



Hybrid Work Arrangements: Challenges and the Way Forward in the Private Sector

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ABSTRACT

Working from home, teleworking, and hybrid work arrangements are not new concepts, but they have become the norm in response to the post-pandemic environment and are increasingly recognised for promoting a healthy work-life balance. Advances in technology have also transformed how employees manage their professional and personal lives. This study explores the work-life balance of employees in hybrid work arrangements within a private organisation in Sarawak, examining the challenges, impacts, and strategies used to balance work and personal responsibilities. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with five managers, each of whom had at least one child. The findings reveal that long working hours and heavy workloads are the main challenges employees face, negatively affecting both their family time and work performance. Time management and maintaining a positive attitude were identified as key strategies for achieving work-life balance. The study also shows that employees are generally satisfied with current hybrid work arrangement policies and support, with many expressing a desire to continue working under these arrangements until retirement. It is recommended that the organisation continue offering hybrid work options, enabling employees to optimise performance without compromising their well-being.

Keywords: work-life balance, hybrid work arrangement, work performance, time management, employee well-being

ARTICLE INFO

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<https://doi.org/10.33736/jcshd.8904.2025>

e-ISSN: 2550-1623

Manuscript received: 31 January 2025; Accepted: 22 March 2025; Date of publication: 31 March 2025

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1 INTRODUCTION

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has gradually reshaped how we live and work. Although the pandemic caused widespread negative consequences globally, it has also led to positive outcomes, providing new opportunities for development. Today, many organisations have implemented work-from-home strategies, while others continue to offer office-based work, or a hybrid work arrangement, which will be referred to throughout this study. Employees in younger age groups are more likely to adapt to these emerging trends, as the younger generation tends to be less concerned with the location of their work and is more digitally adept, socially and environmentally conscious (Gifford, 2022).

Organisations are increasingly encouraged to accommodate remote workers as employees become more familiar with the virtual tools required for such work. Technology offers improved access to resources, enabling information to be accessible 24 hours a day. This can enhance employee engagement, expand workplace boundaries, and provide reliable data from trusted sources (Taylor et al., 2021). The evolution of working from home, telework, and hybrid work arrangements demonstrates the central role technology plays in supporting such work. Rather than adhering to traditional working styles, organisations now allow employees to split their time between in-person work and remote work.

The transition to hybrid employment offers significant advantages for organisations, employees, and the environment (Budiman et al., 2022). It enhances employee adaptability, productivity, and job satisfaction. According to Stich (2022), it also boosts revenue, increases the talent pool, and contributes to a more sustainable future by reducing travel and office space requirements. The hybrid work schedule is determined by the work model that an organisation adopts, which underpins flexibility (Alexander et al., 2021). Some organisations allow employees to choose when and where they work, while others set established timetables that require employees to meet in the office or a coworking space for collaboration and team development. Taylor et al. (2021) have emphasised that the focus on results, rather than location and hours worked, is a key component of hybrid work. In this study, hybrid work arrangement is defined as a model that combines employees who are physically present in the same location with those who work remotely (Elmendorf & Byrne, 2021).

Employees who are part of hybrid work arrangement report that it offers benefits for both their personal welfare and productivity at work, especially in terms of improved work-life balance, effective time management, greater flexibility in choosing when and where to work, reduced job burnout, and increased productivity (Shaari et al., 2022). Dale (2022) further notes that employees with access to hybrid work arrangement are more motivated to exert greater effort as a way of thanking their employers for the flexibility of work schedules. As a result, working from home is likely to offer several advantages for personal and family well-being, particularly due to the flexibility it provides in work timing. According to Ghislieri et al. (2021), organisations must recognise the importance of work-life balance for employee well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction. By fostering a culture that values open communication, trust, and flexibility, organisations can create a supportive environment that allows employees to successfully adapt to the new work model (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Organisations must also create communication channels, engagement activities, events, and learning opportunities to unite the workforce and

bridge the gaps in social interaction and communication. Furthermore, Landes et al. (2020) have stated that a strong social network at work reduces stress and improves mental health, engagement, motivation, and productivity.

While hybrid work arrangements may seem more comfortable than traditional office work, they present challenges for employees and complicate the measurement of inputs, such as time spent and the quality of outputs (Bacarra & Decenorio, 2022; Wong et al., 2021). Ideally, hybrid work arrangements should provide employees with more time to focus on their professional tasks. However, employees working outside the office often experience reduced interaction with colleagues. Some employees may have insufficient contact with their supervisors, while others may feel excluded from important meetings, which can impact their career progression. In this context, Vinueza-Cabezas et al. (2022) argue that maintaining a certain level of social interaction is critical for employees functioning within a hybrid arrangement.

Earlier research suggests that hybrid work arrangement practices have a significant impact on an employee's ability to balance office work with family obligations. Deole et al. (2023) argue that employees' experiences of managing work and life are shaped by the antecedents of conflict and enrichment from both work and family domains. Personal lives are positively affected by fulfilment at work, and vice versa. Consequently, the experiences of these employees are best understood through the lens of the Spillover theory. This theory posits those experiences in one domain (work or non-work) spill over into the other, creating a boundary-less perception of social experiences (Sirgy & Lee, 2016). Spillover theory is characterised by both positive and negative spillover (Sirgy & Lee, 2016). According to Orel (2019) and Siwale et al. (2021), positive spillover occurs when satisfaction, energy, happiness, and stimulation at work translate into positive feelings at home or vice versa. Negative spillover, on the other hand, occurs when work-related stress, conflicts, or exhaustion hinder participation in family life. In this regard, hybrid work arrangement can be beneficial if employees use it to support both their family and professional commitments. However, it can have detrimental effects if it causes employees to blur the lines between work and family, leading to stress and reduced efficiency. To achieve work-family balance within the framework of hybrid work arrangement, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by managerial employees in balancing work and family while working in a hybrid work arrangement?
2. How does working in hybrid work arrangements affect the ability of managerial employees to balance work and family responsibilities?
3. What are the most effective strategies for managing work and family among managerial employees in hybrid work arrangement?

2 METHODS

2.1 Participants and Design

The study involved five managerial employees from various sections and grades within a utility company in Sarawak, each of whom had at least one child. The inclusion criterion of having at least one child was chosen because it is often linked to an individual's ability to balance work and

family roles (Ahmad, 1997). To capture a broad range of experiences and perspectives, maximal variation sampling was employed. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of how employees from different roles and levels within the organisation experience hybrid work arrangements. Participants were recruited through internal communication channels, with support from the Human Resources department. A qualitative research design was chosen, as it is particularly suitable for investigating complex, individual experiences and capturing the subjective perspectives of employees regarding their work-life balance in the context of hybrid work arrangements.

2.2 Data Collection

Prior to the interviews, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, their involvement, and their rights, including confidentiality. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in both English and Malay, providing flexibility while maintaining consistency across interviews to address key themes. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent, enabling accurate transcription and analysis.

2.3 Data Analysis

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the resulting data were analysed using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method involved systematically identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns or themes within the data. To ensure the reliability of the findings, inter-rater reliability was assessed. Two researchers independently coded the data and compared their findings to ensure consistency in theme identification and interpretation. Ethical considerations were rigorously followed throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained by assigning pseudonyms to the participants. Data were securely stored to protect participants' privacy.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study involved five informants, whose details are summarised in Table 1 below. The participants' ages range from 28 to 52 years. In terms of years of service, all have been employed for over seven years, with the most senior participant having 21 years of service. All participants are married, with the number of children ranging from 1 to 4. None of the participants employ domestic helpers.

Table 1. Informants' background.

No	Age	Years in service	Current position	Number of children	Housekeeper services
1	52	21	Senior Executive (HR)	3	No
2	35	15	Senior Engineer	4	No
3	34	13	Senior Executive (IT)	3	No
4	30	7	Executive (HR)	2	No
5	28	8	Executive (Land & Wayleave)	1	No

3.1 Challenges of Balancing Work and Family in Hybrid Work Arrangements

The findings identified two sub-themes—long working hours and workload—as the primary challenges in balancing work and family within hybrid work arrangements.

3.1.1 Theme 1: Long Working Hours

All informants agreed that long working hours were a major challenge. They shared personal experiences where they were unable to complete their work due to distractions associated with hybrid work arrangements.

“...of course, we have a few challenges; however, our company is concerned for the employees. During the implementation of this hybrid work arrangements, we have been provided with all the facilities needed for us to be able to work from any location we choose. For the past three years, we only need to go to the office two days a week, although this depends on the needs, but I am not going. The challenges arise when work needs to be done on time and when dealing with heavy workloads. I personally missed many of my family events because I needed to fulfil my job. The weight of tasks becomes heavier if we cannot manage them well. Planning and getting assistance are crucial for balancing work-life and family.” [Informant 1]

“I hardly have time for myself and my family... even during lunch, if my boss insists on me being ready early. My boss is strict, and I believe he wants to train us to be more capable in our work. However, I feel pressured because I need to go onsite every day and speak to people. My job requires me to do negotiations, and when going outstation, I have to take the earliest flight and return on the last flight scheduled.”

“...of course, I feel very tired. I miss the quality time with my family. It is a challenge when we have a high workload.” [Informant 5]

Long working hours pose a significant challenge in balancing career and family life, as they leave insufficient time for family and social activities. This is supported by Gálvez et al. (2018), who found that employees are either working or caring for their families, with these roles not being combined or alternated. As a result, employees often work beyond office hours to compensate for time spent on personal matters. This challenge of long working hours is further reflected in the findings of Ajzen et al. (2021). Additionally, employees may take certain aspects of hybrid work arrangements for granted, such as starting work later or taking more frequent breaks, under the assumption that they are comfortable and no longer need to commute.

3.1.2 Theme 2: Workloads

Workload was agreed upon by all informants as a major challenge. Informant 2, in particular, highlighted the challenge related to workload, as the current career progression requires employees to achieve high KPIs (Key Performance Indicators), which forces them to take on more work than they can manage.

“A lot of work sometimes cannot be done immediately. Our company uses Microsoft Teams as the communication platform. The KPI urges us, as employees, to make extra efforts, which means we often have to take on tasks that are beyond our capacity...”

“...yes for me, hybrid work arrangements need ourselves to set the boundary between work and life. As the mother of 4 active children, I have to prepare all the necessities for them before going to school and after school. Between that time, I am only working hybrid in front of my laptop. I have no quality time with my family and spend time with friends on weekdays, even on weekends because too tired and that is the only time for rest.” [Informant 2]

According to informant 4, the office time from 8am until 5pm cannot be used, besides need to allocate other time to do the office works.

“Everything is online and provided; the company will ask why employees have not responded when needed, so I have to work extra hours, sometimes even late into the night. In my department, I am responsible for listing the hired candidates. This process takes time, and discussions with the team are necessary, but when I am working in a hybrid arrangement... hybrid work arrangements is good because we have flexibility, but that flexibility means we have to work extra hours and put in more effort.” [Informant 4]

An employee may experience work overload if they are assigned too many responsibilities (Gifford, 2022). The workload described by all informants supports this finding. Balancing family and career become particularly challenging when employees are required to do increasingly large amounts of work to meet their KPIs. Furthermore, they noted that the large volume of work forces them to work on weekdays, which interferes with their rest time that should be allocated to family. Workload is a recognised issue in work-life balance (Budiman et al., 2022). According to the research, hybrid working has had a positive impact on workload because when employees work from home, the boundaries between work and family become blurred. The increasing amount of work time needed is compounded by the demands of family at home, which require more time, care, and attention.

3.2 Effect of Hybrid Work Arrangements on Work and family.

The costs associated with hybrid work arrangements arise when the worlds of work and other aspects of life intersect and overlap (Tran, 2022). In these arrangements, the impact on work-life balance can be negative, while the benefits for organisational attachment are generally positive, with most employees appreciating the flexibility offered, provided it is managed effectively. The ability to manage working hours was deemed crucial for maintaining a healthy work-life balance (Levin, 2022). However, flexibility may also increase the workload if employees take it for granted and fail to manage their time properly, potentially leading to burnout in the hybrid model. All informants agreed that the implementation of hybrid work arrangements affects the time spent working, as well as their performance and productivity.

3.2.1 Theme 1: Time

Hybrid work arrangements is applicable to desk officers but not to onsite employees. The informants agreed that while the time factor is important, the output of daily work is more crucial.

“... Yes, I agree that if planning is done well, the output will also be good. I work in HR for the business, where I manage over 2,000 employees' HR needs. I also need to stay fit to maintain my performance and productivity, as I sometimes need to hold physical meetings or discussions for more meaningful sessions.” [Informant 1]

Informant 2 believes that hybrid work arrangements provide meaningful time to complete daily tasks. The company is satisfied with employees' performance, even though most of the communication is online. While working online is not an issue, what matters is how effectively the work is done.

“The key factor is time. When we manage it well, we can also achieve good performance. Productivity is maintained, and all work can be done online as long as we have an effective communication channel and support from management. However, sometimes time is not enough because I have to focus on many things, such as my work, children, husband, and pet. So, if we are not good at organising, it impacts either our work or family.” [Informant 2]

For Informant 3, there is a challenge in balancing work and family in hybrid work arrangements, which can affect either their career or family life. The feeling of not having enough time to spend with family due to work is common.

“... My kids are under 8 years old, and they need my full attention too. If I do hybrid work arrangements, I am in front of my laptop all day, and most of the time, I end up falling asleep. When I fall asleep, I have to use my family time to finish my work. This is the impact and how it influences my performance and job satisfaction.” [Informant 3]

Work-life balance is often characterised as the quantity of time an employee spends working versus the time spent with family. According to the findings, all five informants agreed that time is a crucial factor. The time available to allocate between work and family seems insufficient due to the need to focus on multiple responsibilities. If employees fail to manage time properly, it negatively impacts either their career or family life.

This factor is supported by a past study by Racherla (2020), which stated that hybrid work arrangements can also help employees improve their work-life balance. Employers can alleviate stress and enhance employee well-being by allowing employees to choose their working hours and locations. This finding is consistent with recent studies showing that hybrid work arrangements provide higher flexibility, enabling employees to adjust their working hours to meet personal and family needs (Vinueza-Cabezas et al., 2022). However, building a work-life balance and managing time remains challenging, particularly for the newer generation of employees entering the workforce.

3.2.2 Theme 2: Performance and Productivity

The impact of work-life balance on hybrid work arrangements encouraged employees to set boundaries between work and family, preventing conflicts. Informant 4 discussed the struggles faced during the first year of implementing hybrid work arrangements and adapting to safety measures during the pandemic.

“I wake up early every morning just to ensure my work is done properly. Sometimes I can't sleep just to finish my tasks. Having a baby is another challenge, which affects both my work and my baby. Yes, I really need support from my family, and since I live with my parents, it has been a big relief for me.” [Informant 4]

“As my boss said, I have to be efficient in dealing with stakeholders and the villagers. For him, being excellent at my job is the only way to show my skills as a consultant.” [Informant 5]

Based on the findings, all informants noted that while hybrid work arrangements present a few challenges, it has proven to enhance employees' performance. Despite not being closely monitored, employees continued to perform well and remained on track with their work. This is due to the company providing all the necessary facilities for employees to work effectively under hybrid work arrangements. However, current research indicates that hybrid work arrangements offer numerous benefits for both employers and employees, with no negative effects on performance or career advancement opportunities, along with significantly higher employee experience ratings (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023). This is further supported by Ipsen et al. (2021), who stated that when leaders attend to the fundamental needs of their employees, such as providing a conducive working environment and fostering a sense of belonging, they can inspire and support success in hybrid work arrangements.

Tran (2022) highlighted changes in the workforce, noting that most leaders typically support the option of working from home, as it promotes productivity, enhances focus, and addresses issues related to work-life balance. Similarly, research during the pandemic revealed that productivity when working from home was positively associated with flexibility (Yang et al., 2023). In this context, productivity was centred on individual routines, and the physical boundaries between work and home decreased, leading to improved work-life balance.

3.3 Strategies in Balancing Work and Family in Hybrid Work Arrangements

Effective time management is identified as a key strategy for balancing work and family within the context of hybrid work arrangements. Some informants shared their approach to planning and organising their time to prevent the blending of work and family responsibilities, which could lead them to juggle both simultaneously. Time management is the process of fitting a greater amount of work and activities into a set amount of time. It plays a crucial role in ensuring that the right amount of time is allocated to the right activities. This is supported by Vinueza-Cabezas et al. (2022), who assert that effective time management skills positively impact employees' achievements by helping them manage their daily schedules and ensuring tasks run smoothly to meet goals. This approach allows employees to carve out enough time for themselves, whether for work or for spending time with loved ones.

Hassan (2016) suggests that caregiving responsibilities, supported by work-family policies, can help families navigate complexities. Spending quality time with family is enough to achieve a balance between work and life each day. The family is a fundamental social institution, and when managed effectively, it can help balance the meaning of work and life. The shift in working culture has increased responsibilities (Rudnicka et al., 2020). Employees must plan effectively to transition from traditional working hours to hybrid work arrangements. Adaptation is necessary to cope with the challenges and persistent circumstances in their lives. The informants stated that these strategies have helped them adjust to the new working arrangements.

Informant 1 discussed their strategy for balancing career and family in terms of self-management, emphasising the importance of maintaining a professional boundary between work and family life.

“...for me, it depends on the individual. My strategy is simple: I get assistance and support from my family. I’m lucky to have a very understanding spouse, and my children are all grown up. Two of them are at university, and only my daughter is at home. I have a wireless vacuum, air fryer, pressure cooker... you name it, I have it all as my kitchen assistance. That is my strategy to make my housework easier, so I can focus on my office work during hybrid work arrangements.” [Informant 1]

Informant 2 also highlighted the importance of setting boundaries in order to protect valuable time with family.

“I am very strict with myself. I wake up at 4:30am every day, do all the housework, and prepare meals from breakfast to dinner, storing them in the fridge. That is my strategy to make everything easier. I set my time as best as I can to work for my family. I always prioritise what is most important because I know work-life balance is key to maintaining a healthy lifestyle.” [Informant 2]

Informant 3 shared a similar strategy, focusing on effective time management to maintain a balanced and healthy environment. They prefer to commute to the office every day, even during hybrid work arrangements, to maintain momentum and ensure work stays separate from home life.

“...I work at the right time only. I don’t bring work home, and when I’m at home, I focus on my family. When I’m at work, I focus on my tasks. I need to focus on coding for the system, and it’s easier to access resources when I’m at the office. Reaching my staff is not a problem; time management is important because if we plan our time well, we can achieve tasks faster and more efficiently.” [Informant 3]

Informant 4, a junior executive, discussed the challenge of planning time effectively to complete all tasks. Without a housekeeper, they manage everything themselves, from waking up to going to bed. The flexibility of hybrid work arrangements, combined with strong support from their supervisor, is key to effective time management.

“I work like a superwoman, from the time I wake up until I sleep. My husband is often working outstation, so I handle everything. Even in hybrid work arrangements, we still have time during lunch and to fetch our children from school. The company emphasises work-life balance, and we,

as employees, are very grateful for that. However, not everyone can manage well. Some employees experience burnout, but we help each other during tough times.” [Informant 4]

The fifth informant also uses time management strategies to balance career and family life. Although the job requires quick responses and fast decision-making, they maintain a positive attitude to avoid conflicts with supervisors and colleagues.

“I make sure I get home on time every day and never bring office work home. I work onsite and outstation every day, so when I’m at home, I appreciate every moment with my family.” [Informant 5]

3.4 The Future of Hybrid Work Arrangements

The implementation of hybrid work arrangements by organisations is likely to remain a significant aspect of post-pandemic employment. On average, both employees and management are more inclined to continue working from home in the future.

“I agree with my management to continue with the current policy... Yes, because as a senior HR executive, I can see that employees have coped well with the implementation. The company has provided all employees with the necessary tools to work from home. Personally, I want to continue working from home, and I fully support the hybrid work arrangements policy. It is a comprehensive policy and part of the ongoing effort to make our company a great place to work.” [Informant 1]

“...Yes, I support the hybrid work arrangements policy, not only because it provides me with flexibility but also because I can still cook or wash clothes while attending meetings. The policy is beneficial as it supports the needs of employees in terms of engagement and job satisfaction. By the end of the year, we will be notified about the option to continue with hybrid work arrangements or not. In the meantime, no improvements are necessary.” [Informant 2]

“For me, it can also improve recruitment and retention efforts, enhance organisational diversity, and help the organisation be more socially responsible. Among the key benefits is the promotion of better work-life balance by balancing professional and personal commitments. I think it's great.” [Informant 4]

Every policy aims to improve and sustain business productivity. Based on the findings, the current policy has actively engaged with hybrid work arrangements, addressing organisational policy-to-practice gaps and updating employment regulations and enforcement to align with the new way of working. The company emphasises the importance of promoting work-life balance to strengthen employee engagement and motivation. This can be achieved by introducing a new policy that requires management to define standards and best practices for internal communication (Taylor et al., 2021). With such a policy in place, leaders often have substantial control over who, when, and how their team member’s work. Mishra and Bharti (2023) also support the notion that a policy demonstrates how an organisation values and trusts its personnel while recognising the growing need for job autonomy and time-spatial flexibility.

4 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that, although hybrid work arrangements contribute to digital fatigue and stress, employee performance remains satisfactory. Informants indicated that effective time management plays a crucial role in preventing conflicts and maintaining a balance between work and family life. Despite fixed working hours, work frequently intrudes on personal and family time, highlighting the importance of achieving work-life balance. These findings support the Spillover theory, as they show how the challenges of work, such as digital fatigue, negatively impact personal life, while effective time management strategies help foster a positive spillover between work and family life. Based on the Spillover theory, it is argued that experiences in one domain of life can either positively or negatively impact other domains. In the context of work-life balance, employees aim to manage the time allocated to work and other personal aspects effectively. Achieving an ideal balance between professional and personal life is key to realising this concept. Therefore, employees must manage their emotions and behaviours well to avoid negative impacts on both their work and personal lives.

This study is limited to a single utility organisation in Sarawak, which may not fully reflect the experiences of employees working under hybrid work arrangements in the private sector. Furthermore, the generalisability of the findings is constrained by the qualitative nature of the study and the limited number of informants. However, the study provides valuable insights into the implementation of hybrid work arrangements, highlighting the challenges, impacts, and potential improvements that need to be addressed. The results demonstrate that hybrid work arrangements are generally accepted by employees and are expected to continue in the future, particularly with the presence of Generation Z in the workforce, who highly value flexibility.

It is recommended that organisations continue to offer hybrid work arrangements, allowing employees to optimise their performance without compromising their well-being. Thus, the organisation's support in implementing hybrid work arrangements is crucial to ensuring employee performance, well-being, and retention. Informants expressed their preference for maintaining the hybrid model throughout their careers, not only for its flexibility but also because the organisation has provided the necessary resources and digital infrastructure to enable them to perform their work effectively. A policy that reinforces a hybrid approach could help organisations attract top talent, potentially increase productivity, and reduce facility expenses, all while avoiding new challenges related to organisational culture, training, and employee well-being. This study can assist organisations in improving the management of employee well-being.

In conclusion, the organisation's most valuable asset is its employees. Even with the best management and resources, an organisation cannot function effectively without its workforce. Therefore, management must prioritise the care and moral support of employees, making them feel valued. Furthermore, organisations will maintain productivity through high employee performance when employees are aware of and adhere to work-life balance principles. A proactive approach to creating a safe and healthy work environment involves demonstrating genuine concern and support for employees. Therefore, employers are advised to reinforce current workplace policies and take the necessary steps to ensure the successful implementation of hybrid work arrangements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research received no specific grant from public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding agencies.

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