et al., 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic served as a catalyst, triggering a move away from traditional office routines. Current debates now centre on the sustainability, design, and consequences of hybrid models for organisations and their workforces (Lee, 2024; Williams & Shaw, 2025). Employees consistently express strong preferences for hybrid work. Despite challenges in sustaining organisational culture and managing operational concerns, hybrid models can also support productivity gain (Charas, 2025; Gratton, 2021).

These tensions are reflected in ongoing scholarly debates. Empirical studies highlight the perceived advantages of hybrid work, including greater autonomy, improved work-life integration, and better access to talent pools (Williams & Shaw, 2025; Kumari & Yelkar, 2022). However, challenges persist, including a reported gap between how employees assess their own productivity and how managers evaluate performance in hybrid settings (Lee, 2023); organisational resistance rooted in concerns over collaboration, innovation, and accountability (Stoker et al., 2022); and evidence that rigid return-to-office mandates may generate hidden costs in terms of talent attrition and disengagement (Charas, 2025).

Hybrid work is increasingly recognised as both an organisational and a human phenomenon. Effective hybrid models must address both individual and group needs, not just institutional requirements, and tackle critical questions of fairness, inclusion, and the interplay between human and technological actors. Practitioners must confront not only logistical challenges but also rethink leadership, culture, and employee experience to ensure hybrid work is both sustainable and productive (Gratton, 2021).

This paper undertakes a structured literature review to synthesise current insights on hybrid work. It clarifies key debates and integrates findings across four guiding research questions: 1) What kinds of work are suited to hybrid models? 2) Who or what enables hybrid work in organisational contexts? 3) How do human and non-human actors shape hybrid work outcomes? 4) What are the limits of hybrid work and organising? The aim is to inform both theory development and practical decision-making.

The remainder of the paper is structured around these questions. It begins with an overview of work types suited to hybrid arrangements, then examines organisational and technological enablers. It next explores the role of human and non-human actors, and concludes by addressing the limits of hybrid working. Practical implications and directions for future research are outlined throughout.

METHODOLOGY / APPROACH

This review adopts a structured approach to synthesising recent developments in hybrid work, with a focus on business studies, particularly management, organisation studies, and work psychology. The literature search was conducted using Scopus and Google Scholar, with keywords including "hybrid work," "flexible work," "remote work," "telework" (for older publications), and "digital collaboration".

Inclusion criteria focused on English-language publications from 2020 onward, reflecting the shift to hybrid models following the Covid-19 pandemic. Older studies on remote or flexible work were included if highly relevant. Sources were selected if they addressed at least one of four guiding research questions: types of work suited to hybrid work, enablers in organisational contexts, the involvement of human and non-human actors, or the limits of hybrid work and organising.

Thematic mapping was conducted manually, organising literature around the four research questions to enable comparison of key debates, areas of agreement, and contested issues. While

the review aims for broad coverage, it is limited by language scope, the fast-evolving nature of the field, and potential publication bias.

Although the selected literature spans various disciplines and formats, many studies contain empirical material, such as organisational case studies and descriptive accounts of hybrid practices. These examples were loosely mapped onto sector classifications using ISIC Rev. 5 (United Nations, 2024) to identify patterns of sectoral engagement. A recurring emphasis was found in IT and telecoms, education, professional services, and public administration.

Types of Work Suited to Hybrid Working

Hybrid work models are suited to roles that require autonomy, focus, and cognitive engagement, while routine tasks often require more structured setups.

Knowledge-Based Work

Knowledge-based roles, such as research, strategic planning, and consultancy, are well-suited to hybrid work. These roles involve both independent tasks and collaboration. Employees can manage their time remotely, but in-person collaboration is essential for tasks requiring brainstorming or decision-making. For example, a scientist working on research may analyse data independently but needs periodic team meetings for feedback (Gratton, 2021; Jaß et al., 2024; Bloom et al., 2025; Castañeda et al., 2025). Hybrid work allows employees to schedule solo tasks with greater autonomy, while reserving in-person interaction for complex activities. This combination of task-based and location-based flexibility supports roles in IT, consulting, and other knowledge-driven sectors, where solo and group work can thrive with the right digital infrastructure (Gibbs et al., 2024).

Studies show that hybrid models in higher education balance teaching, management, and innovation through a mix of remote and in-person activities (Bloom et al., 2025; Castañeda et al., 2025). In the education sector, Innstrand et al. (2022) document how Norwegian universities adopted hybrid models for academic staff, allowing more flexible approaches to teaching and research. Yet, staff faced role conflict and overwork, particularly in student-support roles requiring both digital and physical presence.

Deep-Focus Work

Deep-focus tasks, such as writing, coding, or analysis, thrive in hybrid settings, particularly for roles requiring sustained concentration and minimal distractions. While occasional collaboration or feedback is necessary, these tasks are best done remotely, allowing workers to manage their time without interruption. Employees in these roles benefit from the quiet and autonomy of home-office environments, making hybrid models particularly effective (Gibbs et al., 2024; Kumari & Yelkar, 2022). Tjernberg et al. (2025) highlight hybrid work practices among scientific consultants in Sweden, where remote periods enabled focused analysis, while scheduled onsite meetings supported client engagement. This structure preserved both autonomy and service continuity.

Routine and Administrative Tasks

Administrative roles in public administration, consulting, and other sectors benefit from remote task completion and more autonomy, with tasks such as report writing and digital communication done remotely, while more complex or collaborative tasks are reserved for office days (Gerding et al., 2021; Halford, 2005; Hanzis & Hallo, 2024). However, the success of hybrid models depends on task matching and organizational support for collaboration (Jaß et al., 2024; Chafi et al., 2021).

Enablers of Hybrid Working in Organisational Contexts

The successful implementation of hybrid work depends on several key enablers that vary across organisational contexts. These include organisational culture, leadership practices, digital

infrastructure, ergonomic and spatial conditions, human agency, and training. Each factor is crucial for ensuring that hybrid models are not only feasible but also sustainable and effective.

Organisational Policies and Formal Support

Robust organisational policies and formal support mechanisms are key enablers of hybrid work. Effective hybrid work requires more than just digital tools or informal remote arrangements. Clear policies, sustained leadership engagement, and ongoing support are essential. Kumari and Yelkar (2022) stress the importance of maintaining organisational culture, transparent communication, employee recognition, and formal hybrid models. Policies should also adapt management and appraisal systems for distributed teams (Stoker et al., 2022). Leadership engagement, managerial adaptability, and organisational support are critical for embedding hybrid norms (Halford, 2005; Rockmann & Pratt, 2015). Messenger and Gschwind (2016) highlight that the full benefits of digital tools emerge only when supported by equitable, flexible policies. Jaß et al. (2024) underscore the need for a coherent organisational framework for integrating digital infrastructure.

While sectoral and contextual differences exist, studies such as Tjernberg et al. (2025) and Marozva and Pelsler (2025) highlight the importance of inclusive decision-making, resource provision, and adaptable working arrangements, particularly in sectors like higher education and public administration. The role of line managers in interpreting policies and supporting hybrid practices is also critical (Williams & Shaw, 2025; Gratton, 2021).

Leadership, Culture, and Social Climate

Leadership and organisational culture are pivotal enablers of hybrid work. Kumari and Yelkar (2022) emphasise the need for a strong organisational culture, transparency, and inclusive management practices. Leadership support is essential to grant autonomy in remote work while maintaining collaboration (Rockmann & Pratt, 2015). Jaß et al. (2024) and Castañeda et al. (2025) show that supportive leadership in knowledge-intensive sectors enhances hybrid work effectiveness by promoting well-being and innovation. While Jaß et al. (2024) base their findings on qualitative interviews in German public administration, Castañeda et al. (2025) draw from secondary synthesis across educational contexts. This contrast reflects both sectoral and methodological variation in how leadership effectiveness is assessed.

The role of trust, mutual respect, and adaptability in leadership is emphasised by Jindain and Gilitwala (2023) and Chafi et al. (2021), who highlight that trust-based management and flexible policies are key to sustaining engagement and performance. Effective leadership and a supportive organisational climate ensure successful hybrid work by maintaining trust and engagement, whether remote or in-person.

Digital Infrastructure and Communication Technologies

Digital infrastructure and communication technologies are fundamental enablers of hybrid work. Messenger and Gschwind (2016) emphasise the importance of ICTs such as email, videoconferencing, and cloud-based tools for remote work. Halford (2005) adds that robust ICT support is critical, alongside policies supporting spatial flexibility. Stoker et al. (2022) stress the importance of managerial capabilities in using these technologies effectively.

Gibbs et al. (2024) and Hanzis and Hallo (2024) find that coordinated use of communication platforms and consistent digital infrastructure support are key for sustaining innovation and collaboration in hybrid teams. Bloom et al. (2025) also highlight how digital tools are reshaping workplace communication, especially among in-office employees who now prefer digital methods like messaging and videoconferencing. For example, Bentley et al. (2016) describe how IT firms in New Zealand integrated collaborative platforms and remote-access systems to support software teams across dispersed locations. However, they also report that inconsistent ICT support and uneven training led to productivity gaps between tech and non-tech staff.

Ergonomic and Spatial Conditions

Ergonomic and spatial conditions are central to the success of hybrid work. Gerding et al. (2021) stress the importance of ergonomic equipment and suitable workspaces for productivity and health. Appel-Meulenbroek et al. (2022) emphasise that both home and office workspace design, including noise control and privacy, significantly affect work outcomes.

Studies show that employees manage their environments to maintain productivity, with organisational support playing a key role in providing ergonomic resources and spatial flexibility (Dale et al., 2024). Bentley et al. (2016) and Yang et al. (2023) find that home office conditions, such as ergonomic furniture and privacy, enhance productivity and satisfaction, making supportive infrastructure critical to hybrid work.

Human Agency and Behavioural Adaptation

Aprilina and Martdianty (2023) emphasise that autonomy and effective time management are key to satisfaction and productivity in hybrid settings. Their study relies on self-reported data from employees in a corporate setting, capturing perceived productivity rather than observed outcomes. This reflects a broader trend in hybrid work research, where findings often prioritise individual experience. Research by Hanzis and Hallo (2024) and Dale et al. (2024), similarly highlights the importance of boundary-setting and time management for sustaining performance and connection.

Hybrid work also involves a shift towards digital communication and collaboration, with employees and managers adapting to new formats and expectations (Bloom et al., 2025; Sokolić, 2022). This shift, supported by organisational structures, enhances both individual and collective performance across hybrid teams.

Training and Competence Development

Training and competence development are vital for hybrid work success. Stoker et al. (2022) emphasise the need for ongoing training in digital tools and leadership behaviours that support hybrid work. Williams and Shaw (2025) further highlight the importance of equipping employees with the necessary skills, particularly in digital competence and time management. Castañeda et al. (2025) and Gratton (2021) underscore the importance of leadership training and alignment with corporate values for engagement in hybrid settings. Chafi et al. (2021) note that the development of digital competence and trust-based management are crucial enablers of hybrid work.

Impact of Human and Non-Human Actors in Hybrid Working

Hybrid work models are shaped by both individuals and non-human actors—tools, technologies, and physical spaces—that facilitate and structure work. The interaction between human and non-human actors is a critical enabler of hybrid work, influencing work outcomes and organisational dynamics. These interactions shape structure, leadership, cult

Structuring Work and Organising Systems

Halford (2005) shows that human actors (managers, employees, teams) and non-human actors (ICTs, digital tools, remote technologies) reshape work across various spaces, enabling new forms of collaboration and surveillance. Human actors adapt practices to maintain productivity and relationships, while organisational culture shapes the uptake of remote work (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). Appel-Meulenbroek et al. (2022) note that workspace features and technologies influence task performance, with leadership mediating satisfaction in hybrid arrangements. However, risks such as psychological strain or digital exclusion can arise from poorly managed resources (Tjernberg et al., 2025). Organisations must also adapt to socio-technical systems in which workflows are co-shaped by human agency and technology (Sokolić, 2022), with digital platforms influencing innovation in hybrid models (Castañeda et al., 2025).

Leadership, Culture, and Collaborative Practices

Stoker et al. (2022) observe that leadership in hybrid settings requires less direct control, with managers expected to delegate more. However, employees often do not perceive increased delegation, and leadership shifts depend on enabling technologies and organisational support. Kumari and Yelkar (2022) show that leadership, collaboration, and organisational culture in hybrid environments emerge from the interplay of leadership practices and digital systems. Leadership styles fostering trust, transparency, and inclusivity are key to maintaining engagement in hybrid work.

Hanzis and Hallo (2024) demonstrate how leadership behaviours evolve in response to digital and physical environments, establishing new norms for digital etiquette and coordination. These norms are mediated by non-human actors like MS Teams that influence how teams collaborate. Jaß et al. (2024) and Chafi et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of human adaptability and digital competence in leadership and collaboration, noting that misaligned tools can hinder teamwork. Overall, their effectiveness depends on the alignment of leadership, culture, and technology.

Employee Experience: Relationships, Inclusion, and Wellbeing

Dale et al. (2024) show that managers and co-workers play a critical role in enabling or hindering hybrid work. Supportive management practices influence employees' sense of inclusion and engagement, while inadequate support can create negative experiences. Marozva and Pelser (2025) highlight that reduced physical interactions and insufficient onboarding can undermine social connections, while personality traits also play a role.

Rockmann and Pratt (2015) discuss how offsite work alters the value of in-office interaction, leading to isolation. The contagion effect, exacerbated by non-human systems, can erode team cohesion. Aprilina and Martdianty (2023) reinforce that employee satisfaction is linked to human actors' ability to reconcile roles, while non-human actors like ICT systems and ergonomic equipment support well-being.

Gerding et al. (2021) emphasize the impact of physical workspace conditions on comfort, health, and performance. Cuerdo-Vilches et al. (2021), Bentley et al. (2016), and Haapakangas et al. (2018) underline the importance of workspace features and household dynamics in the hybrid work experience. Yang et al. (2023) add that environmental factors and family presence affect productivity and satisfaction positively or negatively.

Limits of Hybrid Working and Organising

While hybrid work models offer organisational flexibility, productivity, and work-life balance, they also present limitations. These challenges arise from both human and non-human factors, and may reduce their effectiveness. Key challenges include isolation, communication breakdowns, equity issues, and incompatibility with some roles or sectors.

Social Isolation and Weakened Interpersonal Connection

Social isolation and weakened interpersonal connections are common limitations of hybrid work. Marozva and Pelser (2025) highlight issues like reduced informal communication, limited networking, and onboarding challenges, intensified by leadership style and under-resourcing in sectors like higher education. Their study used self-reported survey data from academic staff, capturing perceptions of social isolation and support gaps rather than observed behavioural outcomes.

Rockmann and Pratt (2015) find that hybrid models can erode both onsite and offsite workspaces, increasing isolation, particularly when remote work diminishes the role of physical offices in sustaining collaboration. Halford (2005) and Hanzis and Hallo (2024) note that remote employees face pressure to demonstrate productivity, exacerbated by the absence of spontaneous interactions and non-verbal cues. Castañeda et al. (2025) and Jindain and

Gilitwala (2023) underscore weakened collaboration, diminished organisational culture, and loss of trust resulting from fewer face-to-face interactions.

Communication and Collaboration Breakdown

Hybrid work environments often struggle with maintaining communication and collaboration. Gibbs et al. (2024) identify a drop in innovation when teams fail to align their office and remote working patterns, with digital tools sometimes hindering spontaneous interaction. Tjernberg et al. (2025) argue that hybrid work can blur boundaries between work and personal life, increasing psychological strain and hampering communication. Gratton (2021) suggests that hybrid arrangements hinder cooperation unless physical spaces are redesigned for collaboration. Castañeda et al. (2025) add that disrupted workflows and weak collaboration arise when remote work reduces opportunities for real-time interaction, especially when asynchronous communication dominates. Chafi et al. (2021) and Bloom et al. (2025) further point to reduced spontaneity, information silos, and diminished collaboration when hybrid work is not managed effectively.

Equity, Visibility, and Career Progression Challenges

Hybrid work can create disparities in visibility and career progression. Williams and Shaw (2025) note that remote workers may struggle with recognition and accessing informal networks, hindering their career advancement. Kumari and Yelkar (2022) identify misalignment in appraisal systems and inconsistent security and inclusion experiences as barriers. Hanzis and Hallo (2024) and Gratton (2021) observe that proximity bias and digital workspace challenges can affect visibility, complicating career progression for remote workers. Sokolić (2022) and Bloom et al. (2025) add that hybrid work can indirectly impact promotion opportunities by reinforcing inequalities through unequal access to digital infrastructure.

Managerial Resistance and Organisational Culture Constraints

Managerial resistance to hybrid models is a significant barrier. Stoker et al. (2022) highlight that managers struggle to delegate in hybrid settings, especially under external pressures like the COVID-19 pandemic. Messenger and Gschwind (2016) identify resistance, insufficient regulation, and legacy practices as barriers to hybrid adoption. Tjernberg et al. (2025) emphasise that hybrid work may be constrained by unsupportive management and inadequate digital infrastructure. Jaß et al. (2024) and Dale et al. (2024) support these findings, noting that managerial resistance and an organisational culture favouring onsite presence undermine hybrid work effectiveness. Inconsistent leadership and lack of clear policies further hinder its adoption across sectors. In public agencies, Jaß et al. (2024) report that hybrid policies were undermined by rigid hierarchies and inconsistent managerial buy-in. Some departments adopted flexible schedules, while others imposed office-first norms, creating internal inequities and confusion.

Environmental, Wellbeing, and Boundary Challenges

Hybrid work arrangements often lead to physical discomfort, stress, and blurred work-life boundaries. Gerding et al. (2021) and Appel-Meulenbroek et al. (2022) point out that inadequate home office setups, poor ergonomic conditions, and insufficient breaks create barriers to effective and healthy hybrid work. Dale et al. (2024) and Marozva and Pelsler (2025) note that boundary management challenges, increased presenteeism, and sedentary behaviour contribute to wellbeing concerns. Innstrand et al. (2022) observe that hybrid work can lead to longer hours without greater output, increasing burnout risk, particularly among younger employees. Halford (2005) adds that the pressure to demonstrate productivity in remote settings complicates work-life balance due to the lack of physical boundaries at home. Poor lighting and environmental distractions (Yang et al., 2023) also hinder productivity, especially when family interruptions are frequent.

Structural Incompatibility with Certain Roles or Sectors

Not all roles suit hybrid work, particularly those requiring physical presence. Williams & Shaw (2025) note that sectors like healthcare, manufacturing, and retail face logistical challenges in adopting hybrid models. Aprilina and Martdianty (2023) and Messenger and Gschwind (2016) emphasise that hybrid work is more suitable for knowledge-based, white-collar roles reliant on digital infrastructure. Gratton (2021) and Jaß et al. (2024) argue that sectors dependent on in-person coordination and physical interaction struggle to implement hybrid models, reinforcing the need for sector-specific strategies.

Synthesis, Gaps, and Empirical Directions

The literature on hybrid work has grown rapidly in recent years, offering insights into its effectiveness, challenges, and implications for both organisations and employees. This section synthesises the key findings, identifies critical gaps, and outlines directions for future empirical research.

Synthesis of Key Findings

Hybrid work models enhance organisational flexibility, work-life balance, and employee satisfaction, particularly for knowledge-based roles that benefit from autonomy and focus (Gratton, 2021; Stoker et al., 2022). Roles requiring deep focus and limited coordination are well suited to remote work, while those involving collaboration still benefit from in-person interaction (Bloom et al., 2025; Kumari & Yelkar, 2022).

Key enablers include strong organisational culture, supportive leadership, and robust digital infrastructure. Organisations that invest in digital tools, flexible office design, and training for employees and managers are better positioned to implement hybrid models effectively (Gratton, 2021; Stoker et al., 2022). The literature also identifies team-level strategies that support collaboration and cohesion. These include aligning communication rhythms, setting shared expectations for responsiveness, and maintaining informal interactions to support trust and engagement (Gibbs et al., 2024; Rockmann & Pratt, 2015; Marozva & Pelsler, 2025). Team-based performance evaluations that emphasise shared outcomes and collaboration, rather than individual visibility, are also recommended (Stoker et al., 2022; Castañeda et al., 2025).

Despite these enablers, challenges such as social isolation, communication breakdowns, and equity concerns persist. Addressing these issues requires careful organisational design and deliberate management practices (Lee, 2024; Yang et al., 2023).

Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing body of research, several gaps remain. First, most literature focuses on the organisational level, with limited attention given to sector-specific challenges in adopting hybrid work. Sectors such as healthcare, retail, and manufacturing face unique constraints that may limit hybrid model applicability. Research exploring how hybrid work can be adapted to these sectors is sparse and needs further exploration (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016).

Second, while much research examines the individual employee perspective, more studies are needed on team dynamics and organisational culture in hybrid settings. Understanding how teams function when part of the workforce is remote, and identifying leadership and cultural strategies that optimise hybrid work, remain underexplored (Stoker et al., 2022).

Finally, there is a lack of longitudinal studies on the sustainability of hybrid work models. Many studies focus on immediate effects, but long-term impacts on employee engagement, career progression, and organisational performance are still unclear (Gratton, 2021). Future research should investigate whether the benefits of hybrid work can be sustained, particularly as employees adjust and organisational needs evolve.

Empirical Directions for Future Research

To address these gaps, future research should focus on several key areas: *1) Sector-Specific Studies*: Research is needed to explore how hybrid work can be tailored to sectors with high

in-person interaction, such as healthcare and retail. 2) *Team Dynamics and Organisational Culture*: More studies should investigate how hybrid work affects team collaboration, cohesion, and leadership strategies, as well as the role of organisational culture in fostering success. 3) *Longitudinal Studies on Sustainability*: Long-term studies are needed to assess the sustainability of hybrid models, focusing on employee retention, career development, and organisational performance. 4) *Hybrid Work and Well-Being*: Future research should examine the long-term mental health impacts of hybrid work, including risks of burnout, stress, and isolation, and how to mitigate these challenges.

Sustaining hybrid work requires adaptive mechanisms for adjusting to evolving employee needs and organisational goals. Future research could explore how organisations use feedback, satisfaction surveys, and performance data to adjust hybrid practices over time (Stoker et al., 2022; Kumari & Yelkar, 2022). This includes examining how policies, appraisal systems, and collaboration norms evolve to maintain engagement, equity, and long-term effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

Hybrid work has reshaped how organisations operate, offering flexibility, autonomy, and benefits for productivity and employee well-being. Its success depends on aligning culture, leadership, and infrastructure with employee needs and task requirements. This review highlights key enablers such as strong leadership, digital tools, and supportive environments, alongside challenges like maintaining collaboration, inclusion, and work-life balance. It also identifies concrete team-level practices, such as aligning communication rhythms and using collaborative performance metrics, as critical for sustaining cohesion in hybrid settings.

Although research has expanded, key gaps remain in understanding sectoral differences, long-term sustainability, and team dynamics. Future studies should address these gaps, focusing on longitudinal assessments and exploring how hybrid work can be adapted to various sectors, roles, and organisational contexts.

The findings suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to hybrid work is unlikely to succeed. Hybrid work policies should be tailored to the specific demands of roles, sectors, and organisational cultures. Recognising both enablers and limitations can help organisations design hybrid models that support individual and collective success.

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