PERCEPTION ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE HYBRID WORK MODEL IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

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Abstract

Purpose. The purpose of this paper is to explore the effectiveness of hybrid work model in Human Resource Management (HRM) practices from the HRM experts' perceptions.

The study designed to provide a clear understanding on the use of hybrid work system within Human Resource Management practices.

Methodology. The study emphasized a qualitative approach guided by phenomenological inquiry to explore the effectiveness of the use of hybrid work practices among the Human Resource Management experts.

Findings. The finding established five main elements of integrating hybrid work model into HRM practices: Wider talent pool and increase in diversity and inclusion; Increase employee productivity; Enhancement of technology; Save cost and enhance employee work life balance.

Originality. This paper has provided unique evidence of HR experts, particularly in the Private sector, on their experiences of assimilating the hybrid work model and its effectiveness in their HRM practices.

Novelty of study. This study's value is found in its examination of the hybrid work model within HRM practices, which hasn't been thoroughly examined from the viewpoints of private-sector HRM specialists. The study offers new insights into how hybrid work can be successfully incorporated into HRM practices by identifying five essential components: a larger talent pool and diversity, increased productivity, technological advancement, cost savings, and improved work-life balance

Introduction

COVID-19 is a global health emergency that has shaken the entire world, causing widespread fear and uncertainty. It has significantly impacted economies, cultures, employees, and businesses. Due to the rapid transmission of the virus, many countries implemented several measures, such as social distancing, to slow its spread. People were quarantined, schools, universities, organizations, and government agencies were temporarily shuttered, travel was restricted, flights were canceled, and mass public gatherings and social events were prohibited (Brodeur, Gray, Islam, & Bhuiyan, 2020; Gourinchas, 2020).

For more than two years, we have been forced to adapt to the new normal in facing the challenges of this health crisis, including a work-from-home (WFH) setting. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many workers were encouraged to WFH full-time, redefining the traditional definition of WFH, which had previously only been used for specific types of work, on an as-needed basis, or in unusual employee circumstances. Both employees and employers are seeing the benefits of WFH and recognizing some of the challenges. Balancing the benefits and challenges of WFH during the pandemic provides a great opportunity

for human resource management practitioners to adapt a hybrid work model for their employees in the post-pandemic era.

Integration of a hybrid work model in Human Resource Management (HRM) became prevalent after the COVID-19 pandemic which has created an extremely challenging environment for (HRM) Human Resource Management. The force of vigorous changes requires HRM to quickly venture into the "unknown" as they seek to help their workforce adapt and cope with the radical changes taking place in work and social environments (Bierema, 2020). During the pandemic, HRM has been at the forefront of crisis management, risk management, and the redeployment of workers to remote working environments. HRM professionals have a vital role to play in aiding organizations to navigate the uncertain situation caused by the dramatic changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Gigauri, 2020). Various strategies such as remote working, working hours reduction, reduced costs of training and development strategies, and a ban on recruitment, among others, have been implemented (Lockwood, 2005). Consequently, as the pandemic begins to ease, many companies are planning a new combination of remote and on-site working, a hybrid work model in which some employees are on-premises, while others work from home. HRM experts came to the conclusion that a hybrid work model will be an excellent option to offer employees a safe and flexible way to transition into post-COVID work life (Am, Affandi, Udobong, & Sarwani, 2020). The development of HRM towards adapting to the digital economy (Donnelly & Johns, 2020) also impelled the demands for the hybrid work environment as an important feature of the post-pandemic world (Gratton, 2021).

A hybrid workforce has been defined by various resources as a workforce distributed partly across different locations and located partly in traditional cubicles and factory spaces. This means that this model of working is characterized by flexibility and choices. Beno (2021) conceptualized hybrid work as a combination of remote and in-person work. This concept is also similar to those mentioned by Grzegorczyk et al. (2021), who denoted the hybrid model as a strategy in which workers can telework for a proportion of their contracted working hours within the limits of individually or collectively negotiated work arrangements. Hybrid work models will allow organizations to recruit talent better, achieve innovation, and create value for all (Hilberath et al., 2020).

Numerous surveys encourage HRM practitioners to consider a hybrid work model for their employees. According to McKinsey (2021), working from home has mostly proven to be successful. Individual productivity, employee engagement, customer satisfaction, as well as diversity and inclusion, have improved significantly for most executives. McKinsey further added that before the COVID-19 crisis, most companies required their employees to spend most of their time on-site. Executives predict that once the pandemic subsides, the hybrid model in which workers work both remotely and in the office will become significantly more widespread. Employees will be on-site between 21 and 80 percent of the time (for all roles that aren't required to be completed on-site), or one to four days per week, according to most CEOs.

A similar study was done by Dimensional Research (What is Hybrid Work, n.d). This

study revealed the following: (1) working from home has 99 % of knowledge workers seeing the benefits, including improved flexibility, no commute, and more time to spend with friends and family. (2) 95% of knowledge workers want to return to work for activities including team building, cooperation, and networking with co-workers, and (3) 53 % of large companies intend to downsize their office space, which will save money.

In the context of Malaysia, in a survey conducted by The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) titled "Implementation of Work From Home and Work From Office Practices In Response to COVID-19 Pandemic" from June 9 to August 6, 2021, the survey found that 61.7 percent of businesses want to keep the hybrid work arrangement, citing the benefits to both employers and employees. Employers profited from the WFH model by saving money on electricity and utility costs (78.5%) and speeding up their adoption of technology at work (68.5%), while individuals benefited by saving money on commute expenditures and experiencing reduced commuting stress (89.4%) (Chau, 2022).

According to Menon and Meikeng (2022), a survey of 203 respondent companies found that 93.6 percent of respondents used a combination of WFH and work-from-home arrangements in response to the epidemic. Weighing the costs and benefits of WFH and on-site working during the pandemic has led the majority of companies in Malaysia to adopt a hybrid work model for the post-pandemic period. This scenario led the authors to explore the HRM practices regarding the hybrid work model from the perspective of HR practitioners.

The main purpose of the study was to explore the effectiveness of the hybrid work model in Human Resource Management practices. The study was designed to provide a clear understanding of the effectiveness of the Hybrid work model in HRM practices. The study will provide leaders and HR experts with an understanding of the effective way towards managing and leading people, particularly in a changing environment, that will enhance employees' wellbeing and work-life balance and consequently improve their performance and productivity. Understanding the effectiveness of hybrid working will also guide many organizations towards adopting a systematic way of managing employees in a dynamic environment, such as a pandemic, which requires them to continuously re-examine the current policies and procedures that will fit into the existing atmosphere as well as employees' needs.

This study employed the phenomenological inquiry approach because it is considered appropriate to achieve the objectives of the study towards understanding the phenomenon of hybrid work, from those who have experienced and witnessed it. This study is specifically concerned with the concept of hybrid from the perspective of human resource experts, the approach used to assimilate the hybrid work into HRM practices, and the effectiveness of those elements when applied in HRM practices.

Assimilating the Hybrid Work Model in Recruitment and Selection
Integrating a hybrid work model into recruitment and selection involves tailoring the hiring processes to identify candidates who can survive in flexible work settings. The

hybrid work model highlights adaptability and requires candidates to balance in-office and remote tasks effectively while managing their time and professional duties autonomously (Magazzo, 2024). The recruitment efforts might focus on assessing technical skills. For instance, proficiency with ICT tools and soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and self-discipline are important in the hybrid work environment (Vesolovska et al., 2024). Plus, recruiters also must assess the alignment of the candidates with a hybrid-friendly organizational culture and the ability to maintain productivity and well-being in the face of changing work dynamics. A hybrid work model has many benefits, such as increased productivity and flexibility, improved work-life balance, and increased efficiency (Eng et al., 2024). By utilizing virtual interviews, assessments, and onboarding processes, companies can attract a broader talent pool and guarantee their workforce is aligned with the evolving demands of hybrid work (Kumar et al., 2022).

Assimilating the Hybrid Work Model in Training and Development

The hybrid work model has changed the traditional development practices that organizations need to adapt to the new delivery strategies that can cater to both in-office and remote employees. As we know, nowadays digital tools and virtual platforms have become important in delivering training programs, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all employees no matter where their location is (Bennett Gayle et al., 2024). These changes have brought an increase in e-learning and blended learning strategies where organizations integrate online modules with periodic in-person sessions to balance flexibility and hands-on communication (Singh et al., 2021).

However, there are also challenges in the hybrid work model in training and development. The biggest challenge is that employees with limited access to technology or even stable internet connections might find it difficult to fully participate in online training sessions (Ferri et al., 2020). Plus, maintaining employee engagement and motivation during virtual training is challenging because of many distractions and insufficient face-to-face communication (Benjamin, 2020).

The success of hybrid training also relies on the training content and whether it is aligned with the hybrid work environment (Tsipursky, 2023). For example, the training programs might need employees to use their skills, such as time management and adaptability, to use remote work tools (Iordache et al., 2021). High-level management must be trained effectively to support hybrid teams, highlighting challenges like integrating collaboration between remote and on-site employees.

Even though there are challenges, the hybrid work model gives opportunities for innovation in training and development. Organizations can use interactive technologies such as virtual reality (VR) to simulate real-world situations to offer more engaging training experiences (Dincelli et al., 2022). On top of that, hybrid training models can lower costs related to travel because we know that employees always travel when they want to go for training (Mathew et al., 2023). Overall, effectively incorporating a hybrid work model into training and development requires cautious planning to highlight the challenges while utilizing the benefits.

Assimilating the Hybrid Work Model in Rewards

As many organizations adopt hybrid work models, there is a critical need for an effective reward system. One of the challenges in the hybrid work model is maintaining equity in reward distribution (Mujtaba et al., 2024). Usually, in a traditional office environment, employees physically attend, which makes it easier to recognize and reward them for their hard work. However, in the hybrid work model, remote employees might feel excluded from informal recognition opportunities that they feel are not equal (Byrd et al., 2022). Past research shows remote employees always find it challenging to receive the same recognition and rewards because they are not always present in the office (Wang et al., 2021). Hence, performance evaluation also becomes more difficult in hybrid environments. High-level management, such as supervisors, find it difficult to assess the performance of remote employees compared to employees who are working in person in the office (Chen, 2021). As a result, it will have an unfair situation in how rewards, promotions, or salary increases are given, and it will cause dissatisfaction among the remote employees.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hybrid Work Model

Labelled as a blended strategy that combines a layout based on being physically present at the office with a remote working system (Cook, Mor, and Santos, 2020), the Hybrid work model is being implemented in numerous ways such as having certain employees work remotely while others work in the office, or having the same people work in the office on days and hours while working remotely the rest of the time (Iqbal, Khalid, and Barykin, 2021). Hybrid work reduces barriers between teams by allowing employees to work where and how they feel most productive (Rahaman et al.,2020). Consequently, a hybrid working environment is a combination of co-located and remote personnel or a system in which employees spend some time in a typical office and some time working remotely. Similarly, Halford (2005) defined hybrid work as a "multi-location" working style in which people can work more freely by dividing their time between different locations, thanks to information technology.

According to Çiftci (2021), organizations can implement hybrid work in a variety of ways. These practices are specifically developed with the need for employees to understand how much of their time they spend at work and how much they spend at home. The author categorized the hybrid work model into four areas, which are office-centred, fully flexible, split weekly, and week-sharing. In the office-centric hybrid model, employees are given flexibility by allowing them to work from a different location one or two days a week, although they are required to work in an office most of the time. In the fully flexible hybrid model, employees are allowed to decide their work location as well as work schedule. The split weekly hybrid model is developed based on the division of working as well as working in the office for a few days. In the week-sharing hybrid model, tasks will be delegated

weekly in a month according to teamwork, whereby departments will be assigned to work at the office based on weekly allocation. (Çiftci, 2021).

The different types of hybrid work models as discussed by Ciftci (2021) indicate the limitation of this model, which focuses on a few industries and mainly white-collar jobs. According to one of the studies done by McKinsey (2020), the potential for remote work is highly concentrated among highly skilled, highly educated workers in a handful of industries, occupations, and geographies. For instance, work deliverables or the need for team cooperation, for example, will dictate how often an individual comes into the office at IBM. In the meantime, Ford's office workers will be required to come on-site for some meetings or projects, but they will be allowed to work independently from home (Schawbel, 2021).

Besides this limitation, the hybrid work model led to some communication challenges. Reliance on technology creates basic communication challenges. For example, on how to use video conferencing equipment, connectivity problems, to check in from separate computers, and some people are more comfortable speaking up over screens than others, and that's in addition to the power, status, and language differences that already create barriers to communication in work settings (Hass, 2022).

Haas (2022) further added that the difficulties of connectivity extend beyond issues of technology, communication, and logistical collaboration. There's also the issue of social relationships, which can be jeopardized or completely lost when working remotely. Professional networks and mentorship connections are vital for career advancement, and it is important for women and minorities to create and maintain them. These could be impossible if employees continue to WFH. Personal ties are also needed for social sustainability and psychological well-being. Hybrid working has the potential to create a "dominant class" of people who feel central to the organization and are deeply committed to it, as well as an "underclass" of people who feel marginalized and detached not only from work but also from social life. This gives employees a sense of purpose that creates meaning and bonds employees more closely to the organization. The consequences can be less happy and less committed employees who are more likely to search for opportunities elsewhere.

Besides these limitations and other challenges, the hybrid work model does provide some benefits both for the employers and employees. In a poll conducted by the MEF to assess how individuals are coping with the WFH model, it was discovered that lowering electricity and utility expenditures (78.5 percent) and increasing their adoption of technology at work were two of the most significant benefits the model provided to companies (68.5 percent). Employees reported saving money on commuting expenses and experiencing reduced commuting stress, with 89.4 percent claiming to have done so (Menon & Meikeng, 2022).

Realizing these limitations and other possible challenges, HRM practitioners should structure the hybrid work strategies effectively for the benefit of all the stakeholders, especially employees.

Effectiveness of the Hybrid Work Model in HRM Practices

Bigger pool of talent

The strategies of hybrid hiring in the hybrid work model, which integrate virtual recruiting and in-person recruiting strategies as part of overall talent acquisition strategies (DiStasio, 2020), have had a tremendous effect on attracting a larger pool of talent. The incorporation of remote working removes location restrictions, allowing firms to choose from a far bigger pool of smart, creative individuals with the skills they require (Beno, 2021). The organization will be able to look beyond their regular candidates, widen their talent pool, and improve their opportunity to allocate excellent candidates for their job vacancies. In a study conducted in a finance firm that uses the hybrid working method, Halford (2005) found that combining the office with working from home has beneficial results, as opposed to solely working from home. In his research, Halford (2005) claimed that spatial hybridity has altered the nature of work, organization, and management in the local, organizational, and digital domains. Moll and De Leede (2016), in their research based on a series of in-depth interviews, revealed that remote working and flexible working hours have a positive effect on creativity and performance.

Enhance employee productivity

The system of the hybrid work model that allows employees to choose the workspace provides them flexibility in performing their tasks. This greater flexibility will obviously enhance employees' productivity as staff will not be compromised in one work location. In addition to that, giving them flexibility also has the tendency to reduce the situations of employees to procrastinate or give unnecessary excuses in delivering their duties (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021). As such, a hybrid arrangement in the workplace helps ensure that the employee or worker's productivity is adequately maximized (Yang, Bisson, & Sanborn, 2019). The level of employees' motivation will obviously increase due to the company's tendency to look after employees' well-being when they are not easily fatigued due to high workloads. In addition, the remote work arrangement is where an employee no longer worries about the stress of onsite office preparation. The remote arrangement's working style requires a mini office place and the connection to great internet and power supply (Di Marino & Lapintie, 2017) As such it reduce the cost of physical stress when employees no longer must worry about getting up early with any intention of getting dressed and facing the ordeal of having to catch a cab to work, which presents many risks on its own. Here, there is no haste to make breakfast to beat traffic on the way to work. This is especially crucial for employees who have families and people who depend on them. Research conducted by Deloitte confirmed that 38% of participants from various sectors and departments believe hybrid work improves their productivity, while 39.2% believe it has neither a good nor a negative impact. Participants in the positive effect percent attribute this to a lower number of meetings, the freedom to concentrate without office noise and division, and the fact that work that requires individual focus is more comfortable (Sezgin, 2020).

Flexible work-life balance

The implementation of ICT in the hybrid work model has led to significant gains in flexibility and agility, providing opportunities for greater autonomy as employees have increased flexibility in terms of where, when, and how to work. According to social exchange theory, the more job autonomy employees have, the greater the effort they put into their work (Kelliher & Anderson, n.d). Thus, employers benefit from a more productive workforce that uses less space and is more cost-effective, while workers gain from the prospect of a better work–life balance, thereby increasing levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Consequently, the hybrid work model facilitates access to employment for vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, including women and young people. The hybrid work system strikes a balance between the requirement for employees to be in the office to engage with the company and their coworkers and the independence and comfort of working from home (Baker, 2021). In other words, rather than scheduling work around fixed hours of entry into an office, the hybrid model allows employees to adapt their work lives to their everyday lives. For many workers, this is the ideal mix of working with less stress and, consequently, achieving more output. Additionally, some studies have shown that hybrid work model strategies indeed help women continue working at the same time as having a balance between work and private life (Tursunbayeva, 2021). Stress-relieving factors such as spending more time with their families and working comfortably at home can be counted among the positive features of this working system, in addition to lowering employee costs, such as the time they spend in traffic to get to work in the morning (Iqbal, Khalid, and Barykin, 2021).

Save cost

The hybrid work model reduces infrastructure, maintenance, and service costs associated with the office environment as employees are not spending all their time at the workplace (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021). Hybrid work model were seemed to be effective in a way of reduction in the cost of running a physical office. Benefits of reducing the cost of rent, transport, company logistics, and extra utility bills like fuel, electricity, office Wi-Fi, and phone bills are some of the privileges of those organizations that have implemented the hybrid workplace model. Reducing the number of employees available in the onsite space consequently reduces the necessity to utilize a massive workspace (Dahmen, Wöllecke, & Constantinescu, 2018). All that is needed is a sizable space where there can be occasional meetings and consultations. The company's main cost will be that of the internet because all the activities are turned virtual. Gradually, employers are questioning the need to keep a physical office space as the necessity is fast becoming reduced. Many who were required to shut down their physical offices and opted for the remote work style have stuck with it. A number have been able to transition into a fully remote workplace (Clancy, 2020). This significant development results from the benefits accruable to both parties as everyone naturally gravitates to a solution that would help save cost.

Fostering the Advancement of Technology

Technology was the primary solution for the entire organization when the lockdown was implemented during the pandemic. Through the help of technology, the remote workplace system became feasible, and companies that suffered significant losses at the early stages of the pandemic were eventually able to regain their footing (Williamson & Colley, 2022). As the pandemic progressed, the remote workplace presented an opportunity for further improvements in the existing technology solutions. The products in use were subjected to several types of updates to suit the specific needs of unique businesses further. As such, the evolution of technology due to the pandemic also leads towards advantages of technology that will be adopted in a hybrid workplace. This is consistent with the sustainable human resource development model proposed by Ketners and Pētersone (2021), which prioritizes customized solutions and flexibility to accommodate evolving work environments, such as hybrid systems. It served as a form of motivation to improve the technological solutions relevant to the use of hybridity. Similarly, Le Bas and Laužikas (2009) stressed that innovation and HR strategies work together to support flexible work systems and long-term productivity, especially in tech-driven industries.

It is evident that hybrid working, in which people work both remotely and in the office, has progressed from a temporary practice to a standard practice in the workplace. Hence, companies, specifically HRM personnel, must address how to effectively engage employees in hybrid working and design appropriate strategies. To further understand how to build this model to effectively accommodate the post-pandemic period, the authors have engaged with HRM practitioners to gather their perspectives on this matter.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative approach guided by phenomenological inquiry to explore the effectiveness of hybrid work model practices among Human Resource Management experts. Phenomenology best fits the researchers' assumptions that it is possible to know, define, and categorize Human Resource Management practitioners' experiences in a more structured manner. It is by entering their field of perception that the researcher seeks to understand the hybrid work model as the expert sees it. Therefore, in determining the essential strategies of hybrid work, the researchers aimed to learn about the perceptions and thoughts of Human Resource Management experts' experiences. Phenomenology focuses on the subjective experience of an individual. The phenomenology approach signifies the work of describing human experience as it is lived (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Van Manen (1992) stated that from a phenomenological perspective, research is always about questioning the way one experiences the world. Therefore, phenomenology investigates the nature of the phenomenon, in which "it asks what something is, and without which it would no longer be what it is" (Van Manen, 1997, p. xv). The primary focus of a phenomenological study is to describe the "essence" or structure of a phenomenon from the perspective of

those who have experienced it (Meriam, 2002). Human Resource Management experts were purposively selected from three private organizations. All the respondents were selected based on a criterion-based approach coupled with snowball sampling, which involved asking the initial respondents for suggestions of additional respondents (Creswell, 1998). To be included in the study, all participants had to be HR leaders or practitioners and have been in their HR roles for over ten years. The last criterion was included to ensure that participants would be familiar with the organization's culture they were heading. Similarly, the researcher wanted to ensure that they would be fully capable of answering questions related to their ability and capacity to lead. The small sample size is supported by Dukes (1984), who recommends including three to ten participants in a phenomenology study.

Sample

The description of the sample is a critical part of the methodology section. The purpose of this study was to determine how HR professionals perceive the hybrid work model. The sample consisted of three respondents, all HR leaders or practitioners with more than ten years of experience in their respective positions. Three private sector organizations provided the respondents, who were chosen through a purposive selection process. The study included eight responders. The participants were selected from the private sector to investigate the hybrid work model in companies that generally have greater latitude to adopt such models than public organizations. The study focused on the experiences of HR professionals with the hybrid work model, which is characterized as a combination of remote and in-office work, with flexibility determined by organizational policies and job roles. Because they had effectively incorporated hybrid work models into their HRM procedures, the three private companies were selected to provide a wealth of context for understanding how the model functions in real-world HR environments. Public organizations were not included because of their typically more inflexible structures and policies, which may restrict their ability to adopt hybrid work models to the same extent as the private sector. The following table lists each respondent's essential information to guarantee clarity and thorough description:

Respondent ID	Age	Industry	Size of Company	Role
R1	45	Higher Education	300	HR Manager
R2	58	MNC	10000	HR Leader
R3	48	Technology	5000	HR Manager
R4	51	Manufacturing	2000	HR Director
R5	42	Retail	1500	HR Specialist
R6	55	Healthcare	8000	HR Consultant
R7	38	Hospitality	700	Executive
R8	47	Financial Service	3000	HR Manager

Data collection

Participants were initially contacted by e-mail. After agreeing to participate in the study, virtual interviews were conducted with the participants. Interviews were semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to respond to the situation at hand, the emerging worldview of the respondents, and to new ideas that arise on the topic (Merriam, 2002). A set of instructions was developed and sent before the interview session, clarifying the research and what would be expected from them during the interviews. In line with a phenomenological approach, the interviews set out to describe the essence of the Human Resource expert's experiences. The primary method of data generation was through phenomenological interviewing, which provided access to the participants' life worlds. According to Van Manen (1992), interviews can be a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that serves as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of human phenomena. An interview guide was developed that included broad questions on the topic under investigation (Riessman, 1993). The researcher also posed follow-up questions, where necessary, that delved deeper into the content of the guide. Each interview lasted between one and two hours. Field notes were used to provide the researcher with additional information related to feelings, impressions, and other interesting incidents, as well as to address follow-up questions that arose during the interview sessions.

Data Collection Method

Semi-structured interviews were used in the study to gather data. This approach provided the researchers with the freedom to thoroughly examine the participants' experiences while maintaining a uniform framework for comparison. The purpose of the interviews was to gather deep and complex information about how HR professionals viewed and applied hybrid work models.

The participants were first contacted via email. After giving their consent to participate in the study, participants were interviewed virtually. The interviews were semi-structured. Through semi-structured interviews, researchers can respond to the current situation, the respondents' evolving perspectives, and new ideas that arise on the topic (Merriam, 2002). A set of guidelines outlining the research and what the interviewees could anticipate was prepared and distributed before the interview. The interview guide included general questions about the participants' perceptions of hybrid work, covering its benefits, challenges, and effectiveness in HRM processes. Specific questions focused on how HR professionals perceived the impact of hybrid work on HR management practices.

The purpose of the interviews was to use a phenomenological approach to distill the essence of the HR specialist's experiences. Phenomenological interviewing, which gave access to the participants' private lives, was the primary method used to collect data. According to Van Manen (1992), interviews can be used to investigate and gather experiential narrative material that may be utilized as a resource to obtain a more thorough and in-depth understanding of human phenomena. An interview guide contained general inquiries related to

the study's topic (Riessman, 1993). The researcher also probed further into the content of the guide by asking follow-up questions when necessary. Each interview lasted between one and two hours. The respondents were given a feedback summary of the interview that included the interpretation of their answers to guarantee accuracy and validate the interpretations. Field notes provided the researcher with additional information about feelings, impressions, and other significant events, as well as follow-up questions that arose during the interview sessions.

Data for the study were gathered through semi-structured interviews. This method allowed the researchers to comprehensively analyze the participants' experiences while maintaining a consistent framework for comparison. The interviews were conducted to gather detailed and nuanced information about the perceptions and implementation of hybrid work models among HR professionals.

Ethical Considerations

Before beginning the study, INTI International University provided ethical clearance. The approval made sure that the study complied with ethical guidelines, which include voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality. Experts in human resource management were chosen explicitly from three private companies. Every respondent was selected using a criterion-based methodology in conjunction with snowball sampling, which involved asking the original respondents for recommendations of additional respondents (Creswell, 1998). To be enrolled in the research, each participant had to:

1. Be HR professionals and leaders.
2. Have been in their HR positions for more than a decade.
3. The final requirement was added to ensure that participants would understand the company culture they were leading. In a similar vein, the researcher wanted to ensure they would be fully capable of responding to inquiries about their leadership skills and abilities. Six people participated in the study, which aligns with Dukes' (1984) recommendation that a phenomenological study include three to ten participants.

This thorough methodology ensures the research approach's rigor and clarity, providing a strong foundation for the study's conclusions.

Data Analysis

During the data collection, transcriptions, notes, and personal documents were gathered and organized sequentially, according to the story of each participant's experiences. Interview transcripts were read, and memos were created based on initial reactions and observations, which were then followed up on later (Willig, 2001). Transcripts were then analyzed using the modified van Kaam method or Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenology as a guideline (Moustakas, 1994). On the transcripts, all statements that seemed relevant to the participant's experience towards integrating a hybrid work model in their Human Resource Management practices were highlighted. Utilizing this concept

enabled the researcher to have a complete understanding of the participant's life experiences. Using a horizontalization process, all statements from the interview transcripts related to the experiences of Human Resource experts regarding the effectiveness of integrating a hybrid work model were then extracted. Each statement was viewed as having equal value. The significant statements were then pasted into another Word document, creating what became meaningful statements. In these steps, similar or overlapping statements were deleted. The remaining descriptions were identified as "invariant constituents" of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The meaning units were scrutinized to check the accuracy of the inquiry into the phenomenon of hybrid work practices. Irrelevant and redundant meaning units were omitted. Each meaning unit was rephrased grammatically to a more direct expression of the participant's meaning. Then, they were grouped into categories, and the invariant horizons were clustered into themes. The themes were then evaluated based on the respondents' experiences.

The meaning units were listed, and general descriptions of the textures of the experience, which denoted what happened or what was experienced, were written verbatim. This individual narrative was a synthesis of the invariant horizon and clustered themes. The individual textural description was then used to create imaginative variation. The primary purpose of imaginative variation is to create an individual structural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). To develop the individual structural description, structural themes were developed from the individual textural description created during the phenomenological reduction. The structure described how the phenomenon of hybrid work was experienced. Once the individual textural and structural descriptions were established, the participants were contacted to schedule a second interview to complete the entire interview process, including the second interview transcripts. The method was used with all the participants. The subsequent stage in the study was synthesis, which involved integrating the textual and structural descriptions into a single narrative. The resulting composite textural structural description is a universal description of the experience for all participants (Moustakas, 1994). In the final step, the total description of the meaning and the essence of the experience was assembled. The report is expected to help readers better comprehend the essential, invariant essence of the experience, distinguishing the single, unifying meaning of the hybrid work experience.

To ensure trustworthiness, the triangulation method was utilized by consulting with experts in a similar area of the study to seek multiple sources of data. Various documents from the library have also been reviewed to gather information in support of ensuring validity. Using multiple methods, such as semi-structured interviews and follow-up interviews, also provided the researcher with a more detailed and balanced explanation of the phenomenon. Seeking-related literature helped the researcher in examining and interpreting the data by contrasting evolving themes and patterns with existing literature. This helped the researcher make sense of what was similar, what was different, and why, thereby increasing their understanding of the investigated phenomena. Besides triangulation, the researcher used member checking with respondents and peer review with committee

members to ensure trustworthiness. Member checks require that the researcher present the findings or interpretations of the findings through descriptive triangulation, which ensures consistency between the researcher and the participant (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The researcher has contacted participants via email and sent them a copy of the transcripts, an interpretation of the data, and their profiles for review and feedback. Peer debriefing was conducted to ensure that the researcher maintained regular contact with committee members, and reflexive notes were taken to review their feedback during discussions of the findings.

Result and Discussion

The results of the semi-structured interviews with HR specialists are presented in this section, organized according to the main themes that emerged from the data analysis. Insights from participants and the implications of their experiences with hybrid work models in HRM practices are highlighted as the themes related to the research objectives are discussed. Respondents are identified by their role and demographic information to maintain anonymity (e.g., Respondent 1).

The findings of this study are presented in response to the research objective of this study:

Five main themes are identified:

(1) Wider talent pool and an increase in diversity and inclusion.

(2) Increase employee productivity

(3) Enhancement of technology

(4) Save cost

(5) Enhance employee work-life balance

A wider talent pool and an increase in diversity and inclusion.

Most HR experts assured that adopting a hybrid work model enabled their organization to have a tremendous effect on securing talent by widening the pool of applicants they hire. As mentioned by HR experts, the previous strategies, which were restricted by commuting distance, will not be applicable. As such, the HR experts endorsed that embracing hybrid work strategies allows them to locate candidates across the globe, and the company can find candidates beyond a limited geographic area. According to the HR experts, when talent plans are no longer restricted by location or a candidate's willingness to move, employers can source the best talent from anywhere in the world and reduce expenses associated with relocation and office setup. Hybrid work models also provide more opportunities for job seekers, who may live in rural or remote areas of the world, to pursue roles that were previously inaccessible to them due to their location. These findings are similar to those reported in studies by Beno (2021) and Halford (2005). The ability to access a broader talent pool also allows the company to increase diversity and inclusion within their company:

"This meant that organizations were able to look beyond their usual candidates, widen their talent pool, and improve their chances of finding the truly best candidates for their job vacancies. Once such candidates are found, being able to offer hybrid working models means that these new employees have the flexibility to work closer to home and thus do not always have to commit to a lengthy commute". (Respondent 1)

Previously, before the remote work was implemented, we used to hire candidates based on geographical areas. This limits the culture of diversity and also the technology backgrounds. However, with hybrid work, I think this issue has become less of an issue as we are now able to practice diversity without any geographical limitation". (Respondent 2)

The HR experts also emphasized that flexibility in working location and hours is beneficial for employer branding, as younger employees increasingly desire more control in this area. In addition, they have also mentioned that employees in other phases of life, such as young parents or caregivers, will also embrace the chance to work from home.

Another advantage mentioned by the expert is that incorporating a hybrid approach to recruitment can also create an exceptional experience for candidates:

Using in-person hiring alongside virtual recruitment strategies is a great way to add additional value to the interview process, as candidates will be able to take advantage of the speed and convenience of virtual hiring. At the same time, you will be giving them the chance to meet the people they will be working with physically". (Respondent 3)

"Adopting a hybrid approach gives companies more flexibility. For example, bringing candidates into the office may not be an option for many companies, so virtual hiring makes it easy to pivot quickly by using virtual tools like Zoom and Google Hangouts." (Respondent 4)

Increase employee productivity

Most HR experts shared their experiences on how hybrid work has contributed to higher productivity, apart from autonomy and time management. They claimed that employees were satisfied and happy to be given the freedom and flexibility to work from anywhere. This workplace flexibility is said to enhance job satisfaction, which also enhances productivity. Assuming home working conditions are suitable, the employee will be able to focus better than in an average office. There is a greater focus on the job at hand, and there are fewer disruptions than in the office. Many HR experts indicate that working partly at home increases productivity both qualitatively and quantitatively, and employees accomplish more in the same amount of time than before.

Employees seemed to be more focused and productive when they have a better work-life balance and adjust their job to fit around other commitments and things they enjoy. Since employees are not travelling or commuting every day to their workplace, they will feel more energized and refreshed to perform their daily work with more excitement" (Respondent 5)

"We have employees who need to wake as early as 6 am every morning to reach the office on time. In this case, having a hybrid work schedule will help them to work much better and be more productive". (Respondent 6)

These findings support those of Leclercq-Vandelannoitte (2021), Sezgin (2020), and Yang, Bisson, and Sanborn (2019). In these studies, the authors stated that the flexible work arrangement using a hybrid working model reduces the situations where employees procrastinate or give unnecessary excuses for delivering their duties, lowers the number of meetings, provides freedom to concentrate without office noise and division, and allows for more individual focus, which maximizes employees' productivity.

Enhancement of technology

Most HR experts have claimed that the long shift to hybrid work has prompted them to invest in technologies such as automation and artificial intelligence. The investment in technologies utilized in various HRM practices, such as recruitment, onboarding, workforce scheduling, rostering, and time and attendance tracking. The technology being implemented, such as mobile app employee self-service, facilitates employees' access to key employment information, including holiday entitlement, regardless of their location. Most experts claimed that the post-pandemic period assisted them in adapting to various technologies, such as video conferencing, webinars, and other video tools. Platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams are undergoing digital transformation with the implementation of artificial intelligence to automate tasks, recognize participants' gestures, and enable groups of people in the same conference room to appear in separate windows for those working from home to see.

"Automatic notifications and reminders of, for example, when to celebrate colleagues' work anniversaries or birthdays are also becoming given priority to ensure employees feel appreciated and part of something bigger". (Respondent 7)

Regardless of which approach is adopted, these tools provide opportunities for staff to immerse themselves in the new office designed for hybrid working well before they physically walk in. Since automation helps to improve the overall accuracy and quality of such processes, the benefits tend to be felt not only by the HR team alone but also by employees". (Respondent 8)

The experts stated that the ability to communicate through the latest communication tools also ensured that employees did not miss the one-to-one communication provided by an in-office setting. Additional benefits of these tools include an increased sense of belonging, an increased ability to stay focused and avoid distractions, and added privacy when sensitive conversations cannot be overheard in the office. Technology-embedded jobs during hybrid working allow companies that suffered significant losses at the early start of the pandemic to regain their footing eventually (Williamson & Colley, 2022).

Save cost

According to HR experts, a hybrid workforce benefits employers by reducing electricity and utility costs and accelerating their adoption of technology. As for employees, most of them claimed that they saved up on commuting expenses and experienced less commuting stress.

> Instead of spending time in traffic or sitting on a congested walkway, I believe that employees may use the time to exercise, have a good dinner with their family, or prepare healthy meals. The extra time that they have, which will not be available with the fixed working schedule, will have a considerable advantage for their life". (Respondent 9)

> I think working from home has eliminated my commuting costs, as I travel less, including tolls and petrol consumption. I used to travel from Seremban to KL every day, and I needed at least RM1000 a month for all my expenses. Moreover, now that money goes into my savings. Additionally, I saved on dining out costs, such as grabbing coffee or breakfast on my way to work and going out for lunch with colleagues. (Respondent 6)

> I saved costs on my work clothes. Practically every month, I will be getting a couple of blouses and a pair of shoes for my work, which is costly as well. For example, when you enter the main office, travel to visit clients, or have a video call, you need to wear smart attire. When you work from home, you have the flexibility to wear casual outfits. I have met home workers who will only wearing bright clothes on the top half when holding video calls. (Respondent 3)

The findings in Dahmen, Wöllecke, & Constantinescu (2018) and Grzegorczyk et al. (2021) studies align with the findings of this study in which the HRM experts agreed that the hybrid work model is not only allowing organizations to operate at a lower cost but also reduce the traveling cost for employees and use their time efficiently by reducing the traveling time.

Enhance employee work-life balance.

According to most HR experts, their employees were generally happy and performed

well because they were given flexibility to manage their work and family.

> "For many employees, working from home gives them more opportunities to improve their quality of life." (Respondent 3)

> "Most of my employees are happy when they are given flexibility with a blended approach where they can have their own time working from home". (Respondent 6)

> "Employees have time for activities that support well-being, like exercise and quality time with loved ones". (Respondent 1)

These findings echoed the results and conclusions of Baker (2021), Kelliher and Anderson (n.d.), and Tursunbayeva (2021), who agree that hybrid working provides more job autonomy, comfort, and work-life balance.

These results are consistent with earlier research that suggests hybrid working offers workers greater job autonomy, comfort, and a better work-life balance (Baker, 2021; Kelliher & Anderson, n.d.; Tursunbayeva, 2021). Because they feel more empowered to handle their personal and professional obligations, employees who have the freedom to choose when and where they work report higher levels of job satisfaction and better mental health.

However, it is crucial to understand that, despite its advantages, hybrid work also presents some unavoidable difficulties. The "dark side" of hybrid work, as highlighted by recent studies, includes the potential for burnout, feelings of loneliness, and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life. Due to the constant connectivity made possible by technology, some employees may struggle with overworking, which can result in stress and a decline in their well-being, even though they may enjoy more flexibility (Baker, 2021; Kelliher & Anderson, n.d.; Tursunbayeva, 2021). In certain situations, the absence of face-to-face interactions can also lead to feelings of alienation from coworkers, which can impact employee engagement and team dynamics.

Therefore, when developing and implementing these models, organizations need to consider both the advantages and disadvantages of hybrid work. To prevent potential problems and establish a well-balanced workplace that fosters worker productivity and well-being, HR professionals must ensure that hybrid work policies are properly managed. This all-encompassing strategy is necessary to minimize the drawbacks of hybrid work while maximizing its advantages.

Conclusion

In this study, a phenomenological inquiry is adopted to explore the effectiveness of hybrid work model practices among Human Resource Management experts. Respondents were purposively selected from three private organizations. A series of semi-structured

interviews was conducted. Based on a systematic data analysis, responses were categorised into five themes, namely (1) wider talent pool and increase in diversity and inclusion, (2) increase employee productivity, (3) enhancement of technology, (4) save cost, and (5) enhance employee work-life balance. The hybrid work model enabled HRM experts to locate candidates worldwide, allowing the company to find candidates beyond a limited geographic area. The ability to access a broader talent pool also enables the company to increase diversity and inclusion within its organization. Flexible work arrangements using a hybrid working model reduce the likelihood of employees procrastinating, provide the freedom to concentrate without office noise and division, and foster more individual focus, which enhances employees' productivity. Additionally, the use of technology enables employees to communicate effectively both while working from home (WFH) and on-site. This enables HRM experts to outline technology-embedded work for effective hybrid working. Furthermore, weighing the costs and benefits of hybrid working, HRM experts believed that this strategy enables organisations and employees to save costs. Finally, the hybrid work model, to a certain extent, develops work-life balance for employees, which leads to job satisfaction and increased productivity. All in all, the findings of this study suggest the need to implement a hybrid work model by HRM experts and organisations for the betterment of both employers and employees. The study will apply to human resource personnel who need to develop policies and procedures to enhance hybrid work strategies within their organizations. The study enables researchers and practitioners in the Human Resource field to understand the issues related to HRM practices in the current era. Hence, the information in this study is useful in aiding them in advocating for employee training programs and formulating human resource intervention remedial programs. Besides, it will help practitioners act as change agents to understand and analyze the characteristics of personal and organizational situations, thereby contributing to the long-term survival of the organization. For future studies, this study could be extended to include wider audiences using a quantitative approach to ensure a more valid and reliable study.

Limitations

It is important to consider the various limitations of this study. First, the sample size of private sector HRM specialists might not accurately reflect the range of HRM practices found in different sectors or industries. As a result, the findings might not be as applicable to small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) or the public sector. Second, despite offering deep insights, the qualitative method is vulnerable to researcher bias and the arbitrary nature of data interpretation. The unique organizational contexts of HRM specialists influence their experiences and viewpoints, which may not be universally applicable. Furthermore, the study did not include input from workers or organizational leaders who directly use hybrid work models, which could have provided a more thorough understanding of its effects. Instead, it concentrated primarily on the opinions of HRM specialists. Finally, the study was conducted within a specific time frame during the post-pandemic recovery phase, which may not accurately represent the long-term impacts of hybrid work models

as businesses continue to evolve.

Directions for Future Research

This study could be expanded in the future by including a larger sample of participants, such as managers and leaders, as well as workers from different organizational levels, to examine the cross-sectional effects of hybrid work models on HRM procedures and worker well-being. Additional research could compare the hybrid work model across industries, particularly in sectors where the adoption of remote work varies, such as government, healthcare, and education. To evaluate the sustainability and long-term efficacy of hybrid work, longitudinal studies can also offer important insights into its development. Future studies could also delve more deeply into the technological difficulties and obstacles that businesses encounter when implementing hybrid work models, especially in developing or rural regions where access to cutting-edge technologies is limited. Lastly, the cultural impact of hybrid work may help us better understand how various cultural contexts affect the success or failure of hybrid work models, especially in multinational and diverse organizations.

Scientific Implications

This study contributes to the growing body of research on the integration of hybrid work models—a topic that has received limited attention in HRM practices. For academics seeking to understand the dynamics of remote and hybrid work environments, identifying the essential components that enhance the efficacy of hybrid work, such as expanded talent pools, increased productivity, cost savings, and improved work-life balance, provides valuable insights. Furthermore, by emphasizing the real-world experiences of HRM professionals in the private sector, this study advances phenomenological inquiry and adds qualitative support to organizational behavior and HRM theoretical frameworks. The study's conclusions may inspire future researchers to investigate how hybrid work impacts organizational culture, employee retention, and employee engagement in the long term.

Practical Implications

This study provides practical guidance to HR professionals on successfully implementing and integrating hybrid work models within businesses. Organizations can create more efficient policies that meet the needs of both the company and its employees by understanding the advantages and challenges of hybrid work from the perspective of HRM specialists. These findings can be utilized by HR professionals to enhance their training, reward, and recruitment strategies, ensuring they align with the hybrid workplace. Additionally, by ensuring that both in-office and remote workers have equal access to resources, this study encourages businesses to make investments in infrastructure and technology that support remote work. Practically speaking, the results also emphasize the importance of developing an organizational culture that is hybrid-friendly, where success depends heavily on adaptability, effective communication, and trust. To ensure that managers and employees

alike adopt the hybrid work model for long-term organizational success, HR leaders can utilize this study as a guide when implementing change management programs that support workers in adapting to the shift. To sum up, this study not only provides a framework for understanding the efficacy of hybrid work models in HRM but also opens the door to further investigation and real-world applications in businesses seeking to implement adaptable, sustainable, and employee-focused work practices.

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