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Hybrid working models: The new working challenge for employees' loyalty and productivity

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Abstract

This study aims to assess the implementation of hybrid working models at a broking insurance services multinational firm in Greece during the eras of post-Covid-19 and Great Resignation and understand whether and in which way the growing trend of remote work has impacted employees' loyalty and productivity. The research took place during early 2023, at a time when all employees were trying to find their footfalls between remote and onsite working settings, following the post-covid-19 and Great Resignation eras. A mixed-method research design was formulated to collect data in this study. An online survey was initially designed, the responses were recorded, and then face-to-face structured interviews with some employees were conducted to triangulate the findings. These interviews offered the narrative inquiry needed to enrich the understanding of findings. Outcomes highlighted that flexibility, autonomy, and digital transformation positively influence employees' productivity. In addition, findings made clear that while adopting flexible working models is essential for keeping employees loyal, it is still the last of other proposed options promoting employees' loyalty since wages and recognition are the leading causes for someone to feel valued at a company.

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1. Introduction

Since the Covid-19 outbreak, working from home has become essential and the most common type of remote work. Although remote work existed before the Covid-19 outbreak, the pandemic hastened the trend, mainly turning remote work into a mandatory and long-term requirement (Baakeel, 2021). Greece, though, was one of the EU countries with the lowest incidence of employed individuals working remotely in the pre-Covid 19 era, with the percentage being only 5,3% compared to 37% observed in the leading countries of Sweden and Netherlands (Eurostat, 2020). In 2020, the percentage of people working remotely in Greece rose to 7%, while the EU average was 12% (Eurostat LFS, 2021). The various regulations and lockdown schemes implemented in most countries resulted in a sudden and hurried change in the work routine, leaving employees and employers switching to remote work without preparation or coordination in establishing the new working practices (Wood et al., 2021).

For the specific organisation of our study, is essential to point out that no employee or manager used to work remotely before the Covid-19 outbreak. In March 2020, all employees were obligatorily sent home during the lockdown, except for 5-6 Directors, who had the freedom to choose whether to work from their office venue or their homes. The pandemic found the firm unprepared since most employees did not have the means to perform their duties in an environment other than the office. For example, not everyone had a corporate laptop to connect to the corporate network and perform their duties, corporate mobile phones to communicate with clients and colleagues, or fast-speed internet to support the corporate applications at home.

Until the pandemic's outbreak, corporate laptops were only given to managers, directors, and employees who traveled for business reasons regularly. To overcome this difficulty, and until new laptops were ordered and set up, employees took their desktops home for a short period. All difficulties were managed successfully and eminently by the IT colleagues who enforced the available corporate technological advancements. Laptops were given to everybody, Avaya Workplace was established on all laptops as an application to handle telephone calls, and Webex was implemented to set up virtual meetings. What though must be stressed is the fact that the firm was unprepared to handle the pandemic ad hoc, and yet it managed to send all employees to work remotely from their homes. Following the abrupt change in working conditions with the pandemic's outbreak, which turned remote work into a mandatory and long-term requirement, employees' productivity not only maintained but also improved in most cases, according to Dahik et al. (2020), demonstrating that business as usual will be different in the world of work and understanding that the rivers of productivity are critical to the future success of work.

Many different perspectives on the future of remote work can be found in the literature. While some authors believe that employees will eventually return to the company full-time (Fernandes & Melo, 2022), others believe that remote work is here to stay (Moglia et al., 2021). Finally, others claim that

implementing hybrid working models is the future of work (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). The implementation of hybrid working models is of crucial importance for both employees and employers. Most businesses will consider hybrid working models as an integral part of their business model in the future (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020) since flexibility appears to be an essential consideration for employees and employers. Reisinger and Fetterer (2021) report in their recent global study on future work arrangements preferences that knowledge workers are motivated by autonomy and have distinguished flexibility as the most crucial benefit for remaining loyal to an organisation. From the employers' point of view, flexibility is associated with lower fixed costs and increased labor availability, while one of their primary concerns is employees' level of productivity.

In his research, Morikawa (2022) shows how the productivity percentages of various demographic groups and industries fluctuate. Higher-educated and better-paid workers are more likely to maintain their productivity levels. However, studies on the effect of remote work on productivity have yet to be questioned, as it has become increasingly more challenging to gauge the effectiveness and productivity of highly skilled, intellectual, or cognitive work. In conjunction with the "Great Resignation" phenomenon, which emerged unexpectedly amid the pandemic and saw employees voluntarily quitting in large numbers, it demonstrates how challenging the workplace is becoming and how much employers are being forced to rethink their approach to retaining talent and increasing employee loyalty (Prevot & Mägi, 2022). The primary reason employees quit their jobs since the beginning of 2021 was to avoid returning to their 9-5 contractual obligations, accompanied by long commute times after the lockdowns (Homegardner, 2021). Even though a certain amount of voluntary turnover is always expected, and the loss of a few employees is unlikely to have a long-term, irreparable impact on the performance of the organisation, the Great Resignation has been characterized by the abrupt departure of a remarkably high number of workers (Serenko, 2022).

As such, the different remote work approaches and their implementation in the particular business context will be explored and analysed in this study. The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Great Resignation phenomenon on employees' loyalty and productivity will be investigated, while the key factors influencing employees' loyalty and productivity in conjunction with remote working will be evaluated. The advantages and disadvantages of remote work will be discussed from both employees' and employers' perspectives, together with the technological advancements and how these have led to the growing awareness of alternative approaches towards the hybrid working models.

Furthermore, the need to change companies' perceptions about managing their most valuable human capital resource will be analysed to provide further insight and recommendations based on the research findings. A mixed-method research design was formulated to collect data in this study. An online questionnaire was designed initially, through the online survey platforms of Microsoft Forms, with the aim of sending it out to all employees of the specific organisation to complete it. The

responses were recorded, and then, face-to-face structured interviews with some of the employees were conducted for the findings to be triangulated. These interviews offered the narrative inquiry needed to enrich the understanding of findings and aid analysis. Through an inductive approach to theory development, this study could produce empirical descriptions, new understandings of hybrid working models, and technological advancements. At the same time, suggestions on best practices for managing remote workerscould also arise from analysing the data.

2. Literature review

2.1Turning remote working into hybrid working

For most employees worldwide, the switch to remote work, precisely the working-from-home (WFH) experience, began as an obligatory condition at the start of the pandemic. However, employees faced both negative and positive outcomes by leaving the office and beginning to work from home. The reported adverse effects concerned mental health implications and increased social isolation (Brooks et al., 2020; Cowan et al., 2020; Felstead and Reuschke, 2020; Gunnell et al., 2020; O'Connor et al., 2020), which mainly came up due to imposed lockdowns, including school closures, and increased caring responsibilities for working parents and caretakers. On the positive side, employers and employees experience many benefits: heightened productivity, increased employee retention, enhanced communication, and additional flexibility (Dahik et al., 2020).

Today's businesses and employees are battling the pandemic, with high rates of burnout, stress, and fatigue still present (Cohen, 2022), and the implementation of hybrid working models as a new working paradigm looks like it can offer the desired solution according to thelatest research (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020; Berger et al., 2021; Grzegorczyk et al., 2021). Hybrid working is a form of flexible employment where employees spend some time workingremotely (usually, but not necessarily, from home) and some in the office (CIPD, 2021). Therefore, hybrid working can benefit employers and employees in those organisations that can accommodate staff who can work flexibly between locations. With employees' growing interest in combined modes of work, offering hybrid working could be a critical factor in attracting new talent, reducing commuting costs, providing autonomy, increasing engagement, motivation, and productivity, and lowering turnover rates (Berger et al., 2021). However, organisations must pay attention to what workers have to say and what types of work are advantageous to them while keeping in mind that hybrid working may only be a goodfit for some. Different home environments and personal preferences exist among employees. For example, while some people enjoy working from home and can do so successfully, others might need more support because of isolation or a lack of guidance or concentration.

According to Berger et al. (2021), their report about the hybrid work compass has shown the six top critical organisational challenges companies face pursuing hybrid work models. These concern the need to keep up and foster corporate culture, effective collaboration between teams, managing remote

teams, uplifting IT security, ensuring employees have good mental health, and maintaining high productivity. For most organisations, the CIPD (2022) suggests that implementing new working practices, associated policies, and procedures toward hybrid working models will necessitate a significant cultural shift. Even though many people during the pandemic worked from home and acquired the necessary skills, the hybrid will, in some ways, place greater demands on managers and organisations than the urgent transition to total remote working. According to a recent study by Choudhury et al. (2022), hybrid work arrangements can give employees the "best of both worlds", meaning a better work-life balance while still upholding social bonds and effective collaboration with coworkers.

However, well-known voices continue to be dubious about hybrid work. For example, the CEO of Goldman Sachs wants employees back in the office five days a week and has expressed doubt about the company's effectiveness in "innovative, collaborative" settings (Fortune, 2022). Other critics of hybrid working models are executives like Elon Musk at Tesla, and Jamie Dimon at JP Morgan, who highlight their negative impact on productivity as a lever of pressure for a strict return to the office policy (Bloom et al., 2022). Concerns about how remote work might impair the creation of creative work if employees communicate with fewer coworkers are echoed in a recent paper by Yang et al. (2021). This raises concerns about how switching to hybrid work might affect internal communication within the company and/or the novelty of the work produced.

2.2 Employees' loyalty

Most organisations strive to achieve high levels of employee loyalty. Not only for moral reasons but also because high levels of employee loyalty have been shown in numerous studies to increase operational performance. However, the literature on the concept provides multiple definitions and innumerable factors influencing how loyal employees feel toward their organisations. Many definitions of loyalty have emerged over the past years from research based on organisational commitment (Mowday et al., 1982; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Meyer & Allen, 1991) and related variables (Werhane, 1999; Bhappu, 2000) to which loyalty has sometimes been used as a synonym for one or more forms of commitment. Coughlan (2005) proposed a new conceptualization of loyalty that is based on morality and distinguishable from commitment, according to which "loyalty is reflected in behavior that can be tied to an implicit promise, voluntarily made by an individual operating in a community of interdependent others, to adhere to universalizable moral principles in pursuit of individual and collective goals."

Organisations need to realize that different people see loyalty in different ways. For some, being loyal may entail making sacrifices for someone or something else (Hajdin, 2005; Elegido, 2013). For others, staying devoted to someone or something or being loyal towards a thing (Wiklund & Jansson, 2019) may be the substance of loyalty. It also can mean identifying with a specific group in society or within an organisation (Rosanas & Velillas, 2003). Many loyalty scholars have argued that focusing on

perceived obligations is the best way to understand loyalty in the workplace (Grosman, 1989; Pfeiffer, 1992). Although loyalty is considered more than just commitment, commitment is still an essential component of loyalty. Meyer and Allen (1991) classified commitment into three categories: affective, continuous, and normative. Employees with a solid affective commitment stay with the organisation because they want to, while employees whose primary connection to the organisation is based on ongoing commitment remain because they need to. On the other hand, employees with a high level of normative commitment believe they ought to stay with the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

In our working definition of loyalty, we purposefully incorporate components from each of the three types of commitment mentioned above. Our cognitively based definition of loyalty is specifically: a person's perception that both parties to a relationship have fulfilled mutual expectations that: 1) denote enduring attachment between two parties, 2) involve self- sacrifice in the face of alternatives, and 3) are loaded with duties. This definition includes the essential components of Meyer and Allen's (1997) framework of organisational commitment: affective (attachment), continuance (sacrifice or opportunity costs), and normative (some notion of obligation). This is the framework of loyalty that we will use in this paper, and we present these three elements as both necessary and sufficient conditions for perceptions of loyalty. Employees are dedicated to their work in terms of their line of work and the community they are a part of (Khan et al., 2015). The level of employee engagement, pride, acceptance, and commitment to the organisation are all measured by loyalty. It promotes appreciation for a job well done, cooperation among coworkers, and effort in the direction of success. An example of how cognitive and affective motives can coexist side by side should be provided by the employees' enthusiasm, competence, and interpersonal and communication skills. Employees should make room for coworkers while maintaining privacy (Khan et al., 2015). In their study, Al Qudah et al. (2018) refer that loyalty is a two-way path that concerns both employees and the organization. An organisation must create a stable and challenging work environment if it wants its employees to be loyal. In return, dedicated employees will give their 100% effort for the organisation to thrive (Shekhar & Kumar, 2011).

Meijerink et al. (2020) reveal that employees' better performance depends on job satisfaction and loyalty to the organisation in which they work. Additionally, it is believed that emotional or constant control does not encourage employee loyalty to the organisation; instead, as loyalty wanes, the employee feels undervalued, scared, and motivated to leave the company (Teo et al., 2020). Thus, the employees' loyalty factor becomes one of the fundamental requirements for the effectiveness and success of the organisation—a lack of loyalty results in higher employee turnover and lower productivity (Petrova et al., 2020). It is impossible to disagree with authors who hold that loyalty entails both direct problem-solving discussions that aim to achieve shared creative benefits and acceptance and adaptation (Akhmad et al., 2020). Because loyal employees typically have stronger relationships with others, having loyal employees is advantageous for both the employees and the

organisation. The "binding effect" of loyalty is vital for securing cooperation and achieving shared organisational objectives (Zachariah et al., 2021).

Capnary et al. (2018) have pointed out in their study how flexible working arrangements significantly and positively influence loyalty and employee satisfaction. Flexible work arrangements help workers feel more in control of their work, have more control over how it is completed, and have access to material and psychological resources to enhance their well-being and boost job satisfaction (Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Lambert, 2000; Kossek et al., 2006; Gronlund, 2007; Kelly & Moen, 2007).

According to earlier and newer relevant theories and empirical applications, flexible employment policies may significantly impact job satisfaction, employee loyalty, and productivity positively. In contrast, to the best of our knowledge, no negative impact related to flexible working arrangements and employee loyalty was found in the literature. As such, the flexibility that the hybrid working models impose will be further studied and assessed in this report to check its effect on the employees' loyalty to the specific business context.

2.3 Employees' productivity

Growing attention has been given to working from home (WFH) and its effects on productivity in recent years, particularly since the Covid-19 outbreak. In general, productivity measures an organisation's ability to effectively utilize its resources to generate outputs from inputs, which means that resource availability is closely linked to productivity. In a nutshell, this indicates that productivity suffers when a company's resources are insufficient or not utilized appropriately. On the other hand, creating value is strongly correlated with productivity. When activities and resources in the manufacturing transformation process add value to the products produced, high productivity is achieved (Tangen, 2002). Beyond this broad idea, a quick look at the productivity literature and its various applications reveal that neither the meaning of productivity nor a universally accepted measure exists (Rogers & Rogers, 1998; Tangen, 2002). Productivity measurements have attempted to target individuals, businesses, specific industries, and even entire economies. The complexity of the economic organisation under investigation correlates with the debate surrounding the most appropriate measurement techniques. Nevertheless, a variety of productivity metrics are frequently utilized. The purpose of productivity measurement and data availability is to determine which to use (Attar et al., 2012). Productivity measures can broadly be placed into two categories - single-factor or partial productivity and multi-factor or total productivity. As the names of the categories already indicate, single-factor productivity measures link a specific output measure to a single input measure, such as labour or capital, as opposed to multi-factor productivity measures, which link an exact output measure to a group/total of inputs used (Attar et al., 2012).

A small number of studies have provided evidence on WFH productivity based on individual or firm surveys since the Covid-19 pandemic began. Etheridge et al.'s (2020) research is based on a study of people in the United Kingdom, which shows that WFH productivity is similar to workplace

productivity on average. Still, it varies depending on socioeconomic status, industry, and job. Barrero et al. (2021), based on responses to a survey of people in the United States, show that most of those who have adopted WFH practice report higher WFH productivity than they anticipated before the pandemic began. However, there have been only a few empirical studies of WFH productivity under Covid-19 from the employer's perspective. The survey by Bartik et al. (2020) is an exception. Utilizing data from a study of small and medium-sized businesses conducted in the United States from March to April 2020, they found that productivity decreased by approximately 20% on average. However, as stated by the authors, the outcomes reflect worker self-selection into WFH.

The correlation between increased productivity and intensification of work has been reported in previous research (Bloom et al., 2015; Palumbo, 2020), as well as the variation in productivity that occurs due to the nature of the work (Dahik et al., 2020). Nevertheless, despite the productivity advantages of remote work (Hickman & Robison, 2020), there is little empirical proof of these gains (Martin & MacDonnell, 2012; Choudhury et al., 2021). Galanti et al. (2021), in their study about WFH during the Covid-19 outbreak, have shown that social isolation and family-work conflict were linked and demonstrated to be crucial job requirements of remote work that can significantly lower productivity and work engagement on the one hand while increasing job stress on the other. These results align with previous studies (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020; Wang et al., 2021) and improve knowledge concerning the relationship between productivity, engagement, and stress experienced during WFH. Findings suggest that organisations and employees should consider these factors and develop guidelines to manage them better to observe the positive outcomes typically expected from remote work.

Since the onset of the pandemic, there needs to be more direct evidence of productivity in the new hybrid working environments and how it varies across job types and worker characteristics. Some suggestions indicate that if employers allow employees to determine their working arrangements, it may support higher productivity (Bloom et al., 2015; Chung et al., 2020; Felstead & Reuschke, 2020). The question is whether employers could leave this decision up to employees, given that remote work may have broader implications and needs a holistic approach toward productivity that will include not only an individual reliance on self-reporting (Collings et al., 2021). Findings show that autonomy and self-leadership have a positive relationship with productivity and work engagement, which can sustain remote work productivity and, as such, bring potentially favorable outcomes for both employers and employees (Galanti et al., 2021). In this new context of remote work, attention is needed to developing self-leadership behaviors through training courses that could empower employees towards work objectives and less based on directive leadership processes and instead more participatory.

On the other hand, the perception of lower productivity is linked to the mismanagement of the work-life balance (Wolor et al., 2020). Every employee considers the importance of work-life balance, and studies show how a poor work-life balance can increase psychological stress at an individual level and

reduce work productivity (Kotera et al., 2020). Lower productivity is also correlated with the aging workforce, likely explained by the challenges these workers may face when using technological tools and their potentially reduced capacity for change, mainly if it occurs quickly (Sharit et al.,2009). From an employer's perspective, WFH can be seen as unsafe due to a control deficiency and diminished coordination (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021). Employers may be reluctant to offer remote working opportunities because they are concerned that employees might engage in moral hazard by working less when they are away from the office, potentially lowering productivity.

According to the CIPD "Working from home" report (2020), employers must consider how productivity and performance are managed and whether their processes and systems are suitable to make remote working sustainable and effective. The role of the line managers is vital in helping ensure that employees remain healthy, engaged, and productive since the management of remote workers is undoubtedly more challenging, with virtual meetings taking place instead of face-to-face meetings (CIPD, 2021). Taking a consistent stance, empowering individuals, fostering trust, and ensuring communication clarity are all crucial components of managing remote workers. These aspects involve being honest, open, respectful, fair, and consistent while providing guidance and clear information (CIPD, 2021).

2.4 The future of work

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a fundamental shift in how work is done, and hybrid work is now a viable option for setting up work within organisations. However, there is a vigorous managerial and policy debate around hybrid work, with the main focus being the specific business context and what is more appropriate for each business. Whichever decision is made regarding this relatively new concept of hybrid working should be accompanied by supporting guidance and information to enable effective implementation (CIPD, 2022). According to the results of a McKinsey survey (2021) about employees' perception of the future of remote work, employees feel they need to learn more about their employers' post-Covid-19 working arrangements. Employees claim that while organisations may have expressed a general desire to embrace hybrid work in the future, only a few have shared specific guidelines, policies, expectations, and approaches toward this direction. This lack of precise communication results in increased employee stress and anxiety, lower productivity, reported mental health issues, and increased levels of burnout (McKinsey, 2021).

To avoid the pitfalls of remote work, careful consideration of leadership and management in a hybrid environment is required. The social cohesion and unified mixed virtual culture that organisations need for the next new normal are created through interactions between leaders and teams (McKinsey, 2020).

What matters is building a culture of trust and openness between managers and employees to reach solutions, not by imposing rigid company policy but through mutual agreement. In global economies, and more specifically in global business structures, tele-leadership is both a growing trend and an urgent need. Leading from a distance effectively is a challenge for global leaders. This automatically

forbids ongoing physical interaction with team members and frequently leads to communication issues and loss of control over monitoring a project's progress. Due to this, businesses should implement tele-leadership in a proactive and anticipatory manner, focusing on guiding and training employees (OECD, 2021).

A special edition of the "HR Case Study Series" of the Athens University of Economics and Business on the Future of Work in Greece (AUEB, 2022) has pointed out that the new form of hybrid work also calls for the renewal and improvement of all skills, especially those concerning digital transformation. Although younger generations have these skills, more mature workers should cultivate them through training and development. Therefore, over time, organisations have to invest in upskilling and reskilling their most valuable asset, human resources, and developing digital and administration skills in the context of new forms of work. According to reports from Greece, the general population's lack of digital skills is to blame for the current digital divide in businesses, making it difficult to transition quickly to working remotely (Paidousi, 2020). European Commission publication (2022) about Greece's Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) shows that both on the human capital and integration of digital technology indicators, Greece ranks 22nd of 27 EU countries, scoring below the EU average. On human capital, with 52% of people aged 16-74 having at least basic digital skills, Greece is very close to the EU average (54%). But zooming into the group age of 16-24 years, Greece is among the frontrunners, with 88% of young people with at least basic digital skills, much higher than the EU average (71%).

On integrating digital technologies into business operations, compared to the EU average of 55%, only 39% of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Greece have at least a basic level of digital intensity. Greece continues with low scoring compared to the rest EU members on the Digital public services dimension, ranked 26th out of 27 EU countries. Although the emergency of the pandemic and the need to keep the world safe accelerated Greece's digital transformation, the progress level is not yet entirely reflected in the above-mentioned numbers. Overall, Greece is ranked 25th out of 27 EU members compared to all relative indicators of Human capital, Connectivity, Integration of digital technology, and Digital public services.

Figure 1: Digital economy and society index (desi) 2022
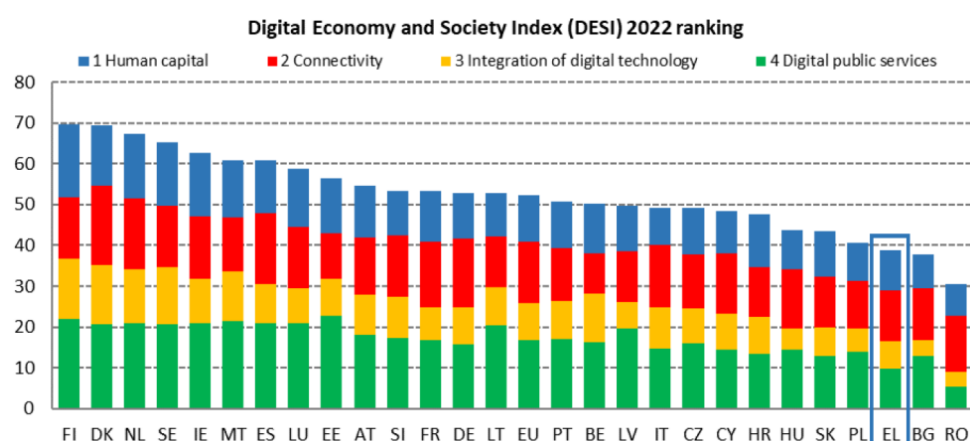
Businesses in Greece, though, as soon as they realized that the Covid-19 crisis had altered how everything worked and that organisational restructuring is inevitable, decided to increase their budgets and invest in digital transformation, as Foundation's annual report (2022) about the Digital Transformation in Greece 2022/2023 indicates. Additionally, the pandemic enabled "definite" future opportunities for remote work by propelling some industries further than others. As the world reopens, businesses have realized how crucial it is to transform digital communications to address business challenges and have planned to expand digital communication channels.

For the 8th consecutive time, Adecco has conducted the annual survey "Employability in Greece 2022", attempting to map the working environment in Greece through the views of employees and employers (Adecco, 2022a). The survey's results show that adopting flexible working models is essential for Greece but at a decreasing rate, as most employers seem to prefer a total return to the office. More specifically, employers want the total return of employees to the company's premises with a physical presence, as 67% of the respondents answered that they work exclusively from the company's premises, while only 23% work from a combination of home and office. According to the same survey, boosting productivity is still a bet for adopting flexible work tactics, as young workers are not only looking for high pay but also for more flexibility and more care for their mental balance. For most survey participants, working from home is just as productive as working from the office.

The impact of experiencing remote work over the last two years, paired with a resurging embrace of employee-first actions to stem the tide of the Great Resignation, have represented critical drivers in a shift toward a more flexible approach to working in an office. Organisations are learning to adapt to workplaces that enable their employees to be at their best, as returning to the way work was done in the past is no longer required. The workplace continues to evolve and be redefined, and the working world embraces flexibility. An office can be anything a company needs to help teams work at their best, including a place to focus, a place to work with others, and a place to build culture. What teams accomplish in the space defines it, not just the desks or chairs.

2.5 The research objectives in a constantly changing world

The correlation between an organisation's operational critical interests and its people becomes inevitable by studying and analyzing the factors affecting employees' loyalty and productivity. However, all the above become even more challenging when trying to apply the best-raising practices effectively in an ever-changing world. There are numerous and extensive global challenges since the Covid-19 pandemic led to a global health crisis with no parallel in living memory. A labor market crisis emerged, with the appearance of the Great Resignation phenomenon, as businesses closed and sent their workers home to shelter from the virus. An energy crisis arose in 2022 due to the war between Russia and Ukraine, which is still under development. Rising inflation costs are undisputable, and even more pandemics will likely appear, in the future, due to environmental changes. All these global challenges have an impact on businesses and households. As recent research findings have

revealed, the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Great Resignation phenomenon are now apparent and have affected employees' loyalty and productivity since the results have shown that:

- Employees productivity not only maintained but also improved in most cases

- Knowledge workers are motivated by autonomy and have distinguished flexibility as the most crucial benefit for remaining loyal to an organization

- Employees do not want to return to their 9-5 contractual obligations, accompanied by long commute times

- Flexibility appears to be the most important consideration for both employees and employers

- Work-life balance has become imperative

- Employers are being forced to rethink their approach to retaining talent and increasing employee loyalty

High rates of burnout, stress, and fatigue are still present in businesses and employees Many positive and negative outcomes have been correlated to flexible working arrangements, according to the latest research. Among the positive ones, heightened productivity, increased employee retention and satisfaction, enhanced communication, additional flexibility, attracting new talent, reducing commuting costs, providing autonomy, and enhanced well- being are highlighted. On the contrary, the negative ones include mental health implications, increased social isolation, family-work conflict, increased job stress, lower productivity and increased psychological stress linked to the mismanagement of work-life balance, lower productivity linked to the aging workforce likely due to the challenges these workers face when using new technological tools, control deficiency and diminished coordination that make employers reluctant to offer remote working arrangements.

Global research carried out by Adecco Group about the Global Workforce of the future (2022b) navigates the talent paradox and shows the most significant challenges from both employers' and employees' perspectives. The survey, in which 34,000 employees from 25 countries, including Greece, participated, is the most significant attempt to record employee behavior worldwide, regardless of industry.

The findings of this global survey showed that companies should adopt a human-centered approach that will promote well-being, preserve the balance between personal and professional life and ensure employees' financial stability in the face of increasing the cost of living. The survey identifies increased inflation as the leading cause of concern for workers and highlights the rise of the "quitfluncer," the phenomenon where one worker leaving a company influences other workers to do the same. According to the results, more than two- thirds (70%) of respondents consider quitting if they see colleagues leaving their jobs. Globally, Gen Zs are 2.5 times more likely to be influenced

to quit than Baby Boomers. In addition, the research findings highlight the urgent need for companies to focus on talent retention solutions, given that nearly a third of employees worldwide (27%) say they intend to leave their jobs within the next 12 months. Furthermore, almost half (45%) are actively looking for their next job. This creates an opportunity for companies to step in and reverse this situation by investing in retraining and talent retention programs that could limit the extent of the phenomenon.

From the employees' perspective, the need for flexibility and autonomy is blatant, the work- life balance imperative, the financial security, and the well-being initiatives of crucial importance. The same research indicates that almost half of Gen Z workers (47%) work four days a week, compared to Baby Boomers, where only 18% work four days. Of the 32% of all workers who currently work four times a week, more than half (51%) have taken a pay cut to do so. Although the prospect of a four-day workweek is not yet the top priority for job seekers, that could change shortly. In this context, companies must be willing to create a flexible work environment that will keep employees happy and engaged in the long term as their needs continue to diversify in the uncertain environment. To retain talent, companies must ensure flexible working models and offer employees a more balanced work life.

As companies face the risk of mass layoffs due to rising inflation, the cost of living, and fears of an impending recession, the report highlights some solutions that could reduce the loss of workers. The findings make it clear that while compensation has recently been an effective recruitment tool, employees are no longer staying with a company just for the salary. Additional reasons to stick with an employer include having a solid company culture that offers work-life balance, a good work environment, and carefully planned development opportunities, especially for younger executives. Overall, job satisfaction today is multi- dimensional and based on performance-based pay and development potential, flexibility, mental health, and well-being. To avoid a crisis of mass resignations, companies should immediately seize the opportunity and re-prioritize their people, setting a clear goal that will inspire and motivate all employees, wherever they are. Finally, the findings highlight low levels of motivation and loyalty– less than half (47% of all participants) are satisfied with career prospects at their company. In Greece, the percentage drops to 27%. However, the predicted "big quit" is not yet evident, with less than 8% worldwide (7% in Greece) considering a career change or quitting work. Two-thirds of workers are convinced that companies will resume significant recruitment, with safety, culture, well- being, flexibility, and growth as the most critical factors related to employment in the future. Having studied all the above, we move forward to examine the research objectives about the implementation of remote/hybrid working practices in a narrower context, the one of a specific broking insurance services sector organisation.

3. Methodology

Having in mind that the social world of business and management is too complex, the philosophical paradigm of interpretivism will be used in this research, through subjective lenses, as an approach that looks to understand personal experiences and how individuals interpret the world in which they live (Saunders et al., 2009). Instead of using the same assumptions throughout one workplace, this approach enables the researcher in a business management context to view the organisation through various lenses and explore the underlying causes for a rich and diverse range of experiences within one environment. Rather than radically altering the situation, the goal here is to get involved in the organisation's day-to-day operations to fully comprehend and explain what is going on (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). Because researchers need to make sense of the individualized and socially constructed meanings expressed by those who participate in research about the phenomenon being studied, qualitative research frequently linked to an interpretive philosophy (Saunders et al., 2019; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) will be used in this research as well. To understand why people behave as they do in a given context, qualitative research typically focuses on descriptive detail and emphasizes the context in which the research is conducted (Bell et al., 2019).

This qualitative research concerns a case study within one organisation. According to Yin (2009), case studies are used to examine a contemporary phenomenon within its actual setting thoroughly. Creswell (2014) adds that case studies are frequently used in qualitative design when a researcher thoroughly examines an event or activity. This research could produce empirical descriptions, new understandings of hybrid working approaches, and theoretical advancements (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Ridder et al., 2014; Yin, 2018). A mixed-method research design was formulated to collect data in this study, consisting of anonline questionnaire and face-to-face structured interviews.

Researchers who employ mixed methods have a pluralistic perspective on research methodology. This indicates their view that researchers should be tolerant of others' preferred methods, even when they differ from their own, and that flexibility in selecting and applying either quantitative or qualitative methods is legitimate (Saunders et al., 2019). In business and management research, surveys are frequently used, and questionnaires are the most popular survey type (Anderson, 2014). Because it examines specific phenomena at a particular time, this research is cross-sectional in nature. Cross-sectional studies often employ the survey strategy (Robson 2002; Easterby-Smith et al. 2008) and interviews conducted over a short period of time for examining casestudies in particular.

The completion of online questionnaires as a method of collecting data has been criticized because researchers typically do not have the opportunity to clarify participant responses after the study is finished (Bell, 2007). However, it has been acknowledged that questionnairedesign presents challenges that must be carefully addressed to collect sufficient trustworthy data (Saris & Gallhofer, 2014). Therefore, adequate time was spent formulating questions to help achieve the research goals carefully. However, it has also been acknowledged that survey questionnaire data collection may not yield the

anticipated number of responses, making it impossible to identify themes and patterns in the data (Saunders et al., 2009). However, the convenience and efficiency of using an online tool to distribute the survey questionnaire can lessen the likelihood of this limitation occurring (Lefever et al., 2007) and increase the participation percentage and number of responses.

Face-to-face structured interviews will offer the needed triangulation of data. By triangulation, using two or more independent sources of data-collection methods within one study is meant to ensure the data's validity (Saunders et al., 2009). According to Denzin (2007), triangulation is one method by which a researcher analyzes data and presents the results to others to comprehend the experience of a common phenomenon. Triangulation mitigates bias (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009) while adding depth to the data collected in qualitative research. This extensive and rich data set supports a direct link between triangulation and data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In this research, an online questionnaire was initially designed, through the online survey platforms of Microsoft Forms, to send to all employees of the specific organization's corporate email addresses, using non-probability sampling, targeting the whole population. All employees are over 18 years of age and able to self-select whether they want to participate in the research. A specific time frame for the completion of the questionnaire was given. After the completion deadline, the received responses were recorded as a first step of data analysis.

Then, for the findings to be triangulated, face-to-face structured interviews with some employees were conducted, following the necessary exchange of correspondence to establish informed consent (Saunders et al., 2009). The final sample was chosen randomly and taken from participants who gave consent. The interviews followed vital themes that arose from the online questionnaire completion. The aim for the researcher was to obtain the narrative inquiry needed to enrich the understanding of findings and aid analysis since, according to Musson (2004), a narrative inquiry may be used in conjunction with another strategy as a complementary approach. According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996), a narrative is an account of an experience told sequentially, indicating a flow of related events that, taken together, are significant for the narrator and convey meaning to the researcher. For the narrative inquiry of the specific research, the participant is the narrator, with the researcher adopting the role of a listener facilitating the process of narration, while the narrative provided will be a short story about specific remote/hybrid working subject matters. Each narrative was examined separately, and key themes were reviewed across the various narratives.

The analysis of the initial survey data was facilitated via Microsoft Forms, and data were exported to Microsoft Excel. In qualitative data, thematic analysis is frequently used to organize data sets to identify specific patterns or themes within the research (Nowell et al., 2017). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this analysis method's adaptability and holistic approach make it advantageous for various studies. However, Holloway and Todres (2003) claim that one drawback of thematic analysis is that the identified themes and patterns may need to be more consistent and coherent. As a result, Creswell (2014) asserts that a systematic approach should be taken when conducting a thematic analysis

to distribute the same amount of awareness and consideration to each piece of data and identify any key themes and patterns. There are five sections to the online survey questionnaire: questions about remote/hybrid working, employees' loyalty, and productivity, which are listed in Appendix (I). All questions are close-ended, and sections are separated as follows:

- Section 1 - Participant's personal information
- Section 2 - Questions that assess employees' loyalty to the organisation Section 3 - Questions about remote working
- Section 4 - Questions that consider participants' opinions of productivity
- Section 5 - The closing part of the survey requests the participant's views on hybrid working

The data collection methods are outlined in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Data collection methods

| Participant	Data collection method	Reason for choice of method	Population size	Sample size	Sample criteria	Data collection date
85 participants employed by the case study organisation	Online questionnaire	Ease of use – convenience for the participants	85	60-85 (Depends on the response rate)	All employees of the case study organisation	February 2023
6 participants (managers and non- managers) of the organisation	Face-to-face interviews	Enrich the understanding of findings and aid analysis	85	6	3 managers and 3 non-managers (random choice)	February 2023

4. Results

4.1 Data analysis

This chapter will provide an analysis of the data gathered from those who completed the online survey questionnaire. Out of 85 total employees invited to participate in this research, 59 completed questionnaires were gathered, showing a participation rate of almost 70%. The Excel file with the gathered survey results is shown in Appendix (II).

Q1. Please declare your gender:
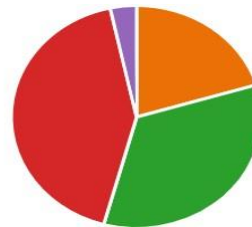

● Male	19
● Female	40
● Other	0
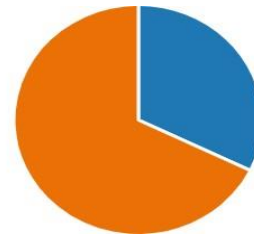
Out of 59 participants, 40 were females, and 19 were males, so the dominant gender in this research is female, with a 68% participation rate.

Q2. What is your age?

● 18-24 years old	0
● 25-34 years old	12
● 35-44 years old	20
● 45-54 years old	25
● Over 54 years old	2

The dominant age group participating in this research, as shown in the above chart, is the 45-54 age group, with 25 participants and a 42% participation rate, while the age group of 35-44 follows with 20 participants and a 34% participation rate.


● Single (never married)	16
● Married or in a domestic partne...	38
● Widowed	0
● Divorced	4
● Separated	0
● Prefer not to say	1
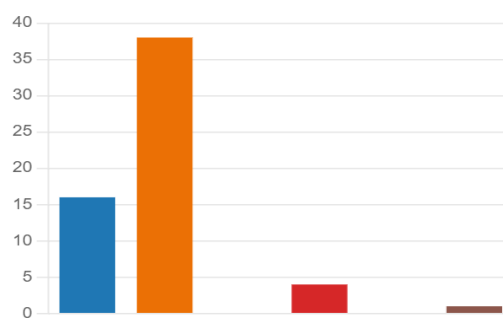
Q3. What is your marital status?

As clearly stated from the above chart, the dominant status of participants is married or in a domestic partnership, with a 65% rate.
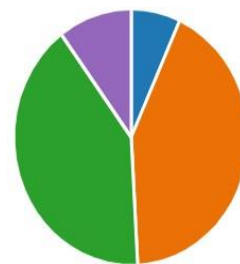
Q4. If you are a parent, please clarify the number of your children. If not, please complete not any (n/a).
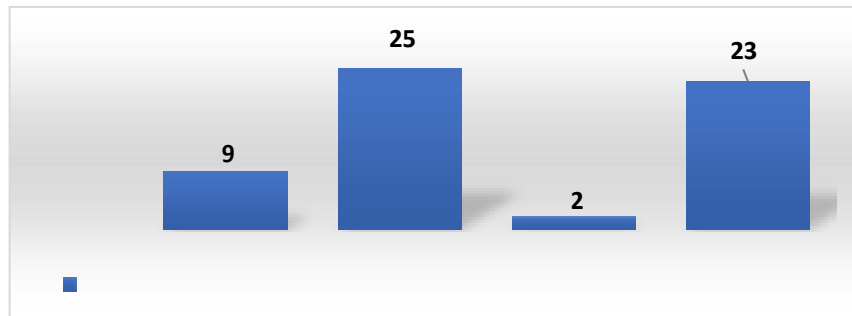
	1 child	2 children	3 children	n/a
Total	9	25	2	23

According to the data shown in the above chart, 36 participants are parents with one, two, or three children, while 23 do not have any children.

High School Graduate   4
Bachelor   25
Master   24
Doctorate   0
Other   6

Q5. What is your academic qualification?

49 out of the 59 participants are holders of a bachelor's or master's degree, meaning that at a percentage rate of 83%, the organisation's employees are graduates of higher education.

Q6. Please clarify your current position.

Entry-level   4
Intermediate or experienced (se…   39
Manager   10
Executive or Senior management   6

The prevalent position group participating in this research, as stated above, is the Intermediate or Experienced (Senior) staff.

Q7. If you are a manager, please declare the number of your direct reports. If you are not, please select not any (n/a).

🔵 Not Any	46	
🟠 1-5 direct reports	9	
🟢 5-10 direct reports	3	
🔴 More than 10 direct reports	1	
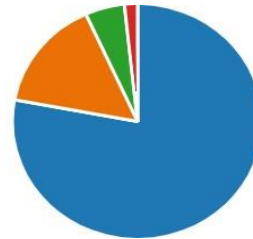
46 out of the 59 participants responded Not Any to this question, while the rest 13 mentioned that they have direct reports, which means are either Managers or Executive/Senior Directors. Most Managers/Directors have from 1 to 5 direct reports. Compared to the responses received for question number six, which shows that 16 participants are Managers or Executive/Senior Directors, it appears that not all Managers or Executive/Senior Directors have direct reports.

Q8. How long have you been employed at your current employer?

|		
🔵 Less than 1 year	9	
🟠 1-2 years	6	
🟢 3-4 years	9	
🔴 5+ years	35	
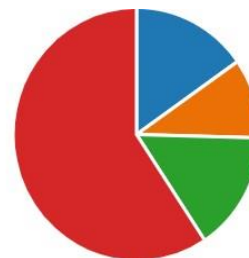
35 out of the 59 employees participating in the survey have been with the company for more than five years, which shows that 60% of the participants are long-standing employees.

Assessing the "Employees' Loyalty" Part

The next part of the survey assesses the employees' loyalty to the organization and consists of seven questions. Participants were asked to answer close-end questions by choosing from five-scale responses from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" and to rank some statements according to what matters most to them.

Q9. For each of the following statements, please indicate whether you agree or disagree.
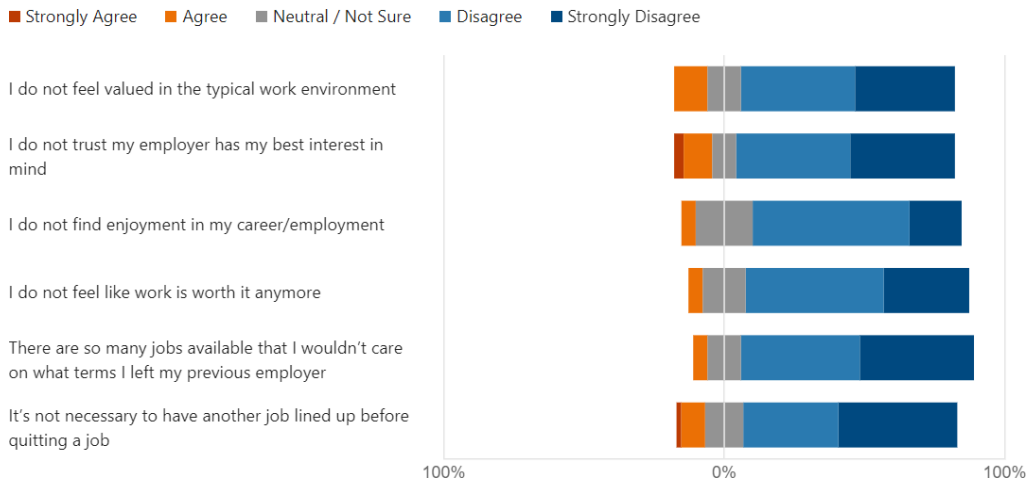
76,3% of the participants feel valued in the typical work environment and 78% trust that their employer has their best interest in mind. Almost 80% admit that work is worthwhile, and 74,5% keep finding enjoyment in their career/employment. Only 10,2% believe having another job lined up is unnecessary before quitting, which shows the importance of keeping a livable wage. The next question asked participants to rank the most critical factors when considering their company and work environment. The five prevalent responses, from most important (1) to less important (5), were:

1. Livable wage

2. Healthy/safe work environment

3. Room to grow/promote

4. Healthcare benefits

Opportunities for raises

When asked about the most critical factors that are making them consider leaving their current employment, the five prevalent responses from most important (1) to less important (5), were:

1. Dissatisfaction with work / Demotivation

2. Employer not paying me what I am worth

3. Needing a mental health break

4. Desire to pursue new professional opportunities

5. Desire to spend more time with family

These results fit Adecco's Group global research about the Global Workforce of the future (2022b), which has highlighted that factors such as a good work environment, carefully planned development opportunities, a solid company culture that offers work-life balance, and mental health balance, can offer the desired solution for reducing the loss of employees. Following, when asked about what their current employer does not have that they are most looking for in their next employer, the five prevalent responses were:

1. Livable wage

2. Positive / Uplifting work environment

3. Opportunities for raises

4. Room to grow/promote

5. Regular feedback from direct managers

The next question asked participants their opinion about the factors that promote employee loyalty and a positive outlook towards an employee. The predominantly received responses were: supportive work environments (100%), offering growth opportunities (96,6%), seniority/leadership that is willing to discuss complex issues (93,2%), establishing clear and transparent paths to promotion (91,6%), offering compensation geared towards how much effort / work an employee puts forth (86,4%), company culture and values that they believe in (84,7%), transparency about company decisions (84,7%), organizing team activities that increase bonding (81,3%), offering hybrid working options (76,2%). From the above, it becomes clear that while adopting flexible working models is essential for keeping employees loyal since the 76,2% percentage is high enough, it is still the last of nine proposed choices promoting employees' loyalty. This supports Adecco's (2022a) findings in the annual survey "Employability in Greece 2022," which also show that adopting flexible working models is essential for Greece but at a decreasing rate. In the last question concerning the loyalty part of the survey, participants were asked their opinion about what actions an employer can take to make them feel valued at a company. The received responses were: giving me a bonus or raise (94,9%), recognizing my work one- on-one (94,9%), giving me adequate support to do my job (96,9%), increasing benefits for longstanding employees (84,7%), encouraging me/supporting me to continue with my professional development (96,6%), recognizing my growth with a title promotion (72,9%), supporting me in my personal life outside of work (74,6%), recognizing my work publicly at the company (66,1%), recognizing my work publicly outside the company (44,1%), personal event acknowledgments such as birthdays, hiring anniversaries (27,1%). From the above, it is noticed that financial security and carefully planned development opportunities are of crucial importance and at the top of employees' list for remaining loyal to the organization.

Assessing Employees' Opinions about remote working

Q15. In terms of remote work, please indicate the frequency you used to work remotely during the specific periods of time:

- Before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic
- During lockdowns imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic
- Post Covid-19
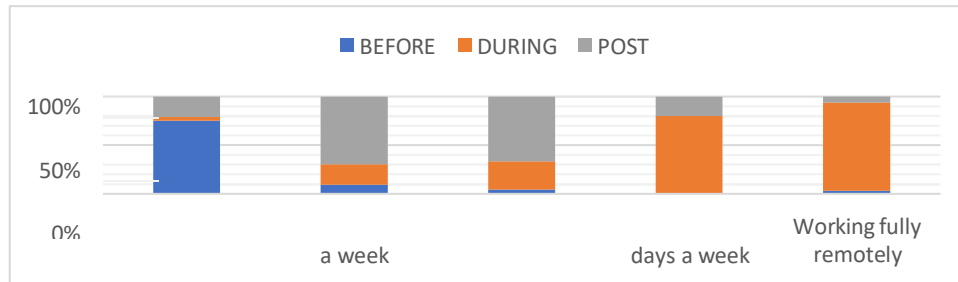
Frequency	Before	During	Post
Not at all	54	3	15
Less than 2 days a week	3	7	23
2-3 days a week	1	7	16
More than 3 days a week	0	12	3
Working fully remotely	1	30	2
Grand Total	**59**	**59**	**59**

54 out of the 59 participants, at a percentage rate of 91,5%, responded that they had never worked remotely before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. This situation altered during lockdowns imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, where 30 out of the 59 participants have been working fully remotely, and 26 were working remotely at a specific frequency of two, three, or more days a week. Nowadays, during the post-Covid period, 42 employees work remotely at a particular frequency, while 2 work only remotely and 15 do not work remotely at all. When participants were asked their opinion about whether the employer was ready for remote working at the beginning of Covid-19, on a scale of 1 to 10, the average that came up showed readiness at a scale of 6,2 while almost 41% of the participants consider that the employer was not prepared for remote working at the beginning of Covid-19.

Among factors that define a company's readiness for remote working, the survey showed that the most important ones are available digital tools/processes (98,4%), digital transformation (96,6%), security issues (91,6%), employees' digital skills (88,1%), managers' skills in remote leadership (84,8%), and less important the fact of sharing specific guidelines/policies (79,6%). As regards the challenges a remote working environment faces, the survey showed that the employees' psychology (i.e., emotional detaching, overworking, depression, anxiety) is the most commonly mentioned challenge,

at a percentage rate of 79,7%. This supports previous studies about the adverse effects of a remote working environment (Brooks et al., 2020; Cowan et al., 2020; Felstead & Reuschke, 2020; Gunnell et al., 2020; O'Connor et al., 2020). Other challenges that follow at a smaller percentage are:

1. The lack of available technical equipment to support remote working (64,6%)
2. The lack of processes to support remote working (64,4%)
3. The distraction that other family members create when working from home (64,4%)
4. The security issues that limit remote operations (59,4%)
5. Lack of effective collaboration between teams (54,3%)
6. Difficulty in managing remote workers (50,9%)
7. Lack of employees' training to perform their duties remotely (42,4%)
8. Physical presence is required (42,3%)

As regards the mentioned advantages of a remote working environment, the "agree" and "strongly agree" responses have disclosed the following results:

9. Gas savings (94,9%)
10. Flexibility (93,2%)
11. Less commute time (83%)
12. Autonomy (79,7%)
13. Work-Life balance (62,7%)
14. Increased productivity (55,9%)
15. Reduced levels of stress (45,7%)
16. Increased employee loyalty (42,4%)

In the final question of this survey's part, employees were asked to clarify whether their tasks can be performed remotely and their preferred working model. 42 out of 59 employees replied that their duties could be performed remotely, and 48 agreed that they enjoy more the blended way of working remotely and onsite at a specific frequency. This also highlights the results of the latest research (Berger et al., 2021; Grzegorczyk et al., 2021; Kaushik & Guleria, 2020) that the implementation of hybrid working models as a new working paradigm looks like it can offer the desired solution and the "best of both worlds" (Choudhury et al., 2022).

Assessing the "Employees' Productivity" Part

Q21. In terms of productivity, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- I feel more productive when working fully remotely
- I feel equally productive either working remotely or onsite
- I feel more productive when working onsite

- I feel more productive with the hybrid working option (remotely and onsite at a specific frequency)
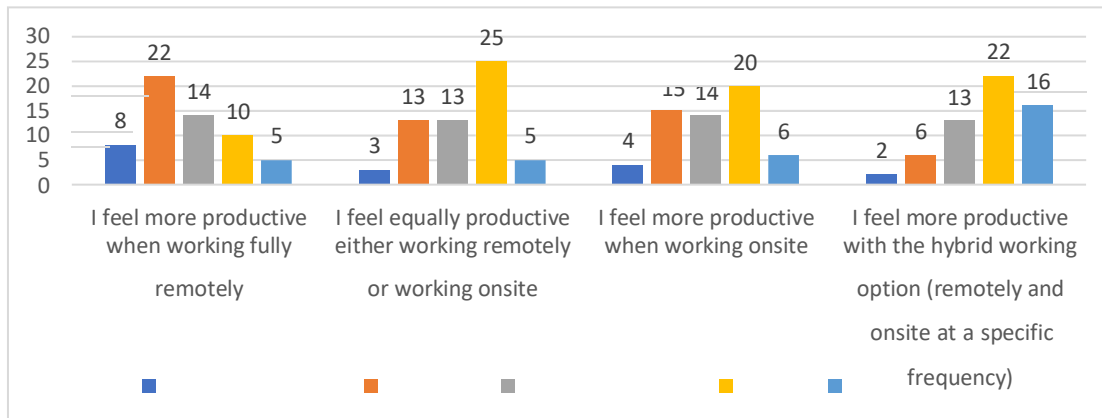
The above results show that most participants feel more productive with the hybrid working option (64,4%), while 50,9% believe they do not feel more productive in an entirely remote setting. Respectively, almost half of the participants (50,9%) feel they are equally productive either working remotely or onsite, while only 44% feel they are more productive when working fully onsite.

Q22. Please indicate the factors that you feel affect your productivity positively or negatively.
The nine factors that participants assessed, and the responses received from a scale of very positively/positively to negatively/very negatively are as follows:
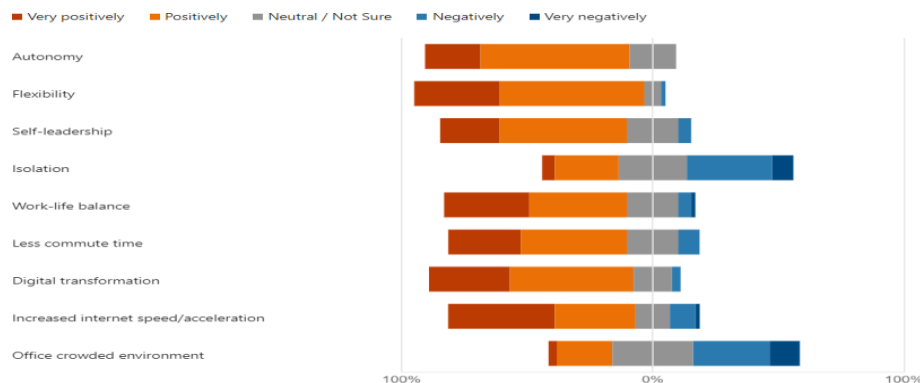
The above chart shows how more positive factors such as autonomy, flexibility, self- leadership, work-life balance, less commute time, digital transformation, and increased internet speed/acceleration affect employees' productivity. On the contrary, the two prevalent factors that affect employees' productivity negatively are isolation and the crowded office environment.

<u>Assessing Participants' Opinions about Hybrid Working</u>

The closing part of the survey requests the participants' opinions about hybrid working. Participants were asked to answer close-end questions by choosing from five-scale responses from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" and to rank some statements about hybrid working. According to the received responses, results show that the overwhelming majority of the participants (88,1%) believe (agree and strongly agree) that hybrid working offers flexibility, and 84,7% believe that hybrid working also offers autonomy. Furthermore, a percentage of 74,6% of participants answered that hybrid working is essential to them, while 72,9% believe that hybrid working reduces commute time and offers extra cost savings. In addition, 62,7% of the participants accept that blended working models provide the desired work-life balance, and 55,9% agree that hybrid working gives them one more reason to stay with their current employer. These results enhance Adecco's (2022b) research and show that the need for flexibility and autonomy is blatant, the work-life balance imperative, the financial security, and the well-being initiatives of crucial importance and key drivers that make hybrid working a necessary aspect of the contemporary world.

Among the statements with lower scores, the survey shows that only 47,4% believe that hybrid working allows them to pursue new opportunities for personal development, 35,6% feel more isolated, and 17,6% believe that hybrid working has more distractions than fully remote or entirely onsite model.

4.2 Data triangulation through individual interviews

This section will present the results of the six face-to-face structured interviews that took place. After analysing the data gathered through the survey, five questions were formulated based on some results. These were presented to the employees who consented to participate in the interview and asked for their opinions. Of the six interviewed colleagues, two are Executive Directors, and four are Senior Staff. The roles and frequency of remote working post-Covid-19 of the interviewing sample are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Interviewing participants and frequency of remote working post-Covid-19

Role	Code	Frequency of remote working post-Covid-19
Executive Director 1	ED1	Occasionally, based at the office
Executive Director 2	ED2	Occasionally, based at the office
Senior Staff 1	SS1	Working remotely 2-3 times a week
Senior Staff 2	SS2	Occasionally, based at the office
Senior Staff 3	SS3	Working remotely 2-3 times a week
Senior Staff 4	SS4	Occasionally, based at the office

The questions that arose for shaping the interviews after the completion of the first step of the survey's data analysis are mentioned below:

Q1. Recent studies show that the hybrid work model is gaining ground and is the preference of the majority of employees. At the same time, employees show a refusal to return to the office in fully onsite mode. What is your opinion, and why do you think this is happening?

Q2. What do you think will be the future of hybrid work, and how do you think this particular model will affect our profession?

Q3. The results of the recent survey conducted through the anonymous questionnaire show that 64.4% of the participants feel more productive with the hybrid work model. What is your opinion, and what do you think are the factors that determine this result?

Q4. However, the Directors and Managers of the company are unsure about the productivity part related to remote work. What do you think is the reason? Could it be the lack of trust between the teams?

Q5. The results of the survey conducted through the anonymous questionnaire show that 76.2% of the participants consider that the offer of the hybrid work model promotes "employees' loyalty," while 55.9% believe that the offer of such a work model gives them one more reason to stay with the company. What is your opinion, and what do you think are the reasons that determine this result?

The responses received to these questions aim to obtain the narrative inquiry needed to enrich the understanding of findings and aid analysis. All the employees interviewed use the hybrid working model, others at a tiny scale (one or two times per month) and others more frequently (two or three times a week). This makes sense since the firm of the specific case study has established a general guideline that allows employees, according to their preference and role, to work remotely for 50% of their contractual working hours.

Some parts of the interviews were cut off and are presented below to show the identified findings and the derived key themes.

Responses received to question Q1:

"Hybrid working has offered many conveniences to employees, such as flexibility (FB), autonomy (AU), reduced commuting costs (CO), and time savings (TS)… More people want to work from the office and less from home (ENV). In our own company, we were forced by the dominance of the pandemic (PAN) conditions to adopt this solution, and I would say wholly unprepared and relatively violent." (ED1)

"The hybrid model offers flexibility (FB) and economy to the employees, perhaps in operational expenses such as travel expenses (CS) and time savings (TS)…

This is the option that the hybrid working model gives essentially to establish the flexibility (FB) that all workers ask for after the experience they lived with remote work during the pandemic (PAN)." (ED2)

"The hybrid working model is a way to attract new talent (AT) since it is a prerequisite for employees. Their refusal to return to an entirely onsite mode concerns their comfort (COM) with remote working, combining daily programs and routines concerning family issues (FAM). They don't need to request help from their relatives and face significantly lower costs (CS) due to less commuting (CO). We must think that we cannot treat everyone differently, but there should also be a standard guideline (GL) for everyone because it is unfair for an employer to choose who goes to the office and who stays at home. There should be a standard guideline (GL) aiming primarily at each employee's satisfaction. There should be a choice because neither fully remote nor entirely onsite is correct. By being fully remote, you lose contact with the company (CM), the corporate culture (CC), your colleagues (CM), and developments that may be happening, and you cannot perceive them—being entirely onsite means losing the flexibility (FB), autonomy (AU), and other advantages of remote work. The hybrid work model, therefore, covers this need. Indeed, the employee's personality or family status (FAM) also dramatically determines the preferred work model. Young people who want to travel often, by having their laptop with them, get the ability to work from anywhere. So, this gives them tremendous flexibility (FB). But in the long term, being fully remote will impact not only the quality of your work but also how you perceive your work and your development (DEV)." (SS1)

"Because many have saved commuting time to/from work (CO) and feel more liberated in the safe environment of their home (COM). Compared to the office environment (ENV) where the manager and whoever is above your head is telling you to do this or that. So greater freedom, flexibility (FB), and saving time (TS) and money (CS)." (SS2)

"The financial benefits are the most crucial reason employees refuse to return to entirely onsite mode in the office. (CS).

Another reason is the office environment (ENV). If the climate or relations between colleagues (CM) are not good and you do not feel comfortable (COM) working from the office, you do not want to

return to it. You prefer working from home, where you feel more comfortable (COM) and do your work in isolation (IS) without distractions.

Finally, another important reason is the saving of time (TS) due to the reduced travel time (CO) to and from the office, which enables me to organize my obligations better, such as doctor's appointments and family issues (FAM)." (SS3)

"The reasons that most workers refuse to go back to the office, I think, are first of all the fact that they don't waste time (TS) commuting from/to work (CO), that they feel more comfortable (COM) at home in more casual clothes and probably have the time on their own to sort out some personal/family issues (FAM)." (SS4)

All themes derived from the above narratives are summarized in Table 3 below, together with the number of times these were mentioned.

Table 3: Narrative analysis of key themes

Theme	Code	Number of times mentioned in the Narratives
Flexibility	FB	6
Time Savings	TS	5
Commute/Travel	CO	5
Comfort	COM	5
Family	FAM	4
Cost Savings	CS	4
Environment	ENV	3
Communication	CM	3
Guideline	GL	2
Pandemic	PAN	2
Autonomy	AU	2
Productivity	PR	1
Isolation	IS	1
Development	DEV	1
Corporate Culture	CC	1
Attract Talent	AT	1

As appears from the above analysis, flexibility is an essential aspect of hybrid working and a crucial reason why employees refuse to return to the office in an entirely on-site mode. This supports previous research findings (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020; Dahik et al., 2020; Adecco, 2022b) and this study's findings as well, which have shown that flexibility is one of the most significant advantages of a remote working environment. Following flexibility, other reasons are time savings, commuting, comfort, family issues, and cost savings. All of the above enhance previous findings about implementing hybrid working models (Berger et al., 2021). Furthermore, the below extract of the ED1 narrative enhances Wood et al.'s (2021) research about how the sudden and hurried change in the work routine left employees and employers to switch to remote work without preparation or coordination in establishing the new working practices:

"In our own company, we were forced by the dominance of the pandemic conditions to adopt this solution, and I would say wholly unprepared and relatively violent." (ED1)

While the below extract of the SS1 narrative shows how much attention organisations must pay to what workers have to say about what types of work are advantageous to them while keeping in mind that hybrid working may not be a good fit for everyone:

"Neither fully remote nor entirely onsite models can survive nowadays. A middle solution should be found, which depending on the style, requirements, and role of each job, will be given to employees. (SS1)

Responses received to question Q2:

Responses received to question Q2 enhance previous research findings and show that remote work is here to stay (Moglia et al., 2021) and that implementing hybrid working models is the future of work (Kaushik and Guleria, 2020).

"For our profession, it will become permanent; that is certain." (ED1)

"The hybrid working model will undoubtedly remain and become established."(ED2)

"Hybrid Working should be adopted by all organisations." (SS1)

"Multinational companies will undoubtedly maintain the hybrid or even fully remote model." (SS2)

"Hybrid work came to stay." (SS3) "Hybrid work is here to stay." (SS4)

Responses received to question Q3:

The responses received to this question highlight the variation in productivity that occurs due to the nature of the work (Dahik et al., 2020) and the importance of technological advancements that enhance productivity in hybrid working models. Also, previous literature findings are supported by the below narratives since they show that if employees can determine their working environment, it can lead to higher productivity (Bloom et al., 2015; Chung et al., 2020; Felstead and Felstead and Reuschke, 2020). It is also accepted that flexible work arrangements boost employees' job satisfaction (Karasek and Theorell, 1990; Lambert, 2000; Kossek et al., 2006; Gronlund, 2007; Kelly and Moen, 2007).

"I agree. It enables even office fanatics to shape their schedule when needed. It gives the freedom…it offers luxury." (ED1)

"Colleagues have seen the advantages of hybrid work and feel more productive when using the ones to their benefit." (ED2)

"I feel more productive when I have the possibility, depending on the work obligations, to choose hybrid working." (SS1)

"The technological means certainly affect an employee's productivity, and a company must have them secured and offered to its employees." (SS2)

I cannot decide if they are more productive or feel more productive. Flexibility and autonomy are the most crucial factors, in my opinion." (SS3)

"Indeed, the basic factors are the reduced commuting time, the more productive work time at home, and the fact that employees feel more comfortable at home, always related to the nature of their role. (SS4)

The below extract from the SS1 narrative highlights the importance of sharing specific guidelines towards the hybrid working model direction, which is aligned with the results of the McKinsey survey (2021) about employees' perception of the future of remote work:

"What needs immediate implementation, is to give clear guidance and help employees support the hybrid work model. There is no need to micro-manage as long as there are clear instructions, and you know what your responsibilities are. I am more productive without micro-management." (SS1)

The above narrative also demonstrates the need to change companies' perception about managing their employees since managing workers from a distance has become more challenging (CIPD, 2021). Micro-management should be eliminated since it seems to affect productivity. Instead, it should be replaced by a culture of trust and openness between managers and employees to reach solutions, not by imposing rigid company policy but through mutual agreement.

Responses received to question Q4:

The responses below show some of the most critical organizational challenges companies face pursuing hybrid work models, as analysed in Berger et al.'s (2021) report. The need to keep up and foster corporate culture, manage remote teams, and maintain productivity are noted. Developing managers' skills in remote leadership seems to be an imperative need and, according to the online survey's results, a significant factor that defines a company's readiness for remote working (84,8% of the participants agreed with that option). The responses below are also aligned with CIPD (2022) report, which mentions that hybrid working models place greater demands on managers and necessitate a cultural shift.

The two first responses (ED1 and ED2) from Executive Directors are aligned with Grzegorczyk et al.'s report (2021) and show the managers' reluctance to offer remote working opportunities because of the insecurities faced.

"There is a reluctance on the part of managers. I think that quite a few managers have responded judging by how they feel working from the office and home, respectively." (ED1)

"We are used to seeing the other employees and watching exactly what they do during their working hours. We feel somewhat insecure when they work remotely and cannot see what they are doing. More insecurity than lack of trust is the reason." (ED2)

"The answer lies in having clear instructions and the correct division of tasks so that the manager knows his subordinates' work. The problem is that managers need to learn what work their subordinates do, not where they work." (SS1)

"The lack of trust and judging by ourselves often leads us to draw the corresponding conclusions. For a manager to be able to manage their team from a distance, they must have made sure to keep the group together despite the distance. To have kept the contact and the interpersonal relationship. If communication is maintained, distance will not be a problem." (SS2)

"Managers must know well what subordinates do to judge their productivity level. If they don't know, they can't judge." (SS3)

"Yes, I believe that. But unfortunately, some examples of colleagues who, in the context of settling some possible personal issues (family, home), are absent from their remote workplace when their superiors need them have led to mistrust." (SS4)

The below extract from the SS2 narrative is directly linked with Sharit et al.'s (2009) study, where it is mentioned that lower productivity is also correlated with the aging workforce, likely explained by the challenges these workers may face when using technological tools and their potentially reduced capacity for change:

"Also, age could be another reason, i.e., if, due to age, someone cannot use advanced technological tools or has old-fashioned views or principles, they need help to accept to change how they work or how they have learned to manage their team." (SS2)

Responses received to question Q5:

The responses to this question support Capnary et al.'s (2018) study and point out how flexible working arrangements significantly and positively influence loyalty and employee satisfaction. Only one participant (SS2) considers that the hybrid working model offer does not promote employees' loyalty since it is widely offered by most employers now.

"We should be able to give the hybrid work model to employees. But, of course, it always depends on each employee's role; some may have it to a greater and others to a lesser extent." (ED1)

"If we are satisfied with the hybrid model as employees, this makes us ultimately happy employees. With happy employees, loyalty increases." (ED2)

"Indeed, the hybrid work model offer is one of many reasons you choose to stay with or choose a company." (SS1)

"I don't think offering the hybrid working model promotes "employees' loyalty" because it's now given to most companies. However, it is accepted that it provides greater flexibility to do more things and shape your time accordingly."(SS2)

"It is good to have the option of the hybrid working model in an agreement between the employee and the responsible operational department. If this arrangement thrives, it will also promote employees' loyalty. It's a reason to stay with the company but not the most important one." (SS3)

"Being able to work from home shows the company's trust in me. I also gain work-life balance by not wasting time commuting to and from work." (SS4)

5. Conclusions

The study's overall aim was to identify how the flexibility that remote/hybrid working models promote seems to affect employees' loyalty and productivity. Following the Covid-19 pandemic and the Great Resignation phenomenon, employees have clarified that the positive transformation the crisis prompted in some business sectors and the labor market must be maintained. While some workdays may necessitate the physical presence of all employees, others may involve a combination of the remote and onsite models. As a result, workers and managers must find new ways to work that combine the advantages of face-to-face interaction with the adaptability of remote working, depending on the nature of their tasks and individual requirements or preferences.

Working effectively in a hybrid environment only comes naturally to some. The ability to successfully operate in a hybrid working environment is itself a skill and, consequently, a wellspring of force. In contrast to entirely onsite or remote working, hybridity requires employees to be ambidextrous and balance between and navigate both worlds. Employees who can think and act in a flexible and adaptable way, organize and coordinate in a complex and dynamic environment, and establish and demonstrate their trustworthiness while working in a low-visibility setting are rewarded in hybrid environments. On the other hand, employees less skilled in operating in such a complex and dynamic environment as the hybrid one may find it challenging to coordinate with those who can and might always be out of sync with managers and coworkers. Employees must make sure they are visible to their managers and have access to the tools they need to do their jobs, and managers must make sure they are informed of what their staff members are doing and make it easy for them to get those tools.

The current survey results highlight the managers' skepticism about employees' productivity and how well remote workers perform compared to people working in an office setting. This skepticism about remote workers' productivity could be linked to hierarchy bias, meaning managerial roles are more reserved for remote working settings than support staff. Furthermore, through this study's outcomes, the imperative need for developing managers' skills in remote leadership has come to the surface. According to CIPD's report (2022), hybrid working models place greater demands on managers and necessitate a cultural shift, making this an important priority. Managing workers from a distance has become more challenging (CIPD, 2021), so changing companies' perception about managing their employees is also critical. Micro-management should be eliminated since it seems to affect productivity negatively. Instead, it should be replaced by a culture of trust and openness between managers and employees to reach solutions, not by imposing rigid company policy but through mutual agreement.

The findings show that establishing hybrid working has been successful for the specific firm. Flexibility, gas savings, and less commute time were highlighted as the key benefits of a remote working model. Moreover, flexibility, autonomy, and digital transformation were the key drivers boosting productivity. The survey's results also show that 64,4% of the participants feel more

productive with the hybrid working option, while 50,9% feel equally productive working remotely or onsite. Of course, measuring productivity is challenging and must be done carefully. By measuring productivity, organizations can distinguish which representatives are battling with remote work and give them the instructions and support they need to be more productive. This might mean these colleagues should only work from the office setting since hybrid working only fits some. Among the challenges a remote working environment faces, the survey's results show that 79,7% consider employees' psychology (i.e., emotional detaching, overworking, depression, anxiety) critical. This highlights that high burnout, stress, and fatigue rates are still present (Cohen, 2022). As such, this study confirms that implementing hybrid working models as a new working paradigm can offer the desired solution (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021; Berger et al., 2021; Kaushik & Guleria, 2020).

The survey's results also show that 76.2% of the participants consider that the offer of the hybrid work model promotes loyalty, while 55.9% believe that the offer of such a work model gives them one more reason to stay with the company. Furthermore, 74,6% declared that hybrid working is essential to them, while 62,7% accept that blended working models provide the desired work-life balance. These factors indicate how flexible working arrangements significantly and positively influence loyalty and employee satisfaction (Capnary et al., 2018). Findings also made clear that while adopting flexible working models is essential for keeping employees loyal, it is still the last of other proposed options promoting employees' loyalty since wages and recognition are the leading causes for someone to feel valued at a company. Increased job satisfaction and loyalty can lead to increased employee retention, which is extremely important in a competitive job market. Especially following the Great Resignation phenomenon demonstrates how challenging the workplace has become and how much employers are forced to rethink their approach to retaining talent (Prevot & Mägi, 2022).

Based on the above-mentioned research findings, the overall recommendations for the specific organization are the following:

- **<u>Build a solid company culture</u>:** The need to keep up and foster corporate culture (Berger et al., 2021) and provide a unified mixed virtual culture (McKinsey, 2020) is imperative for all organisations. The primary goal for companies should be adopting a human-centered approach that will promote well-being, preserve the balance between personal and professional life, reduce stress, and ensure employees' financial stability in the face of increasing the cost of living (Adecco, 2022b). This should be created through interactions between leaders and employees (McKinsey, 2020), emphasis on open and effective communication so that employees feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, ideas, and opinions about critical organisational issues, and the expansion of digital communication channels to connect. Employers must communicate the company's vision, expectations, goals, and objectives that everyone can work towards, to create opportunities, develop trust, and increase employee retention.

- **Build a hybrid workplace policy:** According to the findings of this study, a clearly defined contractual policy is a prerequisite for the hybrid working model direction. This should be based on the firm's specific business context and what is more appropriate for organisational achievements. Any decision made regarding this new concept of hybrid working should be accompanied by supporting guidance and information to enable effective implementation (CIPD, 2022). The lack of precise communication increases employee stress and anxiety and lowers productivity (McKinsey, 2021), a pitfall that must be avoided.

- **Implement a tele-leadership policy for managers:** Global business structures consider tele-leadership as a growing trend and an urgent need. However, leading from a distance is a challenge for leaders. As such, implementing a tele- leadership policy should be proactive and anticipatory, focusing on guiding and training employees. Managers should focus on developing their skills to manage people from a distance and keep them engaged and aligned with individual and company goals and business strategies. Keeping the team's spirit up is crucial, leading by example is imperative, and becoming more empathetic and authentic as a manager is a key behavior. Helping others achieve their best, no matter the circumstances can be the leverage and means for employees to thrive. Laying out a culture of mental security and individual/aggregate trust is especially significant. Leadership must shift from a position of control to a place of trust, focusing on moderately integrating remote workers. Employees' confidence in recognition of their efforts will rise as a result, as will their likelihood of speaking up and asking for help when needed.

- **Implement well-being initiatives:** Employee-focused wellness programs can enhance both physical and mental well-being. Some companies directly benefit their employees by giving them resources or tools to improve their bodies and minds. Others concentrate on strengthening the overall workplace and creating an environment where employees enjoy coming to work. A wellness program for employees creates happier, healthier workplaces. In addition, the morale and productivity of employees increase when adopting healthier routines through a continuous plan. So, moving forward, apart from offering hybrid working flexibility, some more recommended actions can include:

1. Have healthy snacks available at the office

2. Provide gym discounts or establish weekly training sessions inhouse

3. Engage employees in daily step challenges

4. Provide well-being webinars

- **Upskill-Reskill strategies for employees:** The new form of hybrid work indeed calls for continuously improving all employees' skills, especially those concerning digital transformation (AUEB, 2022). In the constantly changing world of work, the demand for new capabilities is ongoing, so reskilling and upskilling employees can enable organisations to develop the skills

needed to remain competitive. In addition, technological advances and continuous digital transformation are expected to create new roles in every department and company. Moreover, training courses for developing techniques concerning self-leadership behavior can be proved as a valuable tool for employee empowerment. Moving forward all the above can be adopted to eliminate talent shortages and gaps. Furthermore, cultivating a culture of continuous education helps employees advance along with their current career paths and gives them one more reason to stay loyal to the organisation.

Considering the potential limitations of the data, what must first be mentioned is that conducting a single case study was chosen, which limited the sample size and the gathered results reviewed and analysed. Fifty-nine completed online questionnaires were received, and six face-to-face interviews were conducted. Unfortunately, the number of Executives or Senior Directors who participated in the study was small, leading to over-divided opinions in many of the survey's questions and no opportunity to validate the reliability of the results for the specific job role. In addition, the study was restricted to the viewpoint of the particular company's hybrid work environment due to the single case study. As a result, the study could benefit from a more generalized explanation if more companies with various hybrid work models were included, and more Executives and Senior Directors participated. Another limitation of the specific study comes from the fact that productivity was not linked to employees' performance. Considering how productivity and performance are managed, establishing processes and systems that will effectively measure productivity in parallel with employees' performance to make remote working sustainable and effective can be further explored and provide richer insights into the literature. Lastly, a holistic longitudinal study into the nature of managers' trust in hybrid working setting employees should be examined in future studies.

Data availability

The detailed participants' narrative accounts (Appendices) can be available upon request.

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