



Hybrid Working Model: A pathway to Success or Failure

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/AJEBA/2022/v22i2130682

Open Peer Review History:

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: <https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/88036>

Case Study

Received 05 May 2022
Accepted 16 July 2022
Published 18 July 2022

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study is to find out how Covid-19 has impacted the working environment all across the globe. Remote workers and Hybrid Working Model are some of the concepts that many companies have started to adopt and implement for their employees. Here, the case of a Company has been presented – the Company's management has tried to implement the Hybrid Working Model to see if it will be a success or not. This case study mentions the challenges they had to face and opens the floor for the readers to see the problems management faces in real life and encourages them to put forward their knowledge on how companies can overcome such hurdles. The study also presents the success story of the implementation of the hybrid working model and explains how modern businesses can expand their talent pool with the help of this model.

Keywords: Hybrid working model; remote working; management; critical thinking.

1. INTRODUCTION

Every industry around the world has suffered the consequences of the recent pandemic. Many businesses were shut down due to bad

economic conditions, while others had to downsize big time [1,2]. Regardless of whether it is a developed country or a developing country, Covid-19 spared no one. The work dynamics have been globally changed, and as McKinsey &

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Company stated: hybrid working is now the future¹. many companies worldwide have successfully transitioned to this working model and have seen great results. The biggest example of this model are companies like Microsoft, Allen & Overy, and many others². Despite of tough Covid situation, some companies were lucky enough to survive but had to face multiple hurdles that reduced the profits and overall business efficiency. However, the problems didn't end with the reduction of the Covid-19 spread. The work dynamics were changed completely, some harmful for business, meanwhile, there were some positive aspects as well for the companies who took the right measures at the right time [3,4]. The emergence of the concept of 'remote workers' and 'hybrid working model' during the global pandemic was a blessing in disguise. It has improved productivity for employees as well as employers [5-7]. However, introducing this hybrid working system isn't easy to implement, as it creates a big communication gap between the employees and management.

In this study, we are observing a case of a company in South East Asia. The owner of The Company was struggling to streamline the communication patterns after implementing the hybrid working model in November 2020. It was the time when companies were allowed to have few employees working from the physical location, while others were from their homes. Since operating from South East Asia and dealing with International clients, the technological struggle was real, and the owner couldn't afford to let the outcome be affected by the communication gap that came with remote workers.

There were multiple issues while implementing the model, like getting everyone together at one place on the same schedule, internet issues, not proper knowledge to utilize the communication tools, and hardware problems. Indeed, these concerns were a source of trouble for many companies around the world. Let's discover how this company overcame the problem and succeeded in implementing the model. But first, here's what we will be exploring in the study:

How to ensure remote workers and in-house teams have a stable internet connection? Does

¹ <https://envoy.com/blog/what-is-a-hybrid-work-model/>

² <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/what-executives-are-saying-about-the-future-of-hybrid-work>

every remote worker have the facility of personal computers and laptops? How to ensure everyone is available at the agreed-upon time? How to make employees proficient and tech-savvy? What other steps must be taken to streamline the communication process? What type of Communication Channels should the Company choose?

2. COMPANY BACKGROUND

The Company is a digital marketing agency that started its operation in 2012. The Company has headquarters in Ontario, Brampton in Canada, while most of its operations are carried from Lahore, Pakistan. They are one of the leading digital marketing services providers in Pakistan that deals with clients in different countries, including the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), Canada, and Australia.

The company's goal is not only to facilitate its clients, but also the employees, which is why they offer work flexibility. Aside from covid-19 SOP restrictions, companies allow work from home in case of any emergency to promote healthy relationships between the employees and employers. However, in the face of new dynamics, many managers and employees had to work hybrid, which though seems ideal for productivity, but had a number of problems in the initial implementation phase.

3. WHAT DOES THE HYBRID WORKING MODEL STATES

The hybrid working model is a drastic transition from traditional working conditions. It has several variations, so the companies can implement whatever suits them best.

3.1 Option A

Few employees work in-house, while others work remotely. The first option is also known as remote-first, which means companies encourage their employees to work remotely, and only those employees are asked to visit the office whose job requires their physical presence.

3.2 Option B

All employees will work in-house for some days of the week, and the rest of the days remotely. This kind of flexibility is also known as office-occasional working. This happens when companies aren't entirely sold on the concept of

remote working or don't want their space to go unused. This is also known as hybrid working, where employees work in the office for a few days a week and take work from home for the rest of the days.

3.3 Option C

Combination of both options A & B. This kind of setting is known as office-first and then remote. This is the situation where team leaders work from the office. In this condition, the working becomes more office-centric, since they would want the rest of the team to be in the office rather than working remotely.

This working model is a blessing in disguise. It allows the workers to complete the tasks whenever they feel most productive. Also, it allows them to have a proper work-life balance - only if it is implemented properly³.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF HYBRID WORKING MODEL GLOBALLY

4.1 The Company before and after Covid-19: Transition to Hybrid Working

Before Covid-19, the Company had only 20 employees working, while they had freelancers to complete the rest of the tasks. However, the Company decided to expand in 2019 and had around 10 more employees on board, but the pandemic had other plans. The Company converted to total work from the home mode in March 2020. Since they were already dependent on freelancers, and few employees, they managed to survive the pandemic.

However, when everything started to open gradually and the team was expanding along with the introduction of hybrid working that was the time when communication barriers started emerging. They had people of different ages working together, some of them were tech-savvy, while others were below-average skills when it came to using the technology to the full extent. It was easy for them to communicate face to face rather than using their devices; however, when the employees had to work from home, it wasn't easy to achieve the same level of productivity anymore.

³ <https://buildremote.co/hybrid-work/hybrid-work-companies-list/>

5. COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS IN HYBRID WORKFORCE

When implementing the hybrid working conditions, The Company came across multiple communication barriers, which was making the execution of hybrid working difficult. With remote workers, the dependency on the internet also increased. The speed and quality of communication are directly reliant on how well the internet works, and that's one of the major problems companies have to face. The fluctuating and poor internet signals in Pakistan were the biggest threat to introducing remote working conditions.

The next problem at hand was the lack of knowledge to use different communication channels. The Company has a diverse team, with age groups from 17-40. Due to such age gaps, not everyone was tech-savvy, which created a problem in efficiently utilizing different channels like Zoom, Slack, Skype, and Google Meet. The Company introduced these channels to facilitate the communication between the in-house workers and remote teams, but instead, because of a lack of expertise in using these online tools, the purpose wasn't fulfilled and the results weren't as what management expected.

Teams working on hybrid modes had another critical issue, i.e., bringing everyone on one page. When working from home, employees had to face several issues, including difficulty in accepting the working culture of families and friends, lack of proficiency in using technology, and the availability of the internet in the area. All of these issues lead to delays in meeting task deadlines, unavailability to important client meetings, interruptions in team meetings, making the right strategies timely, and lack of getting updates, among others. It not only affected the performance of individual employees or one team but brought down the Company's productivity overall.

The hybrid working mode carried one more problem for The Company. That was the hardware problem. Since there were people of different ages, not everyone had the facility of personal computers or laptops at their house. Even the employees that had these facilities were facing other problems, like slow PCs, poor internet connection, and physical damage to the device.

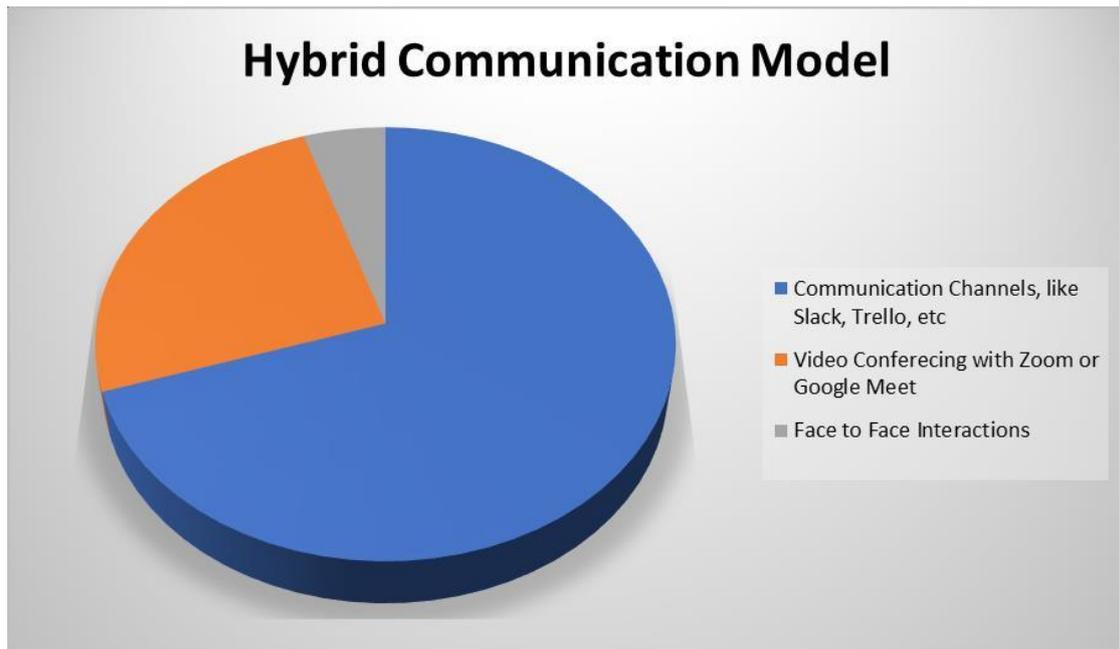


Fig. 1. Hybrid communication model

Many companies already have successfully launched hybrid working in their Company. However, The Company hasn't reached there due to all the problems occurring in the implementation phase of the concept.

To tackle the problem, the CEO of The Company called in his management team to see what they can do to make this execution successful. Due to the threat of Covid-19 still lingering over Pakistan and strict restrictions from the Government, going back to a full in-house team is not an option for the Company. Furthermore, considering the Company deals with international clients they also want some of the employees to be available till late hours to communicate with the clients and handle their queries in a timely manner. This required them to have proficient employees who can overcome all the technological challenges, and excel at delivering the tasks timely to contribute to the Company's success.

The strategic management team had to come up with solutions to defeat all the communication barriers to achieve the level of efficiency the Company needs.

6. CONCLUSION

The communication dynamics have changed all around the globe. Companies are now looking to find efficient solutions to streamline the

communication processes, and the company mentioned in the case study is one of those.

They are now thinking of introducing a Hybrid Working Model, but the implementation isn't as easy as it seems. There are multiple problems companies have to face including hardware problems, diverse workforces, and lack of knowledge in using the latest software.

However, with proper strategic planning, these can be overcome as the company mentioned in the study did. Remote working is the future of companies now, which can help them streamline their process and increase their reach to the larger talent pool.

Proper training and clear rules and regulations are the way to go to ensure the successful implementation of the Hybrid Working Model.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:

The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:

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