PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF MANAGING HYBRID AND REMOTE TEAMS IN THE DIGITAL BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

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The rapid and widespread transition to hybrid and remote working models has radically changed the dynamics of business organisations, creating both unprecedented opportunities and complex challenges for workplace mental health [1; 8]. Although research shows that hybrid and remote workers often demonstrate higher levels of engagement than their on-site colleagues, and approximately 60% of employees prefer hybrid forms of work, instead of traditional business practices based solely on office-based work [9]. This transition has revealed critical psychological aspects. These aspects require urgent attention from company leaders and human resource management professionals. Managers are now under double pressure: on the one hand, they must maintain team productivity, and on the other, they must ensure the well-being of employees, often experiencing increased stress and resource depletion themselves as they try to navigate these uncharted waters [1]. This transformation directly affects the efficiency of companies' business processes, staff performance levels and the long-term sustainability of organisations. Managing the psychological aspects of hybrid work is becoming part of a sustainable business strategy, as employee wellbeing determines a company's innovation, engagement, and competitiveness.

The aim of this paper is to systematise contemporary approaches to supporting psychological well-being in hybrid teams and interpret them through the lens of the 'job demands–resources' model as a basis for managerial decision-making in the digital economy.

The psychological consequences of distributed work go far beyond simple logistical adjustments. Recent surveys show that 47% of remote workers express concern about blurred boundaries between work and personal life, and more than half of them report an increase in working hours during the pandemic. At the same time, mental health self-assessment scores, employee engagement, and burnout indicators have deteriorated, while the use of vacation and sick days has decreased [3]. These trends suggest that, despite the flexibility offered by remote work, without targeted psychological support systems, organisations risk creating an environment that paradoxically increases stress and simultaneously worsens well-being.

Digital communication barriers are a major challenge in remote working environments, as these environments rely heavily on digital tools, which can lead to misinterpretation, delayed responses and reduced personal contact, resulting in a significant loss of nuance and context in conversations [12]. Research shows that while promoting the use of information and communication technologies helps combat feelings of isolation, paradoxically, the simultaneous increase in remote work leads to employees feeling more isolated overall [14]. This seemingly contradictory conclusion highlights the complexity of the relationship between technological mediation and human relationships.

The loss of spontaneous, informal interactions, which are vital to employee productivity, well-being, and team cohesion, is proving particularly difficult to replicate in remote and hybrid work environments [2]. Asynchronous communication, while providing flexibility for distributed teams working across different time zones, can lead to slower response times and delayed decision-making, which can be problematic in situations that require immediate action or resolution [5]. Without proper guidance, there is an increased risk of misunderstandings that can affect project coordination, as employees may not be able to agree on a time or place to collaborate, potentially leading to the creation of silos where teams or individuals work separately [11].

The problem of effective communication in virtual environments goes beyond purely technical difficulties. Challenges for virtual teams include the impact of digital presence on employees' sense of security when they behave with integrity during meetings and written communication, especially when giving and receiving feedback, spontaneous interactions, submitting requests and questions [12]. When team members are in different time zones, scheduling meetings and coordinating work becomes challenging. Prime working hours for one employee may be late at night for another, leading to feelings of isolation and exclusion, especially for employees who are located much further away than most of the team [11].

Technostress, characterised by fatigue and psychological strain caused by technology, has become a serious problem in remote working environments, as excessive use of technology for both work and personal needs significantly increase psychological strain and reduces subjective well-being [6]. Video conference fatigue, widely known as 'Zoom fatigue,' has several causes, including camera use, multitasking pressure, and work-home boundary issues, with the cognitive load of processing non-verbal cues through digital platforms being significantly higher than during face-to-face interactions [5]. The excessively rapid and forced digital transformation of business models has brought great stress to company employees, who have had to adapt just as quickly to new business practices.

For business organisations, the psychological consequences of hybrid work are evident not only in the subjective well-being of staff, but also in key performance indicators: productivity, decision quality, innovation, and staff turnover. Research shows that teams with high levels of psychological safety and support from leaders have higher engagement rates, less burnout, and lower staff replacement costs, which directly impacts a company's financial results.

Research on boundary management distinguishes between 'separators,' who seek greater separation between work and personal life, and 'integrators,' who prefer to combine work and non-work roles, noting that many employees have become unintentional integrators during the transition to working from home [13]. Companies that actively support boundary management report 28% higher employee retention and 22% growth in overall job satisfaction compared to those that do not prioritise these practices. Perceived stress and burnout significantly affect employees' mental well-being, reducing professional effectiveness, while increased boundary violations and unwanted professional interruptions exacerbate work stress and burnout, negatively affecting work engagement and professional identity [7].

Remote working has intensified the pressure associated with balancing work and personal life among employees, but research shows that such conflicts can be mitigated through instrumental leadership and fostering a sense of social belonging. This will lead to lower levels of burnout. Effective strategies include encouraging employees to take regular breaks throughout the day, disconnecting from work during non-working hours, making proper use of holidays, and creating dedicated workspaces in their homes where they can focus and minimise distractions [13].

Creating a psychologically safe environment in teams is challenging under normal circumstances, but it becomes even more difficult in hybrid or fully virtual teams [8]. Psychological safety is particularly difficult to maintain in virtual teams, as trust is usually established over time and through interaction, and virtual teams have fewer opportunities to interact outside of scheduled meetings and do not have spontaneous, non-business conversations that help strengthen bonds and relationships [9]. Psychological safety is a group-level construct, not just a matter of relations between two individuals, and it focuses on whether people perceive the group as giving them the benefit of the doubt when they express their opinions.

Distributed and remote teams have fewer opportunities for spontaneous, casual conversations, which can mean that people are more likely to feel lonely, anxious, or unsure of

their actions, and may be more prone to self-doubt or imposter syndrome. This can have a significant impact on organisational processes in business organisations, as productivity and the quality of the product being developed are significantly reduced. Remote work and online meetings can make it more difficult for team members to pick up on non-verbal cues in conversation, requiring extra effort to ensure clear and responsive communication [4]. In hybrid environments, potential gaps in inclusivity — when remote employees feel that they are less seen, heard, or valued than their colleagues in the office — can undermine psychological safety through unequal access to information, lack of informal communication, or unconscious bias in favour of those who are physically present [14].

Managers' ability to use digital communication tools is crucial for navigating the digital environment and increasing employee engagement, especially when combined with transformational leadership approaches [3]. Companies face a significant training gap: 73% of hybrid managers remain unprepared to effectively manage hybrid teams, while research shows that managers are 7.9 times more effective at retaining employees when they provide them with ongoing opportunities for growth [4]. Research has shown that social support from managers, continuous and relevant information exchange between teams within the organisation, and time management-oriented planning reduce burnout and increase the productivity of remote workers [7].

The 'Job Demands-Resources' model shows that leaders who demonstrate healthy behaviour, promote psychological safety, and create a trust-based environment are key resources for team well-being [1]. Leadership during the pandemic has improved significantly: 55% of employees reported that managers have become more caring towards their subordinates, and nearly half noted that their organisations have become clearer in articulating their mission and goals. However, these improvements must be sustained and institutionalised to ensure the long-term success of distributed work. As Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson points out, creating psychological safety in virtual teams requires effort and strategy, which pay off in engagement, collegiality, productive debates, and idea generation, and the tools and techniques that engage people are becoming common practices that serve managers well today and will serve them well in the future [10]. By understanding these psychological aspects and implementing scientifically based measures, organisations can create favourable conditions that balance flexibility and meaningful connections, ultimately improving both individual well-being and team performance in a distributed work environment.

From a management perspective, this means that companies need to take a fresh look at how they organise hybrid work. First, organisations should develop clear yet flexible hybrid work policies that take into account different approaches to work-life balance among employees ('separators' and 'integrators'). Second, it is important to invest in developing leaders' digital communication skills, as the quality of online interaction largely determines the trust and engagement of the team. Third, regular monitoring of well-being and psychological safety should be built into the human resource management system to identify burnout risks in a timely manner and adjust management decisions.

Therefore, the transition to hybrid and remote work is not a temporary response to the crisis, but an element of the digital transformation of business models. Companies that integrate psychologically oriented approaches to managing hybrid teams into their strategies are creating more resilient and competitive organisations. Investing in well-being, psychological safety and leadership development is becoming an important condition for sustainable business development in the context of increasing virtualisation of work.

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