

# The quest for a perfect hybrid working: A case study of Mars Wrigley Poland

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## Abstract.

**BACKGROUND:** Although hybrid work has been a topic of research for many years, the pandemic has introduced a new context that remains relatively unexplored.

**OBJECTIVE:** This paper aims to define hybrid working as a novel flexible working arrangement and investigate the factors that influence its effective implementation within organisations.

**METHODS:** To achieve this research objective, we conducted a single case study focusing on Mars Wrigley Poland. The study involved interviews with the People & Organization Director of the company and an analysis of internal documents developed during the implementation of hybrid working.

**RESULTS:** Our findings show that hybrid working is a team-managed flexible working arrangement, and it is within the teams that the specifics of the hybrid work should be determined and defined. Additionally, the findings reveal that hybrid working is not a one-size-fits-all model. It requires a holistic approach to establish a clear strategy that encompasses various factors such as culture, technology, and employee experience. Of particular importance is the need to ensure connection in the broader sense and ongoing support to employees.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Managers can significantly improve the success rate of hybrid working by gaining insight into the key factors that facilitate the implementation of the hybrid model.

Keywords: Hybrid working, hybrid team, flexible working arrangements, case study



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## 1. Introduction

Even though the statement: “Work is universal. But, how, why, where and when we work has never

been so open to individual interpretation” [1, p.16] was made over a decade ago, it has become even more relevant in today’s context.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought flexible working, particularly remote work, into the spotlight. With governments worldwide announcing comprehensive lockdowns and many states issuing stay-at-home orders, employers were forced to implement flexible working arrangements on the fly. Then, as businesses reopened, requests for flexible working from employees became commonplace. One significant development is the rise of hybrid work, which allows employees to blend remote and office-based work according to their preferences and needs [2]. This shift underscores a newfound emphasis on employee autonomy and the importance of fostering a healthy work-life balance, reshaping not only how individuals approach their jobs but also how organizations structure their workplaces. Employers who presumed that everyone would return to their offices as before have no choice but to adjust to employees’ expectations or to accept that their recruitment and retention rates will be at risk [3–5].

Interest in flexible working practices began long before the pandemic, resulting in numerous studies analysing various forms of flexible working practices and gaining a better understanding of their impact on both individuals and organizations [6–11].

Workplace flexibility was defined as “the ability of employees to make changes on where, when and the total time they would spend or engage in work-related tasks” [12, p. 152]. Therefore, flexible working arrangements are arrangements that provide employees with a degree of choice regarding when, where and how much they work [13–17]. The term flexible working has been used in a broad sense to encompass various working patterns that diverge from the standard working pattern (be it 9-to-5 hours, shift work or central workplace). However, there have been several main types of named and recognized flexible working arrangements in use prior to the pandemic: part-time work, term-time work, flexitime, working from home, mobile working, annual hours, job sharing and a compressed work week [18]. These practices offer different levels of flexibility both to the employers – to align the supply and demand for labour more effectively – and to the employees – to accommodate their needs and preferences. While it is recognized that not all flexible working is voluntary [19], the assortment of practices that offer so-called flexibility for employees and flexibility of employees [20] can be somewhat confusing. The vol-

untary nature of these practices can influence whether employees truly benefit from them [21–23].

Traditionally, flexibility has been seen as a feature of low-quality jobs [24, 25], where employers impose non-standard working practices such as temporary or part-time employment to achieve organizational flexibility. At the centre of this view is the assumption that given the choice, employees would prefer permanent and/or full-time jobs. However, much of this evidence relates to flexibility of employees rather than flexibility for employees. This contradicts the definition of flexible working arrangement, where the key principle is to provide employees with the choice over how, when and where they perform their jobs. “The central feature of these [flexible] work arrangements is that it is the employee, not the employer, who chooses the working arrangement, so-called flexibility for employees” [26, p. 84]. Flexibility for employees gives them the freedom to choose how they do their work and it is this element of choice that has a positive impact on employees’ perceptions of their work [27]. A lack of understanding of what lies at the heart of flexible working practices can be the reason for their ineffective implementation, leading to employee dissatisfaction which can ultimately impact their engagement [13]. And yet, giving employees the freedom to choose does not mean that they are the only beneficiaries of flexible working practices. On the contrary, several studies have confirmed the benefits of implementing flexible working practices for employers as well, such as growth of employee commitment, higher retention rates or improved productivity levels [9–11, 13, 28–31] demonstrating that providing flexibility for employees can benefit both employees and organizations.

In this article, we will focus on hybrid working as a flexible working practice that only earned its place on the list of such practices after the pandemic [32] and, as such, lacks in-depth exploration. While studies acknowledge the rising demand for hybrid working among employees [30, 33–36], the concept itself remains underexplored within the realm of flexible work practices. Recognizing this research gap and the apparent interest in this evolving practice, our study seeks to precisely define hybrid working and delineate its core characteristics as a flexible working arrangement. Furthermore, we endeavour to identify the essential factors crucial for the successful implementation of hybrid working. The key questions this study sought answers to were therefore what defines hybrid working as a novel flexible work arrange-

ment and what factors play a key role in its effective implementation. To bridge this research gap, we have chosen a single-case study methodology, as such studies are conducive to inductive theory-building, especially in the nascent stages of research [37]. Our approach involved in-depth interviews, featuring open-ended questions that encourage thorough exploration of experiences, perspectives, and situational nuances, coupled with a comprehensive analysis of secondary data sources.

The paper draws upon a study conducted on the implementation of hybrid working within Mars Wrigley Poland (MWP), global manufacturer of chocolate, chewing gum, mints, and fruity confections. The remainder of the paper provides a theoretical background on the evolution of hybrid work, followed by a description of the methodology and data analysis, the findings and the discussion, and finally the conclusions encompassing theoretical contributions, practical implications, limitations, and future research opportunities.

## 2. Theoretical background

Even before the pandemic, companies were experimenting with offering their employees more flexibility in terms of where they work, but very few were taking full advantage of hybrid working that we are experiencing nowadays.

A search for the terms “hybrid work” and “hybrid team” before 2020 yields few results, and even fewer when we add flexibility to these terms. While many earlier studies focused on the dichotomy of face-to-face (traditional or co-located) versus distributed (virtual or non-co-located) work [38–42], with virtualness held constant, Griffith and Neale [43, p. 409] pointed out that “teams are not face-to-face or virtual, but rather can be described as more or less virtual – traditional, hybrid, or virtual.” They described hybrid work as the presence of hybrid groups that meet face-to-face as well as virtually. Similarly, using the multidimensional concept of virtuality, Fiol and O'Connor [44] defined hybrid teams as those that exist along a continuum from more to less virtual, acknowledging the potential variability in face-to-face contact between team members. On the other hand, Halford [44] refers in his definition of hybrid work to a spatial hybridity, defining it as a “multi-location” style of working where individuals have the flexibility to divide their time between different locations using information technology. This draws

attention to flexibility and choice, which closely aligns with the concept of contemporary hybrid working. Chung and van der Lippe [16] also address these elements and while they use the term flexiplace instead of hybrid, they use it to encompass the possibility of choosing to work outside of the traditional workplace premises.

However, prior to the pandemic, most researchers considered hybrid working in the context of virtual, partially distributed teams. These teams typically consisted of both co-located members and geographically dispersed members. The concept of hybrid working, characterised by performing tasks from different locations and thus combining face-to-face and computer-mediated communication, was mostly associated with these types of teams [46–49]. While geographic distribution and reliance on communication technologies are common tendencies in partially distributed teams, their defining feature is the utilization of both remote and face-to-face communication [44, 50]. This characteristic is also shared by today's hybrid working teams.

Nevertheless, these teams lack other important characteristics found in today's hybrid working. Firstly, hybrid working has evolved from a model where some employees work permanently on-site and others work remotely to a model where individuals have an option to work in a mixed manner during the week. Secondly, it has transitioned from teams consisting of members placed in one location and geographically dispersed, to teams that primarily operate within a single location. Finally, the rationale for implementing hybrid working has shifted, with the focus now being on fulfilling the needs of employees rather than solely being driven by business justifications.

In the past, hybrid working was primarily an organizations' response to a rapidly changing environment, providing them with the flexibility to remain competitive [38, 46, 51–56]. The growing prevalence of virtual, distributed teams is attributed to a combination of technological and organizational advancements with various business benefits associated with the use of such teams [53]. These benefits include access to a global and diverse talent pool, accelerated scaling and growth, cost-effectiveness through hiring specialists from emerging markets, reducing office expenses or increased team agility. The key distinction between hybrid work before the pandemic and now is that the choice was made primarily by the organization rather than by the employee.

Nowadays, a hybrid team encompasses both in-office and remote workers, allowing employees the autonomy to choose their preferred work setting, whether it's in a physical office or remotely [2]. Hybrid work is commonly understood as a blend of remote/home and on-site working, as noted by various authors [57, 58]. Some emphasize a division of working days based on the mode of work [5, 59], while others specify a combination of days spent at home and at the office throughout the week [31]. Yet others emphasize the significance of employee choice in determining their workplace, highlighting the flexibility for employees it provides [2, 60]. This perspective directly places hybrid working in the spectrum of flexible working practices.

Implementing flexible working practices requires careful attention to several key factors. Firstly, organizations must ensure the provision of appropriate information and communication technology to enable remote work and effective collaboration among team members [61]. Furthermore, organizations must map out the types of work to determine which tasks are suitable for flexible or remote work and which ones require physical presence [61, 62]. This entails preparing business processes to accommodate flexible work arrangements and calibrating workload analysis and performance measurement methods to suit the flexible work environment [61–63]. Optimizing supporting networks, including both technological and human networks, is crucial for ensuring smooth operations in a flexible work setup [61, 62]. Clear and effective internal communication from management is paramount to ensure that all employees understand the new work model and its implications [61, 62, 64]. Formulating policies, guidelines, and facilities tailored to flexible work is essential for providing employees with the necessary framework and resources to carry out their work effectively [61, 62, 64]. This includes developing flexible work policies, providing access to supportive technology, and offering training and education to managers and HR staff on flexible work arrangements [61, 63]. Moreover, the alignment of policies with strategic and operational objectives, as well as the structure of the HR department to provide support at all levels, are critical for the successful implementation of flexible work practices [63, 64]. Similarly, Gratton [65] underlines the necessity of adequate technology and infrastructure, supportive organizational culture, and transparent communication in implementing hybrid work. Furthermore, she stresses the significance of mapping out types

of work, adjusting business processes, and formulating tailored policies and guidelines, as well as acknowledges the importance of fairness, equity, and work-life balance in fostering a positive work environment. All authors point out that these factors are interdependent and should be considered comprehensively to meet the specific needs of each organization and its context.

### 3. Research methods

#### 3.1. Research design

This study uses a single-case research design. A qualitative approach is adopted as the research method driven by the need to gain a better understanding of the research problem under investigation. Since the primary motivation of our study was to gain a deeper insight into the subject matter, the qualitative method was agreed upon as the most suitable approach. Quantitative methods may prove insufficient when the research objective involves exploring the circumstances and causes and determining the direction of relationships between the phenomena that are unfamiliar to managers and that relate to the social aspects of organization management [66]. The aim of qualitative research is to recognize the unique character of the studied situation, the nature of the phenomenon, its context, and its interaction with other elements. Its major qualities include the researcher's participation as the main tool in data collection and analysis, as well as the predominance of the extensive verbal description of the phenomenon, its context, and the participants. A case study is a type of qualitative research that focuses on empirical inference and explores a contemporary phenomenon in its natural context [67–69]. Yin [70] suggests that case studies are epistemologically valid when research questions focus on the causes behind observed phenomena, when behavioural events are not under control and when the focus is on contemporary events. Other researchers claim that the case method is “appropriate and essential where either theory does not yet exist or is unlikely to apply, [...] or where theory exists but the environmental context is different” [71, p. 423]. This study satisfies these criteria. There are convincing arguments suggesting that research on hybrid work, in its current form, is still in the early stages of theoretical development, and the generalizability of previous research on hybrid working is questionable, given its current status.

Multiple and single case studies have both strengths and weaknesses [70, 72, 73]. However, despite some disagreements, researchers generally agree that single case studies are useful for inductive theory-building, especially in the early stages of a research field [37], such as hybrid work as a flexible working practice.

Case-based research requires a sampling approach that focuses on selecting theoretically useful cases, in particular best practice models [37, 72]. This study addresses the implementation of the hybrid working model in MWP, which was chosen for research based on two main reasons. Firstly, MWP is a part of Mars, Incorporated, a globally recognized people-oriented company that consistently ranks on the World's Best Workplaces list. This list is based on employee ratings of management, pay, benefits, development opportunities, culture, and job satisfaction. Secondly, the company's culture emphasizes trust in employees, which aligns with one of the key factors explored in the research on remote and hybrid teams [2, 46, 74–78]. For both of these reasons, the company can be regarded as a good practice model for implementing cutting-edge HR practices.

Our research on the hybrid working model was designed to develop the definition of hybrid work in its new post-pandemic setting, as well as to identify factors that may influence its better implementation. Our research questions were therefore:

1. What defines hybrid working as a new flexible working arrangement?
2. Which factors play a key role in the implementation phase of hybrid working?

### 3.2. Data collection

We contacted the People & Organization Director (P&OD) of MWP to introduce the research project. Upon garnering her interest, we obtained the formal approval from the company to conduct the study. The data collection phase involved conducting semi-structured interviews with the P&OD for primary data, while secondary data was obtained from internal documents developed during the implementation of hybrid working, both globally and locally, as well as from the company website. The data collection process lasted over three months, starting on 3rd March and ending in mid-June 2023. A total of four online interviews were conducted with the P&OD, each lasting between 3 and 4 hours and with each subsequent interview detailing the previous one in

order to ensure comprehensive coverage of all aspects related to the implementation of hybrid working. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and synthesized with other data. The key questions we sought answers to were:

- 1) Was the implementation of the hybrid working model preceded by an identification of needs and opportunities?
- 2) What are the principles of hybrid working? Are they documented, widely known and applied?
- 3) At which specific level (company, function, team manager, team, employee) are decisions made and what are the types of decision made? Depending on the answer – what choices are made by employees and/or teams? What aspects are standardized for everyone, and where is there a room for individual choice?
- 4) What is the rationale for implementing hybrid working at different levels, i.e., why has the company decided to adopt hybrid working, why is it being implemented for specific functions, teams and employees?
- 5) What support does the company provide during the different stages of hybrid working implementation?

In summary, the research can be divided into five main stages:

- 1) Research initiative: conducting first interview,
- 2) Main interview and document identification: conducting second interview and identifying available internal documents,
- 3) Documentation analysis and preliminary results,
- 4) Data completion: conducting third interview,
- 5) Company authorization: obtaining authorization from the company for the collected data, results, and conclusions during fourth interview.

In addition, between stages two and five, we maintained regular electronic correspondence to complement or confirm the data received.

Table 1 summarizes the data collection process by linking sources with outcomes.

### 3.3. Data analysis

For the analysis of the data, we employed the general inductive approach (GIA), whose primary goal is to identify common themes, patterns, and categories within the data [79]. Several reasons support

Table 1  
Data Collection – Sources and Outcomes

Data source	Acquired information
Secondary data: internal guidance on hybrid working, development kit, internal presentations, internal local and global employees' surveys, the company website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concept of hybrid work.</li> <li>• Principles of hybrid work.</li> <li>• Formal stages of preparation and implementation of hybrid work – formal instructions, tools for support offered to leaders and members of hybrid teams, system for communicating implemented changes.</li> </ul>
Primary data: interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of hybrid work in practice.</li> <li>• Characteristics and definition of a hybrid team.</li> </ul>

the choice of GIA in our study. Firstly, GIA offers flexibility in data analysis, enabling researchers to adapt their approach to the unique characteristics of their data and research questions, thus facilitating a more nuanced understanding of complex phenomena [79]. Secondly, despite its flexibility, GIA provides a systematic framework for analysing qualitative data, ensuring that researchers approach their analysis in a structured manner. This systematic approach enhances the rigour and reliability of the research findings [80]. Thirdly, it allows researchers to focus on the content and meaning of the data rather than becoming mired in complex methodological procedures [79]. Finally, this inductive approach enables researchers to explore the data in an open-minded manner, uncovering unexpected insights and perspectives [80].

Following the procedure proposed by Thomas [79], we began by organizing data from both primary and secondary sources. The next step involved researchers independently reading the received materials and transcriptions of interviews to identify initial codes representing important concepts or ideas. While semantic coding was applied to the secondary data, latent coding was used to analyse interviews with the P&OD. Semantic coding refers to explicit and surface-level coding that identifies the meaning of texts explicitly. On the other hand, latent coding involves extracting deeper, implicit meanings or structures that are not obvious at first glance [81]. The subsequent step involved theme development, wherein we grouped codes to form broader themes or categories capturing common patterns across the data. We then interpreted the themes within the context of the research objectives, seeking connections

and relationships between different themes. It is important to note that the results were influenced by the researchers' judgments, as they determined which aspects of the data were more or less significant to obtain useful insights. The final step involved validating the findings and confirming the interpretation with the P&OD.

The analysis process resulted in over 20 codes, including:

- Leveraging asynchronous work,
- Choosing purpose over presence,
- Creating dedicated time for focus,
- Simplifying decision making,
- Empowering teams,
- Considering communication content and channel,
- Optimizing collaboration with the team,
- Strengthening connections.

Ultimately, six main themes emerged. Two of them delineate hybrid work as a novel flexible practice – team-led work flexibility and people-centric approach. The remaining four specify key elements in the implementation of hybrid work – connection, transformational culture, ongoing support, and a holistic approach.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Background

A diversified, global business in pet care, confectionery and food, Mars operates according to The Five Principles that are rooted in company's history, cul-

ture, and its approach to business. The Five Principles are: quality, responsibility, mutuality, efficiency, and freedom, and they provide a common set of filters to guide decision-making across geographies, cultures and generations. In addition to The Five Principles, there are two other elements at the heart of Mars culture: the Associate Concept and People Leadership. While the Associate Concept defines the relationship between the business and the employees, referred to as associates in Mars, to indicate more meaningful and powerful relationship compared to the standard employer-employee relationship, People Leadership recognizes that all associates are leaders and have the opportunity and responsibility to take initiative, share ideas, and lead through the work they do every day. All three elements together with Mars purpose which is an inspiration for pushing boundaries and challenging oneself to transform the way of work, they guide the business philosophy of all subsidiaries within the company, including Mars Wrigley.

Mars Wrigley, with a global workforce of 34,000, is a manufacturer of chocolate, chewing gum, mints, and fruity confections. MWP employs approximately 1,300 people in three locations – Warsaw, which is the headquarters for the General Management, Sales, Marketing, Planning, Finance, Corporate Affairs and People and Organization functions, and the manufacturing plants in Poznan and Janaszowek.

#### *4.2. Implementing hybrid work globally*

In 2020 Mars initiated a program called Future of Work, to roll out their flexi-hybrid approach. The goal of the program is to maximize the benefits of hybrid working, while building a more consisted experience that unifies Mars across segments and regions, fostering cohesive culture and enhancing company's ability to build more inclusive teams. The Future of Work at Mars is underpinned by the company's Five Principles and the Associate Concept. The work has started already during the pandemic and to develop the strategy the company has adopted a user-centred approach to understand what challenges, benefits and lessons the employees have learned during this time. The starting point was surveying more than 1,000 employees, managers, and senior leaders around the world. The outcomes of these surveys were then synthesized and combined with quantitative data from within Mars. To define the evolution of the ways of working, Mars has identified four key areas that are expected to undergo significant across the business. The first area is about empowering employees

to work in environments that best fit their activity. This includes transition from working remotely on an exceptional basis to having the freedom to work remotely as needed, with focus on optimizing outcomes. The second anticipated shift concerns the role of the office. It transitions from being the place where all tasks are completed to the office that serves the purpose of co-creation, relationship building, and collaboration. The third shift concerns the purpose of travel. It moves from travelling to being physically present to travelling for purpose and intention to deliver specific value. The final expected change relates to the purpose of meetings and the need to re-imagine a way of collaborating beyond solely in-person interaction. This involves a balanced use of virtual meetings complimented with asynchronous collaboration. A collection of guidelines on ways of working, rituals, policies, habits, and deployment kit was developed to establish a unified global approach to hybrid working. However, there is also an emphasis on granting an autonomy to interpret and implement these guidelines locally, accommodating differences in local labour markets as well as local demands for hybrid working. For the purpose of the global exchange of experiences a Future of Work share point has been established, as well as channels for regularly updated resources and materials.

#### *4.3. Implementing hybrid work in MWP*

Before the pandemic, all MWP employees worked traditional hours, with only a limited level of work flexibility. This involved occasional work from home opportunities, subject to supervisor approval and individual employee request. Out of all MWP employees, around 300 have the option to work in the hybrid model. However, certain roles, such as those in sales and manufacturing, are not suitable for flexibility because of the nature of the work they involve.

##### *4.3.1. Connection*

The turning point for the implementation of hybrid working proved to be the pandemic that necessitated the deployment of staff to work from home. The People and Organization department collaborated with IT support to ensure that all the technical infrastructure was established to enable remote working. This involved providing all employees with laptops and any other equipment they needed, as well as offering training in Microsoft Teams. From the very beginning, the company has sought methods to keep a sense

of unity among employees.

“It was an emotionally difficult time, so we were also keen for supervisors to continue to be close to the teams and not lose the connection with employees.”

Several initiatives were then introduced that included all employees. One such initiative was the “coffee connection” which coincidentally brought two employees together for a virtual coffee and replaced the usual conversations over coffee in the kitchen or office. This tool, which is still in use today, not only aided communication in difficult pandemic times but also brought benefits, such as the opportunity to meet people in the organization who had not previously known each other. At the same time, the company was in search of a tool that would allow it to see what was happening across the organization. With this objective in mind, they introduced an internal forum called Yammer, allowing employees to share what they were doing, what they were struggling with, and also to share initiatives. The P&OD emphasizes that this was a very important aspect of management promoting psychological safety and has since developed into a permanent communication tool within the company. In addition, the company used a dedicated forum for managers, that had been created prior to the pandemic with the purpose of developing their competencies and share ideas. All these tools remained in use in the hybrid working model.

#### 4.3.2. *Transformational culture*

The starting point for the introduction of the hybrid model was to look at where, how, and when work is done, in order to create the conditions that would uphold maximum productivity while maintaining a company culture that is fundamentally rooted in collaboration and relationships.

“There was the question of how to be productive and at the same time maintain our organizational culture in a situation where work is done remotely rather than in the office, which has hitherto served an integrative and collaborative function.”

MWP was determined to ensure that the strong relationships ingrained in the company’s culture were not lost during the transition to more flexible working arrangements. Throughout the process, employees were actively engaged and consulted. Surveys, focus groups and interviews were conducted to assess the demand, understand the implications of work-

ing from home, identify the challenges people faced, and determine the critical enablers and blockers from a country-specific perspective during the development of the local approach. This feedback, together with Mars global surveys and external reports and research, gave rise to design the practices of a hybrid model that reinforces the company’s values and culture.

The guiding principle for working in the hybrid model in MWP is the 50/50 split, similar to the split implemented worldwide by Mars. This allows employees to choose where they work, while the expectation is that they spend 50% of their time in the office. The P&OD notes that the 50/50 work scheme is not essential for the majority of MWP employees to perform their jobs effectively, its needed for nurturing relationships. However, the specific details and time perspective of the arrangement are determined at the team level. Team members are free to decide, in consultation with their supervisors, whether they prefer a weekly perspective or, for example, split by days in the working week. The decision is guided by an analysis of the tasks to be performed – complexity, time sensitivity, anticipated duration, the role to be performed, required collaboration, or working styles. Working patterns are agreed within teams and rotas published, while there is an understanding that flexibility is allowed if circumstances require adjustments. The company does not impose any artificial constraints on the implementation of this principle. Instead, it leaves the responsibility for monitoring it to the teams and their supervisors, aligning with the attitude reflected in the company’s Five Principles. MWP has flexible working regulations and a practical toolkit that outlines the principles and how they can be applied. The P&OD believes that having a practical framework and clear values to guide decision-making has been a key to their success. She also emphasizes the importance of trusting employees.

“We rely on trust and transparency in communication, expecting those qualities from all parties involved.”

The organization had already made significant investments in building a high-trust culture, which facilitated the transition to hybrid working. The importance of trust and open relationships was further highlighted during the lockdown when team members struggled with the challenges of remote working or the tension of isolation.



#### 4.3.3. *Ongoing support*

A number of training programs and workshops have been implemented to help employees adapt and review new working practices. These initiatives emphasize the need to align all decisions around hybrid working with Mars culture and values, ensuring agreement with teams and prioritizing the company's Five Principles. Employees also had the opportunity to work together on a list of habits to implement in the new model. Each team has been allocated an engagement budget encouraging them to get together regularly for team-building activities as well as social events beyond work-related tasks.

Particular attention has been given to equipping leaders with the necessary skills and behaviours as they have the greatest influence and impact on how employees feel and perform. MWP offers a line managers forum and provides materials to help them manage hybrid employees effectively. Regular discussions are held regarding how they can enhance their support for employees and their wellbeing. A series of workshops have been conducted to help equip and support managers in adjusting to effective hybrid working practices. Ongoing support and communications are facilitated through the local and Mars-wide share points fostering the exchange of ideas, addressing challenges, and providing support.

"We create an environment where employees feel that they are not left alone and where questions are not left unanswered or without advice."

#### 4.3.4. *Holistic approach*

The implementation of the hybrid model naturally changed the design of the office space to enhance support hybrid working. The company engaged in extensive consultations with employees regarding the use of office space and what they needed for their optimal performance. Offices with desks previously assigned to individual employees were turned into work zones. They created a space for hot-desking, a space for collaboration or quiet spaces for work requiring concentration. In addition, videoconferencing facilities in meeting rooms were expanded to ensure inclusivity. The company has learned that it is important for people to use their time in the office purposefully and find a balance between individual focus time and collaboration with team members. This means reducing the amount of time spent in meetings and increasing the use of tools that enable employees to contribute based on their own schedules. All employees were encouraged to view the

office as a purposeful destination, for collaboration, socializing, and team meetings.

The People and Organization department has also developed clear expectations and guidance for managing key stages of the employee lifecycle in a hybrid environment, for example, onboarding, performance management, creating development plans as well as how to approach other aspects such as giving support and giving feedback.

"Hybrid working does not just refer to whether you work from home or from the office. It encompasses all HR practices from the moment an employee enters the organization until they leave. And it is calibrating all the processes while addressing culture and values, and then gaining understanding from employees that has been and continues to be the biggest challenge."

The company is currently in the process of reviewing both the principles and the operation of the model at a global level.

"My conclusion is that this [hybrid] working model will certainly evolve and is not implemented once and for all."

## 5. Discussion

The results of the data analysis and interpretation show that hybrid working is a team-managed flexible working arrangement where employees can work both in the office and remotely. It is a people-first approach that aims to maximise productivity and job satisfaction. This means that employees have the freedom to choose between the office and remote work, taking into account their own needs and the needs of their organization, enabling them to work where they can be most productive. Our study confirms that decisions on the specific rules for organizing hybrid work schedule lies with the respective departments and teams [82], thereby increasing employee satisfaction [83]. When setting the rules for hybrid working, it is important to adapt them to the preferences of the team, as each team knows the nature of their work and how they work most effectively. Insight into employees' preferences and viewpoints will require managers to adopt a different approach to managing hybrid teams, including tailored support and the development of additional competencies. All this ensures that hybrid working is not a one-size-fits-all model, as not only every team, but also every orga-

nization has its own unique characteristics that will be critical in its implementation. This can account for the uniqueness of the model, which will consequently have an impact on achieving an organisation's sustainable competitive advantage, and further benefits for companies implementing the hybrid model [84].

However, our study analysis reveals that there are certain factors that will favour the implementation of the hybrid working model. Employees should not only be connected, but they should also feel connected. This means ensuring that hybrid working employees are not only technologically empowered with access to work tech tools that enable them to work effectively, but also have the freedom to work in their preferred way through equal access and asynchronous team collaboration. This primarily means that employees believe they have strong connection to organization, leadership team, and to their direct team and immediate colleagues. This belief not only reinforces the potential for effective collaboration, but also has a positive impact on the identification with the company's goals and values as well as promoting psychological safety and team identity. These elements have been identified in the research as crucial to consider when introducing flexibility at work [85]. Access to resources and information is the antecedent of psychological safety because such contextual support helps reduce insecurity and defensiveness among team members [86]. However, in the era of digital collaboration and tech empowerment, many business leaders find it difficult to build new bonds of trust between the organization and the employee now that the traditional, continuous "line of sight" no longer exists [87]. This suggests the need for a cultural shift.

There is no such thing as an ideal culture, but rather a suitable one [88]. New hybrid arrangements, whatever they are, should accentuate company's values, support its culture [65] and blend the need for accountability with the need to protect relationships and build trust. Following Bass and Avolio [89] typology, predominately or moderate transformational organizational cultures exhibit the qualities necessary in the context of hybrid working. They describe such cultures as those having a sense of purpose where both leaders and followers share mutual interests and go beyond their self-interests. Trust does not depend on formal agreements and the organization is flexible, adaptive, and emphasizes potential of its individual employees who go above and beyond for the good of the company. In transformational organizational cultures, "everyone is likely to be constantly talking about purposes, vision, values, fulfilment,

without emphasizing the need for formal agreements and controls" [89, p. 550], because they will feel that their preferences will be taken into account, which is what the implementation of hybrid working requires. A thorough understanding of employee preferences through a combination of surveys and interviews as well as consultative management is key to ensure that any hybrid model chosen will be a good fit [65, 90].

The transition to a hybrid workplace is a significant organizational change that, in addition to vision and budgets, particularly relies on the presence of supportive leaders. Hybrid arrangements require not only written rules but, above all, a sense that employees are not left alone with the challenges inherent in the change process. Even a slight increase in perceived managerial support can have meaningful implications for employee attitudes and behaviours [91]. "Managers should work to support their employees and build the associated trust in order to have a reservoir of ready change recipients when organizational transformation is inevitably attempted" [92, p. 95].

Finally, hybrid working is not as simple as employees deciding where they will work. Successful and sustainable hybrid working models are those where leaders adopt a holistic approach which means setting a clear strategy addressing culture, technology, and employee experience, but also constantly looking at the changes being made, continuously improving and transforming.

## 6. Conclusions

In conclusion, hybrid working which embodies a team-managed flexible working model, underscores the significance of accommodating individual and organizational needs in determining work location preferences. Moreover, the adoption of a people-first approach in hybrid working empowers employees to choose their work environment based on personal preferences and organizational requirements. Furthermore, the transition in the role of the manager from a directive to a supportive stance reflects the evolving nature of hybrid work arrangements. Managers play a crucial role in facilitating employee autonomy and providing support, fostering a collaborative and inclusive work environment conducive to productivity and well-being.

The implementation of hybrid working presents a multifaceted challenge that requires careful consideration of several key elements. Firstly, maintaining connections among employees is paramount,

facilitated through the deployment of various communication tools and initiatives aimed at fostering unity and team integration. Secondly, it is imperative to ensure that the organizational culture is conducive to flexible work arrangements while upholding productivity and company values through active employee engagement and input. Thirdly, ongoing support and training programs are essential to assist employees in adapting to the evolving nature of hybrid work. Moreover, equipping leaders with the necessary skills and tools to effectively manage hybrid teams is crucial for success. Lastly, a holistic approach is indispensable, involving a comprehensive analysis of employee needs, encompassing both technical infrastructure and organizational aspects, all while considering the unique values and culture of the company. By addressing these key elements, organizations can navigate the complexities of implementing hybrid working arrangements with greater success.

### 6.1. Managerial implications

With the adoption of hybrid working models by organizations, they face a complex challenge. Aligning managerial strategies with organizational goals is crucial for the successful implementation of hybrid working. This alignment is essential for fostering connectivity, supporting cultural adaptability, and empowering leaders. The following are the key managerial implications:

- 1) seeking input from employees on their perspectives on hybrid work,
- 2) defining what hybrid means in the specific context, addressing culture, values and employees' voices,
- 3) reviewing relevant policies, procedures, systems, and practices to ensure they are ready for hybrid work and identifying areas that require changes,
- 4) developing hybrid working principles or policies, clearly setting out responsibilities and expectations, eligibility criteria and guidance,
- 5) addressing connection in a broader sense, employee well-being, and trust,
- 6) providing ongoing support for all employees through forums, share points etc., with a particular focus on the new role of hybrid team managers,
- 7) reflecting on the internal climate within the company to foster hybrid working strength-

ening the way things are done, continuously improving and transforming.

### 6.2. Theoretical implications

The reflections undertaken in our article validate the findings of previous research, but also point to new aspects of hybrid working. There are three key new features. The first feature is that it enables every employee to work in a hybrid model and it is not dedicated only to geographically distributed teams. This feature has been pointed out in previous studies [16, 43, 44], and our research confirms it. The second feature is that it enables every employee to work different working hours depending on their preferences and team arrangements [31, 60]. During the pandemic and the period of enforced remote working, employees experienced greater autonomy over their time. When employees returned to offices with the option to work remotely, in many cases they were given the choice of how much time and when they would be in the office or at home. MWP adopted a general 50/50 split, allowing the teams to determine the details of the schedule. The third feature, which is also one of the key elements in designing a specific hybrid working model, is the consideration of employees' needs. Past models of flexible working were mainly driven by business needs [54, 56]. Again, the pandemic has forced and at the same time provided an opportunity to test on a large scale how employees will cope with limited control. MWP regularly conducts performance and development process, which is a general measure of work independently from the way it is done and there is no separated way of evaluating the effectiveness of hybrid work, comparing work and employees in relation to the chosen working model. It is the team that determines its work arrangement taking into account the requirements for effectiveness.

Our findings make it possible to define hybrid working as a team-managed flexible working arrangement, and it is at the level of the teams that the hybridity of the work should be specified.

Hybrid working models need to be effective – for teamwork and organizational performance as well as ensure social and business sustainability. A holistic approach to designing an effective hybrid working team takes into consideration the broader organizational context, i.e., culture, values, and the voices of employee. These three factors are the foundation that should precede the implementation of a hybrid model. MWP example shows that if these factors

have been addressed systematically in advance, the implementation of a hybrid model is effective. On the other hand, once implemented, managerial support is crucial and it is less related to the technologies and systems supporting the managers themselves, but to their behavioural competencies. In a situation of decentralisation and democratisation in determining the organization of work, they will enable them to navigate between principles derived from values, rules, and the specific work systems of individual team members.

### 6.3. *Limitations and future research*

Our study is not without limitations. Firstly, a single case study provides insights into a specific context and solution, but it is limited to it only. Potential readers – managers, researchers – may therefore find it difficult to draw practical insights for their own organizations as the results have limited generalisability. It does, however, serve as a valuable starting point for further research, providing a framework, criteria and research approach. In their context, other entities from various sectors and with different experiences should be analysed and compared.

Secondly, an organization with a global reach and global solutions was selected to illustrate effective organizational practices that are universally applicable. It is important to note that these solutions, may be subject to different legal regulations and influenced by national cultures in different countries as well as have impact on team relationships. Further research can therefore take into account the legal and/or cultural determinants of hybrid working.

Thirdly, our study addresses the implementation phase of hybrid working. The next step should be a robust review of the benefits and drawbacks of the various practices used in the hybrid working model.

From the perspective of the forthcoming in-depth research, we would like to highlight three research threads that are directly relevant to those presented:

- 1) managerial support for hybrid working teams,
- 2) employees' competencies for hybrid working,
- 3) calibration of processes considering culture and values in hybrid work implementation processes.

All of the mentioned research themes raise issues of managerial support addressed by other researchers, also in the context of perceived organisational support [91, 92]. This, in turn, raises the question of what behavioural competencies managers need, and future

research should therefore address this issue in the first instance.

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The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

### Author contributions

CONCEPTION: Anna Wiatr, Beata Skowron-Mielnik (50/50) METHODOLOGY: Anna Wiatr, Beata Skowron-Mielnik (70/30) DATA COLLECTION: Anna Wiatr, Beata Skowron-Mielnik (50/50) INTERPRETATION OR ANALYSIS OF DATA: Anna Wiatr, Beata Skowron-Mielnik (70/30) PREPARATION OF THE MANUSCRIPT: Anna Wiatr REVISION FOR IMPORTANT INTELLECTUAL CONTENT: Anna Wiatr, Beata Skowron-Mielnik (70/30) SUPERVISION: Beata Skowron-Mielnik

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