Hybrid Work Culture, Women Empowerment, and Occupational Stress: A Cultural Sustainability Perspective in the IT Industry

Apeksha Narayan Nigade[1][*] | Dr. Ravindra Deshmukh[2]

[1]Ph.D. Research Scholar, Commerce Research Center, B.P.H.E Society's Ahmednagar College, Maharashtra, India (Affiliated to the Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune), India.
[2]Research Guide, Professor& Head, Commerce Research Center, B.P.H.E Society's Ahmednagar College, Maharashtra, India (Affiliated to the Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune), India.

[*]Corresponding Author: apeksha.nigade@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Women must be treated with the appropriate respect, dignity, justice, and equality; only then will they be empowered in the fullest sense of the word. Employees in the hybrid work paradigm have unprecedented opportunities to improve their family life, career aspirations, and general well-being. Women's workplace empowerment in India and around the world has been greatly aided by hybrid working shifts. This is a result of the flexible work culture created by hybrid working, which has become more prevalent since the epidemic and is drawing more women to the workplace. This study explores the widely used hybrid work paradigm, which is receiving a lot of attention in the IT and ITeS sectors. It focuses on female employees and seeks to analyze how they see office, remote, and hybrid work modes. Hybrid working methods have been a revolutionary advancement in the organization of contemporary labor in recent years. However, the majority of previous study has mostly focused on the financial benefits of hybrid work for businesses, frequently ignoring its wider societal effects, especially those related to women's employment. Additionally, not enough research has been done on the wider ramifications of hybrid labor in various cultural and social situations. The simultaneous pressures of career and household responsibilities have made occupational stress a major worry in today's workplace, with women employees suffering disproportionately. Employee stress-coping tactics have an impact on an employee's performance due to a number of reasons, including peer interactions, job satisfaction, motivation, occupational stress, and remote working issues. The results of the multiple mediation study show that the mediator variables— occupational stress and job satisfaction—have no statistically significant impact on performance when working remotely. Workload, job insecurity, a poor work environment, personal issues, and a lack of structure are the top five causes of occupational stress for female IT workers who work from home, according to the exploratory factor analysis. The study's multiple regression analysis shows that there is an inverse and adversely significant association between the five components of occupational stress and mental health. We will talk about this in this paper. Occupational Stress, Women's Empowerment, and Hybrid Work Culture: A Cultural Sustainability Viewpoint in the IT Sector.

Keywords: Hybrid Work Culture, Women Empowerment, and Occupational Stress, Women's Well-Being, Professional Environment, Job Satisfaction, Workload, Poor Work Environment, Information Technology.

Introduction

A paradigm shifts in how employees approach their professional responsibilities has been brought about by the introduction of hybrid work models, which have completely changed the landscape

of traditional work environments. For female employees, this development is extremely important, notably in the fields of information technology (IT) and information technology-enabled services (ITES). For female professionals, the hybrid work paradigm enables flexibility and redefines work-life balance by combining aspects of remote and on-site employment. [1]

Understanding how female employees view the hybrid work paradigm is crucial in this fast-paced period since it has a direct impact on their work experiences, job happiness, and general well-being. As women negotiate the complexities of hybrid work arrangements, the IT and ITES industry known for its fast-paced and inventive nature plays a critical role in influencing these perspectives.

Hybrid Work Model

The combination of office, remote, and mobile workers is supported by the straightforward working model known as hybrid working. It allows workers the flexibility to decide where and how they work most effectively. It is an approach to personnel management that is humanistic. This strategy improves productivity and job satisfaction while resolving the main issues of distant, isolated, and community-less work. Employees can work from home or any other location where they can be more productive thanks to the hybrid work paradigm. Instead of working inside the four walls of the company's office, hybrid working creates a mixed ecosystem where employees operate both from home and in the office. Depending on the task that has to be done, employees may relocate. Depending on the type of work and the organization, many hybrid work models may be used.

The information technology (IT) and information technology-enabled services (ITES) sectors have been talking about working from home more lately. Many businesses think it solves the problems of physical office administration and reduces workers' commute time and overhead. Employers have urged their staff to work remotely or in a hybrid mode, with a few employees working in the office on a rotating basis, whenever feasible. For regular meetings and conversations, the staff members were connected using conferencing apps like Zoom, Blue Jeans, Teams, and others. Some employees' psychological well-being was impacted by post-pandemic stress and intense emotional upheaval. Some companies have changed their rules and practices to allow for flexible or remote work. [2]

Types of Hybrid Work Models

- **Flexible Hybrid Working Mode**

Based on their daily priorities, workers select their location and working hours. For instance, people can decide to work from home or in a coffee shop if they need to dedicate time to a project. They can decide to go into the office if they need to meet with their team, attend a training session, or participate in a town hall. This strategy gives people the flexibility and independence to choose where and when they work. It creates a connection based on trust with staff members, which boosts loyalty and job happiness, broadens the talent pool, encourages more diverse thinking, and improves the bottom line by saving money on travel and office space. The biggest issues are that it's hard for staff to pick a time or day that works for in-person teamwork, they don't know how many people will be in the office on any given day, and they don't know if the building can accommodate them.

- **Fixed Hybrid Work Mode**

The company determines the days and times that workers are permitted to work from home or in the office. For instance, some teams might work on Mondays and Wednesdays, while others might work on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Alternatively, a company can permit employees to work from home on specific days every week. This strategy makes it easier to predict office occupancy, allows employees to schedule appointments or do quick errands on specific days of the week, and boosts the chance for face-to-face communication and team development. There are also difficulties, such as the difficulty to minimize office space and the lack of individual choice, which could result in a loss of productivity if employees aren't in the best environment for the task that needs to be done.

- **Office-First Hybrid Work Mode**

Although they have the option to work remotely a few days a week, employees are expected to be on-site. This kind of approach, where people work in the office three days a week but have the option to work remotely on two days, is what Google intends to implement. Although this model permits flexibility and individual choice and aids in upholding the company's culture and community, employees are unable to see who will be in the office on a given day and it is difficult to predict how many people will be present.

- **Remote-First Hybrid Mode**

The majority of the time, employees work remotely, with sporadic trips to coworking spaces or the office for training, team-building, and collaboration. Under this approach, the business could not have an office location and instead depends on local team members meeting whenever it's convenient for them. For workers who choose to work remotely most of the time, this boosts output and job satisfaction and allows for cost savings through the reduction or elimination of office space. The difficulties include the possibility that workers will feel alone and more difficulties upholding the company's culture and community. Mothers in particular and working parents in general have spent decades attempting to balance their personal and professional lives. [3]

Work-Life Balance

WLB is defined by Brough et al. (Citation2014, p. 2728) as "an individual's subjective appraisal of the accord between his/her work and non-work activities, and life more generally." WLB can be increased by minimizing the impact of work life on non-work life activities and decreasing the influence of demands from non-work life on work activities. For example, working from home or a nearby office hub can significantly cut down on the time you spend traveling to and from work, freeing you more time for non-work-related activities. Setting priorities and combining work and personal responsibilities without sacrificing either is a key component of work-life balance. Hybrid employment, which offers flexibility in terms of location and hours, can enhance work-life balance by allowing individuals to mix their personal, professional, and family responsibilities. This study will thus address the requirement for an up-to-date, thorough understanding of the factors that favorably impact organizational and psychosocial hybrid work environments. In order to better understand the existing situation, we carried out a qualitative survey to get employee suggestions on how hybrid work may be set up to promote cooperation, work-related health, and WLB.

Occupational Stress

The physiological and psychological reaction to situations or events at work that are harmful to general health and wellbeing is referred to as occupational stress. Autonomy and independence, decision latitude, workload, degree of responsibility, job security, physical environment and safety, type and tempo of work, and relationships with coworkers and superiors are some of the elements that affect it. [4]

Empowering Women Leaders Benefits Everyone

In the hybrid workplace, companies need to take the initiative to fully support female leaders. A company must fully support a female leader who works remotely or in a hybrid role if it hopes to retain her. One could contend that the epidemic gave many female executives a stronger voice, enabling them to obtain the respect and work-life balance they had been pursuing before to the hybrid work paradigm's broad adoption. In other words, businesses may now utilize the skills of women who are both mothers and caregivers. Retaining female leaders and giving them the skills and tools they need is good for the organization, the women, and the leadership pipeline. [5]

Review of Literature

According to Dr. N. Shanmughavadivu and Dr. A. Sethuramasubbiah's study, Occupational Stress and job Life Balance among Married Women Police, International Journal of Research in Social Sciences Vol. 8 Issue 1, January 2018, police job is typically seen as a demanding profession. Police work is particularly demanding and stressful for women. High levels of stress cause imbalances in women police officers' personal and professional lives. As a result, the study made an effort to determine married female police officers' levels of occupational stress and work-life balance. The results showed that married police officers have a modest level of work-life balance and occupational stress. Age, experience, salary, working hours, number of children, getting assistance from a spouse, occupational stress, and work-life balance are all different for female police officers. The correlation results indicate that women police officers have higher levels of work-life balance and lower levels of occupational stress. Among married female police officers, work-life balance is strongly predicted by age, salary, number of children, and total number of working hours per day. [6]

Shobha Sundaresan, "Work-life balance – Implications for working women," Maharani Lakshmi Ammanni College for Women, Bangalore, India. The work-life balance analyses offered in this study are an effort to comprehend the factors influencing working women's work-life balance as well as the effects of a poor work-life balance. In India, women are still mostly in charge of their families, and their careers are rarely given significant attention. According to this survey, the main variables influencing working women's work-life balance are the burden of excessive work, the pressure to live up to others'

expectations, and a lack of personal time. As a result, women are unable to reach their full potential, endure high levels of stress and anxiety, suffer from job burnout, and do not lead peaceful families. Informal conversations with working women showed that those with flexible work schedules and family assistance had better work-life balance. [7]

The nature of particular strains and stressors experienced by married women in their roles as housewives, workers, and spouses was examined by Kandel et al. They discovered that married women experience less stress and tension in their family responsibilities than in their jobs and homes. These have more detrimental effects on women's psychological health than stressors and strains at work. Role-specific stress contributed to strains, which in turn predicted discomfort. [8]

The primary goal of N. Vanitha and Dr. Shailashri V. T.'s 2023 study, "A Systematic Literature Review on Impact of Hybrid Work Culture on Employee Job Engagement and Productivity - A Study of IT Professionals in Karnataka," was to investigate the effects of hybrid work culture on employee job engagement and productivity with a focus on IT professionals in Karnataka. The study evaluated the degree of job engagement and the degree of flexibility offered by employers, which has an effect on commitment, motivation, and general job involvement. In order to comprehend the impact of a mix of in-office and remote labor on output quality, the authors also assessed productivity metrics. The results showed that companies implementing hybrid work models sought to boost employee engagement through elements including culture, reimagined rating systems, and recognition. Long-term success was found to depend on staff retention, and work-life balance was found to be accelerated by digital transformation. [9]

Objectives

- To study effect of stress and work life balance on the quality of life of women professionals. To understand women employees' perceptions of the hybrid work model.
- To explore the different factors of occupational stress among women IT professionals who are working remotely
- To Factors influencing productivity, Collaboration and Communication in hybrid work model and its effects.

Research Methodology

The research employs a qualitative methodology to explore the experiences of professional women in relation to hybrid work culture, empowerment, and occupational stress. Data were gathered through both personal and group interviews with women professionals, primarily from the IT and ITES sectors, utilizing a purposive sampling method. Meetings were scheduled in advance to accommodate the participants' convenience, and interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via virtual platforms. A semi-structured interview framework was developed to facilitate discussions on work-life balance, occupational stress, and organizational support. Personal interviews were instrumental in capturing individual viewpoints, while group interviews fostered collective discussion and comparison of experiences. Prior consent was secured from all participants, and confidentiality was upheld throughout the research. The qualitative data collected were analyzed thematically to uncover significant patterns and insights that align with the research objectives.

Result and Discussion

Elements affecting communication, teamwork, and productivity in the hybrid work model and its consequences.
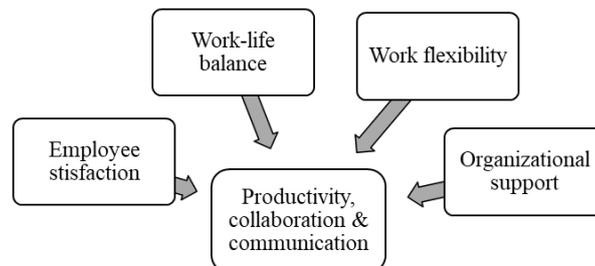
Figure 1: Factors Influencing Productivity, Collaboration and Communication in Hybrid Work Model and its Effects

| Employee Satisfaction	Work-Life Balance	Work Flexibility	Organizational Support
Duration of WFH	Effective team management	Organizational policies on hybrid work	Equitable treatment for both remote and in-office employees
Digital social support	Structured work schedule	Employee needs and preferences	Flexible scheduling option
Flexible scheduling		Job task requirement	
Well-designed workpace at home	Ability to disconnect from work outside designated hours	Communication protocol	Well-defined expectations for collaboration
Sense of belonging to the team even when working remotely	Access to necessary technology	Team dynamics	Training on virtual tools
	Clear communication of expectations	Technology capability	Prioritizing employee wellbeing

This study's conceptual framework centers on the important factors of employee satisfaction, work-life balance, work flexibility, and organizational support. It looks at how these factors relate to one another and how they affect communication, productivity, and teamwork in a hybrid work environment. Productivity is seen to be positively connected with employee satisfaction, a crucial measure of employee contentment. Work-life balance, which represents the harmony between work and personal life, is regarded as a mediating factor that influences job satisfaction and, in turn, production, teamwork, and communication. It is hypothesized that work flexibility will improve team dynamics and job satisfaction by taking into account employee needs, preferences, and communication protocols. Employee morale is thought to be influenced by organizational support, states that prioritize employee well-being, training on virtual tools, and treating both in-person and remote workers fairly. These factors are thought to have a positive impact on overall productivity, collaboration, and communication. In order to promote a more productive hybrid work environment, this framework seeks to clarify the complex relationships between these variables and provide insights into how firms can maximize employee satisfaction, work-life balance, work flexibility, and organizational support. [10–11]

Hybrid Working Model

In essence, a hybrid working model combines working from home and the office as needed for the task. Before COVID-19, many companies, especially in the IT industry, provided workers with the option to work from home occasionally as a bonus to assist them balance work and family obligations. This bonus program was specifically designed to support female employees who frequently had to take on the role of primary caretaker for their families, making them necessary at home if a family member was unwell or in need of assistance. Employees might work or be available to work at any time of day in accordance with the needs thanks to the flexibility of working from home.

Only 10% of CEOs in India are interested in having their staff return to their offices, according to research. Many firms have shifted to a combination of working from home and/or the office depending on business needs in an effort to reduce this resistance and preserve the advantages of remote working as much as feasible. The Hybrid Working Model is the name given to this. According to Grzegorczyk et al. (2021), "in a hybrid model, workers can telework for a proportion of their contracted working hours within the limits of individually or collectively negotiated work arrangements." This working paradigm proved to be more productive and efficient for a number of businesses. [12]

McKinsey & Company, a global management consulting organization, surveyed 885 workers to find out what they thought about the hybrid working model and going back to offices. The percentage of respondents that support each working model is displayed in the chart below.
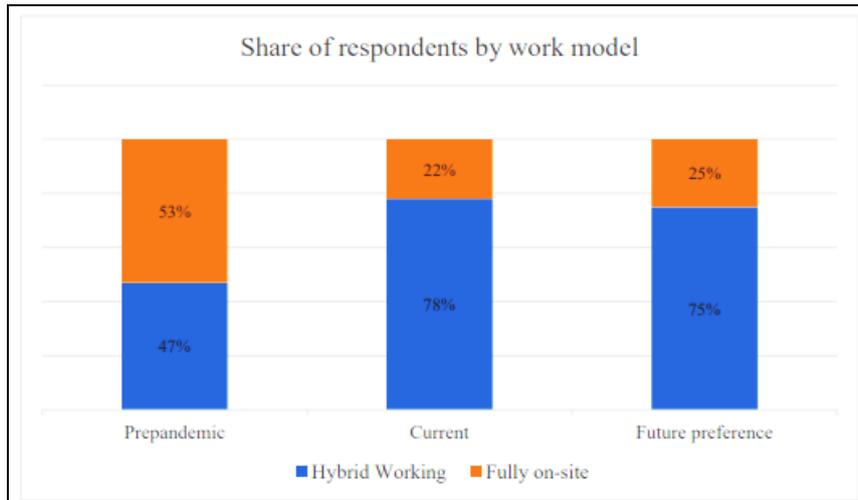
Figure 2: Research by McKinsey & Company about Employees' Preference for Hybrid Working Model and/or Fully on-site Model
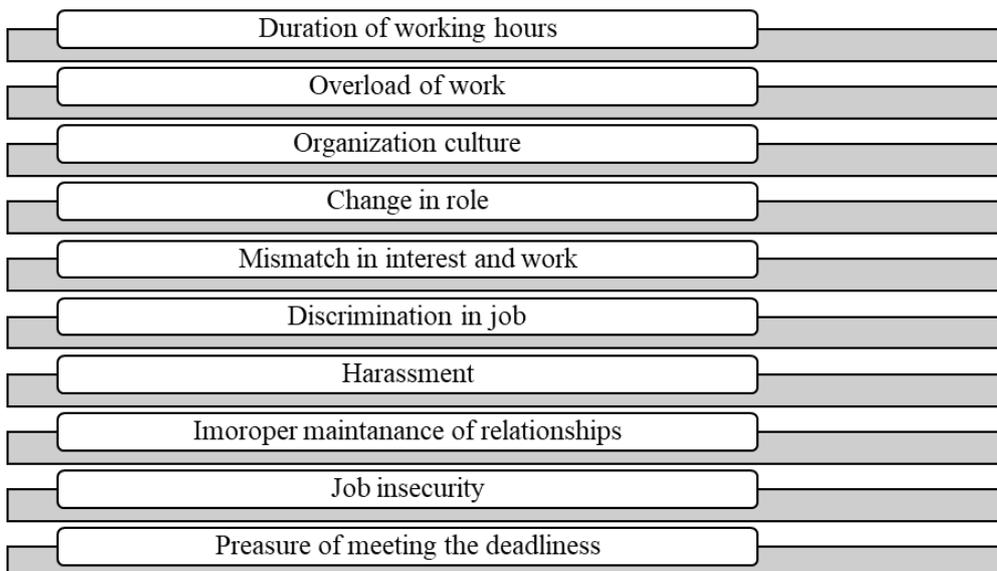
The graph indicates a significant change in preferences from the pre-COVID era to the post-COVID era, and a preference for remote work models seems to be the trend for the foreseeable future.

Occupational Stress and Mental Health

According to Rao and Chandraiah (2012), work stress and mental health are negatively correlated. Occupational stress and mental wellness are inversely correlated. Stress at work has an impact on emotions as well as physical health. The connection between mental health and workplace stress. Unlike the first study, there was no discernible link between work stress and mental health in this report. There was only a moderate correlation between the two factors. The researchers came to the conclusion that there is no such association since there are different ways to deal with burnout brought on by work-related stress. [13]

Determinants of Occupational Stress

The following are some of the various factors that affect occupational stress:

- Duration of working hours
- Overload of work
- Organization culture
- Change in role
- Mismatch in interest and work
- Discrimination in job
- Harassment
- Imoroper maintanance of relationships
- Job insecurity
- Preasure of meeting the deadliness

Figure 3: Determinants of Occupational Stress

WLB of Female Employees in Indian IT Sector

The information technology sector has a very fast-paced, competitive, and challenging work environment. Many people look for job in the IT industry because of its very enticing compensation and benefits, despite the industry's intense deadlines, related pressure, and erratic work schedules. Many women prefer to work in the IT industry because of its flexibility, especially in multinational corporations (MNCs), which enables them to advance their careers while juggling their obligations to their families. [14–15]

Conclusion

Workers who have benefited from hybrid employment seem committed to sticking with it. Companies now have the opportunity to rethink a more adaptable and inclusive hybrid work paradigm that is consistent with their organizational commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion. It won't be a simple task. However, performance, organizational cohesiveness, and enhanced employee well-being, engagement, and retention can be significantly enhanced for leaders who exhibit the sensitivity, inventiveness, and humility required to mold the new hybrid work paradigm. Additionally, the hybrid working paradigm allows for unrestricted access to new talent pools. The dilemma that working women face and their reintegration into the workforce have received a lot of attention lately. Women now have more possibilities in the IT industry because to the hybrid work paradigm, but there are also challenges that need to be carefully handled. While autonomy and flexibility have improved work-life balance, issues with diminished career visibility, growing household workload, and mental health need to be addressed. By encouraging inclusive workplace policies and supporting women's professional advancement, organizations can ensure that hybrid work benefits female IT workers rather than restricting their career options. Because it offers flexibility and enhances work-life balance, the hybrid approach was highly valued. Employees reported better work-life balance despite obstacles including increased remote availability and workloads.

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