



# **THE EVOLUTION OF HYBRID AND REMOTE WORKING**

**TRANSFORMING OFFICE-BASED JOBS**

**DONALD HISLOP**

**ROUTLEDGE**

# The Evolution of Hybrid and Remote Working

This book examines the growth of hybrid and remote working following the pandemic and the diverse issues that result from this.

While hybrid work is undoubtedly the ‘new norm’, for office-based jobs, the organisation of hybrid work arrangements continues to evolve, with many organisations attempting to adjust the balance to require workers to spend more time in the office. This book examines traditional workplace issues (productivity, work-life relations, isolation and wellbeing, meetings, and management) alongside workspace issues (virtual, office, mobile, and co-working), concluding with wider implications and potential future directions. Building on the latest research on hybrid and remote working, and including case studies from different countries, this book considers each issue from the perspective of organisations, managers, and the workers who undertake such forms of work. The author provides a balanced analysis of the topics examined, considering the diverse positive aspects of hybrid and remote working, as well as the challenges and difficulties that they can involve. He offers practical advice for hybrid workers, and those who manage them, to make these forms of work effective.

This book will have wide-ranging appeal, including for professionals such as managers and human resources workers, students and academics of business, and organisational and business psychology, and anyone interested in this fascinating and fast-evolving area.

**Donald Hislop** is Professor in the Sociology of Work and Technology in the Business School at the University of Aberdeen, UK. He has published extensively on the topics of home-based and mobile working, and has recently been an occasional contributor on BBC Radio Scotland on the topic of hybrid working.



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**To Kathy and Jimmy, for love and support  
beyond words.**



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# 1 Overview

## Introduction

Hybrid working has arguably become the new normal in a post-pandemic context for managerial, professional, and administrative work (referred to as white-collar work from now on) that was previously office based. However, there is increasing evidence in recent times that many organisations are attempting to modify hybrid working practices, to increase the amount of time that people spend in their corporate offices. This appears to be driven by various objectives, including increasing levels of productivity and control over workers, enhancing interpersonal collaboration, and strengthening organisational cultures. However, evidence suggests that hybrid workers like hybrid working and may be concerned that such a change could have negative consequences for them in terms of both their work productivity and achieving a good work-life balance. It is now a relevant time to re-examine how hybrid working is organised, especially as there is limited up-to-date analysis of contemporary developments with hybrid working.

The story of how hybrid working became the new normal for white-collar work that had typically been exclusively office-based is well known and will be touched on only briefly. Prior to the pandemic there had been a steady but modest increase in the proportion of people working remotely, but overall, the proportion doing so was relatively small. For example, in the UK, between 1995 and 2015, the percentage of the labour force who mainly worked remotely increased from about 10% to 12%.<sup>1</sup> The enforced closure of corporate offices that occurred at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 transformed this trend and resulted in a massive increase in home-based working. As the pandemic eased, from late 2021 and into 2022, hybrid working, where workers divided their time between working remotely and in the office, emerged as the most common way to organise formerly office-based working. Around this time, much was written about hybrid and remote work, and many books were published on this topic, with a general focus on how to make this form of work effective.<sup>2</sup> These books were written either during the pandemic or in its immediate aftermath, before hybrid working practices had become stabilised. Accordingly, while various forms of

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hybrid working have become very common, these books were published in its infancy. Capelli and Nehme have recently published a book on the topic,<sup>3</sup> raising questions about the efficacy of hybrid work and highlighting the benefits of office-based working. In contrast, this book takes an alternative perspective, suggesting that hybrid work is here to stay and that, despite the undoubted challenges involved in making it work, it can be an effective way to organise white-collar work, combining the benefits of home and office-based working.

What started occurring in 2023, and has gained momentum since, is that many organisations have been evolving their hybrid working practices. These developments are almost exclusively focussed on employers changing the home-office balance towards the office, with a growing number of organisations increasing the number of days that workers are expected to spend in the office. Arguably one of the most high-profile corporate examples of this is Amazon, who in September 2024 announced that it was mandating workers to return to full-time office-based working from January 2025.<sup>4</sup> This case received much media attention, partly due to Amazon's high profile, but also due to the confrontational way they were implementing it, which involved a complete end to remote working (apart from exceptional cases), and where the policy was being enforced despite significant concerns from many workers.

These corporate moves have also been adopted by some governments. For example, mimicking the case of Amazon, in late 2024, the government of New Zealand<sup>5</sup> and in early 2025, the US Federal government<sup>6</sup> both announced that they were eliminating any entitlement to home-based working for government employees.

While in some ways these cases are outliers, in other ways they are exemplars of a much wider trend. This trend is for organisations to reduce the amount of time that workers are allowed to work from home and increase the proportion of time they spend in the office. For example, in the autumn of 2024, People Management, the in-house magazine of the UK-based Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), had a feature discussing the necessity and fairness of forcing workers back to the workplace.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, a tribunal case in the UK in June 2024, where a worker was refused permission to work from home full time, was regarded as setting a precedent that may encourage other employers to try and reduce the use of remote working.<sup>8</sup> Further, in 2024, many organisations, as diverse as Barclays, IBM Consulting, Deutsche Bank, Manchester United, and the UK Civil Service, were all implementing changes requiring their workers to spend an increasing amount of time working from their employer's premises.<sup>9</sup> Finally, in the USA *Business Insider* analysed the case of over 30 US-based organisations increasing the amount of time that workers required to be in the office. However, to illustrate that the case of Amazon requiring a full-time return to the office is something of an outlier, less than 25% of these organisations were calling for a complete end to home-based or remote working.<sup>10</sup>

Despite these developments, survey evidence from a diverse range of sources generally suggests that hybrid workers are happy with hybrid working,<sup>11</sup> and as a consequence, any requirement for them to increase the amount of time working in the office may not be well received.

These ongoing changes and adjustments to hybrid working, and the potential conflict they create between workers and their employers regarding the need for them, mean that now is a very relevant time to examine the topic of hybrid and remote working. The core aim of this book is to do this, considering all the key issues related to the use of hybrid working practices. While it utilises up-to-date academic and non-academic evidence, it is aimed at both an academic and non-academic audience. It does so in a way that is readable and of interest to a wide range of people, including those researching this type of work, those managing hybrid workers, and hybrid workers themselves.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, hybrid working and related terms are defined and clarified. Secondly, some detail is provided on both the character of contemporary hybrid work patterns and the type of workers who undertake hybrid working. Finally, this chapter concludes by giving an overview of how the remainder of this book is organised.

## **Defining Terms: Hybrid and Remote Working**

Hybrid working is a relatively new term, which only became popularised in the post-COVID era. This explains why it was only at the end of 2021 that it became included as a term in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.<sup>12</sup> Definitions of the terms vary. In the broadest terms, it has been referred to as ‘a spectrum of flexible work arrangements in which an employee’s work location and/or hours are not strictly standardised’.<sup>13</sup> However, a definition as broad as this has limited value. Thus, it is preferable to have a clearer and more precise definition. In this book, hybrid work is defined as a form of work which is regularly undertaken from organisational premises and remote locations (typically the home), with information and communication technologies (ICTs), for example, laptop computers and smartphones being instrumental to work, and work-related communication (see Table 1.1). This definition is compatible with that used in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The most common structure for this form of working is that workers have a weekly pattern regarding where they work, like working at home two days per week, and working in organisational premises three days per week. The precise nature of hybrid working patterns, and arrangements, as will be seen throughout this book, can be highly varied. Therefore, the term hybrid working covers a wide range of different working practices. This includes work patterns where people spend four days per week in the office, and one day per week at home.

Prior to the term hybrid work becoming popularised other labels were used to refer to this form of work, the most common of which was teleworking or

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Table 1.1 Defining terms

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Hybrid work	Where work is regularly done from both an office base and also a remote location, typically the home and where ICTs are used for work-related communication.
Remote work	Where work is done remotely from an office base and where ICTs are used for work-related communication.
Teleworking/ telecommuting	Previously popular terms for remote or hybrid working, where some (or all) work is done remotely and where ICTs are used for work-related communication
Virtual work	Collaborative working, where people are remote from each other, use ICTs for communication, and where typically, opportunities for face-to-face interaction are limited. This may be done by people from their home or corporate offices.
Distributed work	A synonym for virtual working
Coworking	Where work is done at a dedicated, independent location, separate from the home or organisational office, which is designed to support remote working.
Mobile work	Where a job involves regular amounts of work-related travel, and where business travellers use ICTs to work and communicate when travelling, or while away with work (such as at static locations like hotels, restaurants, and client sites)

telecommuting. This concept emerged in the 1980s, as computer technology made remote work possible, and it became commonplace from the 1980s until prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (see Table 1.1). An important related term to hybrid working that is sometimes used interchangeably is remote working. A formal definition of remote working is a ‘work arrangement that involves individual workers performing tasks away from their primary offices, using ICTs to interact with others inside and outside their organisation’.<sup>14</sup> Remote work can be understood as an umbrella term for all forms of work, irrespective of location, which are, to some extent, done remotely from organisational premises and offices. Hybrid working thus involves some home-based remote working, combined with some office-based working.

However, there is an increasingly diverse range of locations where remote work can be undertaken, and other terms have been developed to describe them. Mobile working (see Table 1.1) refers to remote work undertaken by workers who are required to travel for work, and where work is conducted either while travelling (such as on trains or at airports) or in static travel-related locations, for example, hotels. Further, coworking, a relatively recent phenomenon, refers to remote working undertaken in dedicated, independent, and private facilities, where people can book and utilise workspace (typically a desk with internet and other business facilities) on an ad-hoc or regular basis. Finally, virtual working and distributed working are terms that refer to collaborative, team-based working where people typically collaborate remotely, via ICTs, and where opportunities for face-to-face interaction are limited, or not existent.

In this book, for clarity, the term hybrid working will be utilised throughout to describe work that is done regularly from home and organisational premises. The central and core focus of this book is on the issues related to organising, managing, and undertaking this form of work. However, in two dedicated chapters in the workspace section of this book, space will be devoted to examining mobile working (see Chapter 9) and coworking (see Chapter 10). In these chapters reference will be either made to remote work and/or mobile and coworking. Part of the reason for these chapters, and for discussing remote working, is that there has been a noticeable growth in remote working of different forms over the last 20 years. Another reason for including these chapters is that hybrid workers may sometimes use coworking spaces and/or may have to travel for work and undertake work when doing so. As the focus here is centrally on hybrid working, limited space is devoted to this broader topic. This trend, of office-based work being undertaken at a diverse range of locations remote from corporate offices, is discussed briefly at the beginning of Chapters 9 and 10.

## **The Extent and Character of Hybrid Working**

If hybrid working is an increasingly common way of organising work, it is legitimate to consider how many people actually work in this way. Various sources of data are presented to illustrate this.

In terms of headline figures, a number of contemporary surveys suggest that home-based and hybrid working has stabilised and is now a widespread work practice. Thus, a 2025 representative survey of the UK workforce conducted by the Office for National Statistics found that 28% were hybrid workers, a figure that had increased steadily since 2022.<sup>15</sup> This data is reinforced by another UK-based survey published in 2025.<sup>16</sup> Further, a representative survey of the Scottish workforce published by the CIPD in 2024 found that 41% of the Scottish workforce work from home to some extent.<sup>17</sup> Finally, a McKinsey survey provided some international data on the extent of hybrid working. This survey (of office workers only, rather than whole workforce surveys) was done in 2022 and included over 13,000 office workers from six countries. It found that 56% defined themselves as hybrid workers and a further 7% defined themselves as fully remote workers. This data is summarised in Table 1.2, and overall suggests that for office-based working, hybrid working is now a well-established and widespread practice.

Another way to consider the significance of hybrid working is to consider the amount of time that people work in the office or the home. Two international surveys provide data on this. The McKinsey Global survey of 13,000 office workers from six different countries discussed previously collected data on this. This survey found a significant degree of consistency across international locations in the average number of days that office workers spent in the office per week (see Figure 1.1). This was typically between three and four days, with London being the lowest at 3.1 days, and Beijing being the highest at an average of 3.9 days per week in the office.<sup>18</sup>