

Chapter 10

Hybrid Work and The Transformation of Employment Relations: Effects On Employee Engagement, Work-Life Balance and Organisational Commitment

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Abstract

Hybrid work has moved from an emergency response to a durable feature of contemporary employment, with important implications for the relationship between employers and employees. This paper argues that hybrid work should be understood not merely as a change in work location but as a transformation of employment relations involving trust, managerial control, communication, employee voice, work-life boundaries and organisational attachment. Drawing on recent empirical and review evidence, the paper examines how hybrid arrangements affect employee engagement, work-life balance and organisational commitment. The evidence suggests that hybrid work can strengthen autonomy, retention, engagement and work-life balance when it is supported by appropriate technology, structured communication, fair access to opportunities and outcome-based performance management. However, poorly designed arrangements may also produce isolation, work intensification, blurred boundaries, excessive monitoring and weaker organisational identification. The paper concludes that sustainable hybrid employment relations require a reciprocal model in which flexibility is matched by accountability, managerial trust is supported by clear expectations, and technological coordination does not become continuous surveillance. The quality of hybrid work ultimately depends on how organisations balance performance objectives with employee well-being, inclusion and voice.

Keywords: hybrid work; employment relations; employee engagement; work-life balance; organisational commitment; trust; managerial control

Introduction

Hybrid work has become a prominent feature of contemporary employment as organisations combine office-based work with remote work supported by digital communication and collaboration technologies. Its significance extends beyond where employees perform their duties. Hybrid arrangements reshape expectations concerning autonomy, supervision, communication, performance, trust and the psychological relationship between employees and their organisations. Evidence suggests that hybrid work can improve flexibility and retention, but its outcomes depend substantially on how organisations design and manage the arrangement (Bloom et al., 2024; Eng et al., 2024).

Traditional employment relations developed around shared physical workplaces in which supervision, interaction and organisational communication were closely tied to presence. Hybrid work weakens this connection and requires greater reliance on digital coordination, trust and outcome-based performance. Systematic evidence on telework shows mixed consequences for

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work-life balance, commitment, professional isolation and communication, indicating that flexibility is neither automatically beneficial nor harmful (Mele et al., 2023). The central argument of this paper is therefore that hybrid work represents a transformation of employment relations rather than a simple scheduling innovation. Its sustainability depends on whether organisations can combine flexibility with trust, accountability, employee voice and protection of employee well-being.

Hybrid Work as a Transformation of Employment Relations

Hybrid work refers to an arrangement in which employees divide their working time between an organisational workplace and a remote location. Unlike fully remote work, it retains a continuing connection with the physical workplace while introducing greater discretion over where work is performed. The resulting workplace is less dependent on physical proximity and more dependent on the organisation's ability to integrate people, technology and work processes across locations. Hybrid workers identify appropriate information and communication technologies, structured communication, collaboration and social interaction as important conditions for effectiveness (Eng et al., 2024).

The most important change concerns the basis of the employment relationship. When employees are not continuously visible, managers cannot rely primarily on physical observation. Organisational control increasingly shifts towards clearly defined expectations, work outputs and accountability. A synthesis of remote-work research identifies supervisory style, trust, organisational identification and control systems as central dimensions of this transition (Pianese et al., 2023). Hybrid work therefore encourages a movement from presence-based management towards a relationship in which employees receive greater autonomy but are also expected to demonstrate results.

Trust is critical in this model. Excessive monitoring may communicate distrust and weaken autonomy, while appropriate managerial support can reinforce responsibility and reciprocal confidence. Research on supervisor monitoring shows that intensive monitoring can reduce employees' felt trust and well-being (Zheng et al., 2023). Similarly, responsible autonomy in remote work depends on an ongoing balance between employee discretion, managerial control and trust (Abgeller et al., 2024). Hybrid employment relations are therefore strongest when accountability is explicit but surveillance is restrained.

Employee Engagement in Hybrid Work

Employee engagement concerns the degree to which employees are psychologically connected to, energetic about and actively involved in their work. Hybrid work can support engagement by increasing autonomy and flexibility, but it can also weaken engagement if physical distance becomes social or managerial distance. Evidence from hybrid workers shows that collaboration, socialisation, structured communication and suitable technology can strengthen the work experience and sustain engagement across locations (Eng et al., 2024).

The implication is that engagement depends less on the mere availability of remote work than on the quality of the hybrid environment. Employees require access to colleagues, timely information, responsive managers and reliable digital tools. Where these are absent, reduced face-to-face interaction may produce isolation, weaker belonging and communication difficulties. Organisations should therefore treat connection as a design requirement of hybrid work. Flexibility is most likely to improve engagement when employees retain meaningful contact with teams and leaders, have clear objectives and are not disadvantaged because they are less physically visible.

Work-Life Balance and the Boundary Problem

Work-life balance is one of the strongest arguments in favour of hybrid work. Reduced commuting and greater control over work location can create more time for family responsibilities, rest and personal activities. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis found a significant positive association between flexible working arrangements and work-life balance, indicating that flexibility can improve employees' capacity to coordinate work and non-work responsibilities (Çivilidağ & Durmaz, 2026).

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Yet the same flexibility can create a boundary problem. When work enters the home, employees may find it more difficult to detach psychologically from work, particularly when digital communication extends beyond conventional working hours. Nigerian evidence also shows that home demands can complicate the relationship between work engagement and work-life balance (Ugwu et al., 2023). Hybrid work can therefore reduce commuting while simultaneously increasing the permeability of the boundary between professional and personal life.

This makes work-life balance an organisational responsibility rather than solely an individual coping issue. Managers should establish clear expectations about availability, response times, workloads and non-working hours. The risk is that apparent flexibility becomes work intensification, with employees expected to remain continuously reachable. Research on hybrid workplaces warns that work intensification can generate perceptions of exploitation and negative employee outcomes (Alsaad et al., 2025). Genuine flexibility requires both discretion and limits.

Organisational Commitment and Belonging

Organisational commitment reflects employees' attachment to the organisation, identification with its goals and willingness to remain. Hybrid work can strengthen commitment when flexibility is interpreted as evidence that the organisation trusts employees and recognises their individual circumstances. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that flexible working arrangements are positively associated with organisational commitment, although the strength of the relationship varies across contexts (Çivilidağ & Durmaz, 2026). Structured hybrid work has also been shown to improve retention without damaging performance (Bloom et al., 2024).

However, commitment can weaken when remote employees experience isolation, reduced access to informal information, fewer interactions with leaders or limited participation in organisational routines. Organisational attachment develops not only through formal policy but through everyday contact and a sense of belonging. Hybrid work therefore requires deliberate inclusion. Employees working remotely should have equitable access to information, recognition, career opportunities, development and participation in decisions. The relevant question is not how many days employees work remotely, but whether they continue to experience themselves as valued members of the organisation.

Technology, Trust and Managerial Control

Technology provides the infrastructure for hybrid work, enabling communication, collaboration, information sharing and performance coordination across locations. It also changes how managers observe and evaluate employees. As traditional behavioural control becomes less feasible, outcome-based control becomes more important (Dekker et al., 2025). This creates an opportunity for more mature performance management centred on agreed objectives and outputs rather than physical presence.

The opportunity is accompanied by a risk of digital overreach. Because technology can make employee activity highly visible, organisations may be tempted to replace physical supervision with extensive digital monitoring. Such an approach can damage the trust on which hybrid work depends. Research indicates that managerial trust and communication frequency are positively associated with perceptions of telework effectiveness (De la Torre-Ruiz & Ferrón-Vílchez, 2024). Psychological contract research also shows that heightened supervisory control can contribute to felt mistrust and perceptions of contract breach (Gong & Sims, 2023).

A sustainable control model therefore combines clear standards, regular communication and transparent performance assessment with employee autonomy and privacy. Technology should facilitate coordination and feedback rather than function primarily as a surveillance system. This balance will become increasingly important as artificial intelligence and data-driven management are integrated into hybrid workplaces. Algorithmic management can influence how work is allocated, monitored and evaluated, raising additional questions about fairness, privacy and employee voice (Aloisi, 2024).

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Human and Organisational Challenges

Hybrid work creates a continuing tension between flexibility and connection. Employees may value autonomy while simultaneously experiencing loneliness, fragmented communication or uncertainty about their place within the organisation. At the organisational level, managers must coordinate schedules, maintain culture, support collaboration and ensure that remote employees are not disadvantaged in access to information or leadership attention. These challenges cannot be solved simply by transferring office routines to digital platforms.

Continuous connectivity is another concern. Digital tools can increase the speed and volume of communication, but intensive ICT demands may also create stress and make detachment from work more difficult. Recent research links ICT demands in hybrid work to important employee and managerial outcomes, reinforcing the need for safeguards around workload and connectivity (Keller et al., 2026). The central design challenge is to prevent flexibility from becoming a mechanism through which working time expands and the costs of organising work are transferred to employees.

Implications for Managers, Employees and Employee Representatives

For managers, hybrid work requires a shift from visibility-based supervision to performance management based on results, communication and support. Clear objectives, agreed deliverables and regular feedback are more appropriate than attempts to reproduce continuous office supervision at a distance. Managers must also guard against proximity bias by ensuring that career opportunities, recognition and information do not flow primarily to employees who are physically present.

For employees, hybrid work increases the importance of self-management, digital competence, communication and boundary-setting. Employees need sufficient autonomy to organise their work, but they also require protection against excessive monitoring, isolation, work intensification and unequal treatment. Organisations should provide the technology, training and social connection necessary to make flexibility workable rather than merely granting permission to work remotely.

Employee representatives, staff associations and trade unions also have a role in the emerging hybrid employment relationship. Issues such as working hours, digital monitoring, health and safety, workload, performance assessment, privacy and access to development increasingly require consultation. Hybrid work should therefore be treated as a subject of employment relations and employee voice, not only as a managerial convenience or technology policy.

The Author's Position and the Future of Hybrid Employment Relations

The position advanced in this paper is that hybrid work should be judged by the quality of the employment relationship it produces. A hybrid arrangement cannot be regarded as successful merely because it reduces office costs or maintains productivity. If it simultaneously produces exhaustion, isolation, constant monitoring or declining commitment, then the employment relationship has deteriorated even if operational targets are achieved.

The preferred model is one of reciprocal flexibility. Employees receive meaningful discretion over work location and organisation, while employers retain legitimate expectations concerning performance, communication and accountability. Control is not removed; its basis changes from constant observation to transparent objectives, outcomes and dialogue. Evidence that structured hybrid work can improve retention without reducing performance shows that organisational effectiveness and employee interests need not be competing objectives (Bloom et al., 2024).

The future of hybrid employment relations is therefore likely to be defined by differentiation rather than a universal formula. Different jobs, employees and organisations will require different combinations of remote and onsite work. What should remain constant are the governing principles: trust, clear expectations, inclusion, appropriate technology, respect for non-working time, fair performance assessment and meaningful employee voice. Hybrid work should become a more mature employment relationship in which flexibility is reciprocal and technology supports human work rather than replacing trust with continuous observation.

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Conclusion

Hybrid work has transformed employment relations by changing how work is coordinated, how managerial control is exercised and how employees remain connected to their organisations. Its implications extend beyond work location to engagement, work-life balance, organisational commitment, trust, communication, well-being and employee voice. Well-designed hybrid arrangements can provide greater autonomy and flexibility while supporting retention and performance. Poorly designed arrangements can instead produce isolation, blurred boundaries, work intensification, excessive monitoring and weaker organisational attachment.

The central lesson is that hybrid work must be managed as an employment-relations issue rather than merely a workplace-location policy. Sustainable arrangements require trust supported by accountability, outcome-based performance management, effective communication, equitable access to opportunities and clear boundaries around work. Employee representatives should also participate in shaping the rules that govern monitoring, workload and flexibility. The long-term value of hybrid work will depend on whether organisations can combine technological capability with human-centred management so that organisational performance and employee well-being are treated as complementary objectives.

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