

Effective hybrid working for employers and employees

Hybrid working is thought of as the new normal for many office workers, but their experiences vary widely. It empowers some employees yet is restrictive and stifles opportunity for others. ‘One size doesn’t fit all’ and the workplace still plays a vital role in a hybrid world. Hybrid working can unlock innovation and productivity or suppress successful business outcomes.



Before our research, hybrid working wasn’t widely understood. We investigated:

- What does ‘hybrid working’ mean in practice? How are managers approaching it? What is its impact on workers and organisations?
- Is there evidence to favour office, home or hybrid working?
- What are the implications for the future workplace following initial decisions over hybrid policies?

We carried out:



91 employee interviews

with people in varied roles, at different levels of responsibility and with multiple working patterns across the public and private sectors



74 stakeholder interviews

with office design and operation experts plus leaders involved in decisions about their offices and staff work patterns



5 workshops

exploring what future workplaces could look like



2 snapshot surveys with 1025 workers

across different industries and the public and private sectors

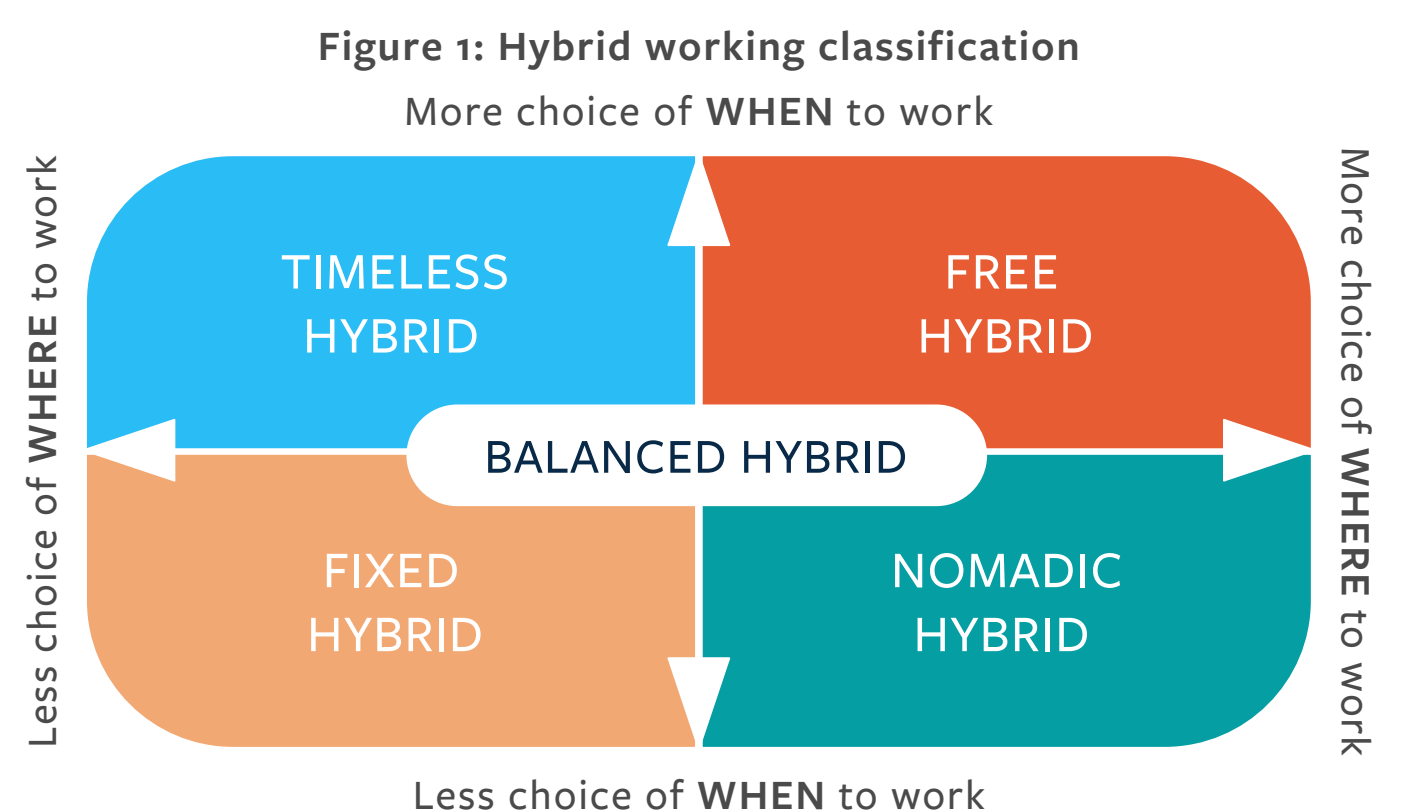


4471 diary observations from 346 office workers

in different types of workplaces

Key findings:

- 1. The office is beneficial to employees and employers.** Working in the office is related to greater employee job satisfaction, engagement and concentration, but seemingly at the perceived cost of work-life balance.
- 2. Hybrid working is not necessarily more positive than full time home or office working.** Hybrid working varies in how much control employees have (see Figure 1). An employee could be told exactly where and when they are working, expected to work in unsuitable conditions at home or have mandated working patterns that are difficult to fulfil alongside caring responsibilities.



3. Many workers do not have an appropriate home workspace.

This could prevent people who may gain the most from increased flexibility from taking up hybrid working, especially as employers' expectations about home workspaces may increase. This may also drive changes to the future design of homes.



33% have no dedicated workspace at home

4. Training for hybrid working is woefully low.

To capture gains from hybrid working we need to prepare organisations, leaders and workers for different ways of working. Hybrid is different to virtual and in-person working.



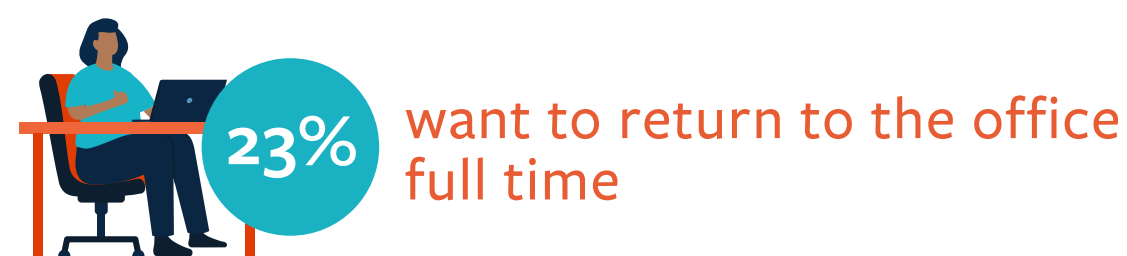
6% of workers were trained for hybrid working

5. Public sector workers want to return to the office for as much or more time than private sector workers.

6. Hybrid tensions pose a culture risk.

There is a risk of employees experiencing an 'us and them' workplace but this can be addressed through localised policies, job redesign and other flexibility within roles. There is also tension between 'me and we' – with employees prioritising individual work-life balance or personal productivity over accepting greater co-location/office working or coordinated schedules.

7. Most workers prefer hybrid working, but big proportions still prefer either working in the office full time or homeworking.



8. A seismic shift is underway and organisations are still designing what hybrid working may look like: this has only just started.

Hybrid working is changing the nature of workplaces, technologies and ways of working. We are a long way from the 'new normal'. Organisations are still feeling their way and employees are developing new habits. Organisations need to maintain or grow their Future Ways of Working teams – there is still a long way to go!



Recommendations for employers:

- **Test and learn.** Avoid making long-term assumptions about work patterns or how much future office space will be required. Hybrid working policies will evolve as they meet the reality of changing routines.
- **Invest in training** for all managers and employees for effective hybrid working.
- **Support employees living in properties with less private space** to retain access to hybrid and homeworking. Explore offering access to 'third' places, shared local hubs and co-working provision to provide colleagues with safe and appropriate workspace in suitable locations.
- **Involve workers in the design of hybrid policies.** This can help resolve tensions between groups, spot problems and make employees part of solutions to the challenges of hybrid working.
- **Support young and early career employees.** They value the workplace as a place to train, network and 'learn what work is'. They need support in establishing how and when to use digital tools, and find informal networking more difficult in an online environment.
- **Encourage choice and enable control over where employees work.** Offering individual choice and allowing a better fit of space to task pays off in terms of employee outcomes.
- **Build a positive story for colleagues to come into the workplace.** Evidence this while being sensitive that there are trade-offs for individuals, groups and organisations.
- **Provide certainty and ground rules for where and how to work,** such as where particular activities should be undertaken and boundaries to enable colleagues to plan their week. Too much choice can be overwhelming.

Get in touch with Dr Matthew Davis m.davis@leeds.ac.uk to find out more.

This policy brief is based on research conducted at the University of Leeds. Read the full report: Davis, M.C., Hughes, H.P.N., Rees, S.J., Wu, C., Gritt, E., Collis, C., & Fang, L. (2022) Where is your office today? A research-led guide to effective hybrid working. Leeds, UK: University of Leeds. Available at futureworkplace.leeds.ac.uk.

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