

Strategic Work Design Dimensions of Hybrid Organisational Models

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Abstract

Digitalisation has reshaped how we work, challenging leaders to navigate the merging boundaries between traditional office settings and remote workspaces. The pandemic accelerated the integration of technology, fostering a shift towards more adaptable work practices and affecting employee well-being. Yet, the significance of hybrid work in designing organisations towards a Hybrid Organisational Model (HOM) is still not fully understood. This study delves into the essential elements required for implementing a HOM, examining work design to elucidate the characteristics, breadth, and measures necessary to foster hybrid work environments at a whole organisational level. Adopting a qualitative approach, we analyse two polar cases for their unique HOM strategies, aiming to understand different organizational paths to hybrid work. The research contributes both theoretical insights and practical guidance for organizations aspiring to adopt HOMs, addressing the call for more qualitative investigations in this area. The preliminary findings demonstrate an effective implementation of the HOM but starting from different strategic and organizational implementation approaches. The paper adds to the still-emerging literature on HOMs enlarging the set of organizational dimensions that contribute to defining and assessing the multiplicity of solutions that can be implemented, conceiving hybrid working arrangements as a strategic and managerial lever to work design and its orientation.

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1. Introduction

Work design has great practical significance to organizations as they try to attain diverse outcomes such as efficiency and satisfaction (Morgeson and Humphrey, 2008). The digitization has revolutionized the way work is designed, representing one of the grand challenges for leaders as they face pressure to address knowledge workers with greater autonomy and flexibility and blurring the lines between the traditional office and remote locations (Bader & Kaiser, 2017). This has changed the landscape of work due to the need for new business practices during the transformation of the organizational model. This scenario also gave rise to the concept of hybrid work, a novel idea which represents a dynamic blend of in-office and remote work, allowing employees to choose the most appropriate environment for their tasks and promoting a more flexible approach to work (Bloom et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2019). Hybrid work has gained incredible success due to its potential to shape and design the future of work and labour modalities (Kaiser et al., 2022). Just like e.g., just-in-time manufacturing, lean manufacturing, six-sigma, and total quality management involve aspects of work design, the new Hybrid Organisational Model (HOM) requires managers to design subordinates' work to stay competitive.

Given the increasing importance of the implementation of a HOM within organisations, several studies have tried to investigate the phenomenon from organizational, functional and individual perspectives. Klaser et al., (2023) aimed to assess the long-term impacts of remote working post-COVID-19, examining work flexibility types and their interdependencies using a micro-survey of 600 Italian workers within the Socio-Technical-System framework, exploring structural changes in organizations. Several studies aimed to better understand the role of leaders, their competencies and characteristics (Aoyama & Silva, 2023; Farhan et al., 2023; Höddinghaus et al., 2023; Montaudon-Tomas et al., 2022). For instance, Bell et al. (2023) apply functional leadership theory to virtual leadership research, identifying key functions affecting follower satisfaction and new technology-related challenges, using a review synthesis method for future research and practical implications. Other studies have focused on problems of poor coordination mechanisms including misunderstandings, help requests, lower job satisfaction among team members, and more defined tasks (De Souza Santos & Ralph, 2022; Javalagi et al., 2023; Li et al., 2015).

Indeed, there are several dimensions related to the design of a successful HOM that occur and interact which require attention to provide a holistic view of HOM implementation.

Although the importance of work design in the successful implementation of HOM is acknowledged, current research falls short in providing qualitative, procedural insights into how it is adopted organizationally (Maitland and Thomson 2014; Parker, Morgeson, and Johns, 2017; Wang et al., 2021). None of these studies has revealed the strategic potential of hybridity in successful organizational work design in a processual manner.

Therefore, in this study a qualitative method approach is employed by selecting two polar case studies, to respond to the following research question: "How do the dimensions of HOM implementation affect the organizational hybrid work design?"

These two organisations have been selected based on criteria designed to maximise insights into the hybrid work design across varying contexts. The two cases contrast in the HOM's origin and the dimensions of the implementation of a hybrid workplace. The case comparison aims to enrich our understanding of the various factors that contribute to the adoption of hybrid work models in different organisational settings.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Hybrid Organizational Model (HOM)

HOM offers the opportunity to balance traditional office-based work with “almost” normal, remote work, redefining workplaces (Aksamija & Milosevic, 2023). The pandemic accelerated the adoption of such models for health and safety reasons, affecting millions of employees worldwide (Kniffin et al., 2021). This transformation has led to behavioural changes in various areas of work, with potentially long-lasting effects. Concerns revolve primarily around the impact of these changes on employees' emotional, cognitive, and physical well-being, which ultimately affects their performance (Fichten et al., 2023; Radu et al., 2023). Indeed, the surge in hybrid working, driven by pandemic-related restrictions, has had an unprecedented impact on office work, prompting considerations of social sustainability, the working environment, organisational sustainable innovation, and therefore the well-being of employees (Gohoungodji et al., 2023).

Hybrid work is frequently associated with terms like: “Remote working” which refers to the capacity for staff members to work from any location as long as they can connect to the organization's legacy systems, collaborate with coworkers, and complete tasks (“flexibility in space”). This includes homes, co-working spaces, parks, and other outdoor spaces (Cuel et al., 2022). The term “agile working” is often used as a synonym to describe work optimisation techniques that prioritise productivity, coordination, efficiency, and agility. Work and performance are typically structured and customised into tasks that are regularly evaluated and improved (“flexibility in space, time, and task/contract”) (Porter & van den Hooff, 2020). Then a “flexible working system” that addresses efficiency and effectiveness through any combination of “autonomy, agility, coordination, and work tool optimisation” is referred to as smart working (Morea et al., 2023).

Several scholars have highlighted five key themes associated with the adoption of HOM, touching on the varied implications—both beneficial and challenging—of embracing hybrid and remote work. These themes regard work-life balance, environmental sustainability, the influence of working conditions on personal well-being and health, and advancements in technology (Galanti et al., 2021, 2023). Gratton (2021) identified four principles to ensure productivity when working in hybrid mode: “*use office space to amplify cooperation*”, “*make working from home a source of energy*”, “*take advantage of asynchronous time to boost focus*”, and “*use synchronized time for tasks that require coordination*”. Work-life balance is another important aspect of HOM, hybrid work allows employees to align work schedules with personal and business flexibility needs, enhancing both organisational performance and personal well-being (Morea et al., 2023). Research, also, highlights that technology-supported HOM employees improve their productivity by integrating their professional roles with their family and community needs, promoting a holistic approach to their social and professional existence (Morea et al., 2023).

Given these characteristics, hybrid work is adding further complexities to work design, which is concerned with the activities of workers, their duties, the tasks required to perform their work, and how those tasks and duties are structured and scheduled (Morgeson and Humphrey, 2008).

2.2 Work design

Maitland and Thompson (2014) in their book *Future Work*, emphasize virtual work design as an essential element of success in the fast-paced world of today (Maitland and Thomson, 2014). Humphrey, Nahrgang and Morgeson (2007) demonstrated that work design has a large impact on worker attitudes and behaviours, explaining on average 43% of the variance in these outcomes.

In the fields of psychology and management, work design is acknowledged as a significant antecedent of most of the primary dependent variables, such as productivity, well-being/strain, presenteeism, absenteeism, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job performance, creativity, etc. Work design is acknowledged as an output of individual processes like job crafting as well as a mediator between other variables and outcomes (e.g., between leadership/downsizing/lean

production/employment contracts/etc. and outcomes) (Parker, Morgeson and Johns, 2017). Work design is inherently connected to its application. Parker, Morgeson and Johns (2017) have shown in their paper how work design principles influence management strategies, their implementation in real-world practices, and their consideration within national policies. Morgeson and Humphrey (2008) described work design as the examination, development, and alteration of the composition, content, structure, and setting in which jobs and roles are performed.

A few studies have tried to apply a work design perspective to explain hybrid and remote working. In their study, Wang et al. (2021) applied a work design perspective investigating the remote working practice in China during the pandemic. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, they explored the challenges experienced by remote workers at this time, as well as what virtual work characteristics and individual differences affect these challenges. The authors identified four key remote work challenges (i.e., work-home interference, ineffective communication, procrastination, and loneliness), as well as four virtual work characteristics that affected the experience of these challenges (i.e., social support, job autonomy, monitoring, and workload) and one key individual difference factor (i.e., workers' self-discipline). Gratton (2021) in the study entitled "How to Do Hybrid Right" suggests that to effectively navigate this shift to HOM, leaders need to create hybrid work arrangements that take into account the needs of individual people as well as institutional issues.

However, despite the significant importance of the work design perspective in achieving an HOM, none of the studies have provided a processual overview of its organizational implementation with a qualitative approach. Therefore, as Wang *et al.* (2021) said, we want to go deeper into "*How to get the most out of remote working*" and answer the following research question: "How do organisations implement an effective hybrid workplace through the combination of different work design dimensions?"

3. Research design

In this study, we adopted a qualitative methodological approach through the application of a polar case strategy (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007), which led to the selection of two exemplar cases "ALPHA" and "BETA" to maximize variance along pertinent dimensions (Gerring, 2009).

This method is particularly appropriate in areas where empirical research is limited and essential data for hypothesis development is not readily available (Yin, 2014). The approach involves selecting various cases, cross-referencing data during collection, and analysing it both within and across cases (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2018).

3.1 Case selection

We considered two organizations adopting HOM effectively but in distinct ways, to allow us to study the different applications of the work design dimensions and their impact on the desired organizational outcomes. The two extreme case studies were selected according to the following criteria:

- Contrasting backgrounds of the companies can reveal unique challenges and strategies associated with implementing hybrid work models in different industry contexts. This can help identify specific dimensions as well as universal themes relevant to the adoption of hybrid work.
- Organizational mechanisms: the selection of these cases also allows for an exploration of how organizational history, size, and market position influence the adoption and effectiveness of hybrid work models. "ALPHA," with its long history and sizeable revenue in the traditional sector, and "BETA," a more recent conglomerate in the technology sector, provide contrasting examples of how different organizational dynamics shape the transition to hybrid work.

Case “ALPHA”: is an Italian company established in 1923 that operates in the Food & Beverage sector, classified under Ateco code 10.39, with a 2022 revenue of €119 million and a workforce of 147, represented in the interview by the HR manager, four senior managers and two collaborators.

Case “BETA”: is a company born from the merger of four companies, specializing in technological infrastructure solutions for businesses, focusing on connectivity, networking, data centre & cloud services, security, voice & collaboration, and Internet of Things (IoT), with a significant presence in Italy's Northeast. It is classified under Ateco code 63.11.3, reported revenue of €25 million for 2022, employs 159 people, and was represented by the HR manager, the manager of the Web and Digital Department and two of his collaborators.

3.2 Data collection and research protocol

Following Yin’s (1994) guidance for case study design, data was collected from various sources. Over six months (January-June 2024), data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with key informants, and reviews of archival materials. The preliminary model, as well as the data collection processes, were continuously refined and revised as new information was obtained, coded, and analysed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This iterative process continued until data convergence indicated that the emerging depiction of the organizations’ HOM implementation was as complete and accurate as possible (Eisenhardt, 1989).

In line with the advocated case study research methodologies (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pagell, 2004; Yin, 1999), our research collection framework incorporated four main components: an interview protocol for the semi-structured interview, a targeted interview process, respondent selection, and a strategy for analysis. Targeted interviews used a set list of questions, ensuring uniformity across interviews while allowing for the refinement of these questions after each case to enhance depth and relevance (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pagell, 2004).

A review of existing literature, alongside the development of research questions and collaborative discussions among researchers, led to the formulation of a series of open-ended questions intended as the interview guide. This review also included an evaluation of other case studies to assimilate various techniques and gather relevant business and contextual information for this research. The questionnaire covered areas such as basic company details, HOM introduction, modalities, evolution over time pre and post-pandemic period; policy regulation; digital organisation readiness, organisational culture, and its effects on business performance, aiming to foster comprehensive discussions on these subjects. The interview format was fine-tuned throughout the study to better capture the nuances of the topics addressed. Table 1 summarizes the interview guide administered to the participants.

TABLE 1 HERE

We employed two distinct interview strategies. The first, a vertical approach, involved interviewing individuals from various organisational levels to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives. The second, a horizontal approach, entailed conducting multiple interviews with managers at the same hierarchical level, allowing for an organisation-wide view of work design for HOM implementation. The choice between these approaches depended on the availability and willingness of participants from the target companies. Table 2 reports the information on the interviewees involved in the study.

TABLE 2 HERE

These approaches enabled the triangulation of data collected from interviews, a crucial process for ensuring the validity and reliability of our findings (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009). The case study method's strength lies in its ability to gather multiple evidence sources, thereby enriching the researcher's understanding of the investigated phenomenon (Yin, 2003).

3.3 Data analysis and findings

We reached our findings after several iteration rounds by adopting a two-fold saturation criterion: (i) all data sources could be coded using the established coding structure, and (ii) the research team reached a consensus on the coding results. (Yin, 2018). The cross-case analysis is summarised in Table 3 identifying the main dimensions of the inception and subsequent implementation of the hybrid work design. This section illustrates in more detail the main differences among the two configurations of HOM implemented by the two extreme cases considering the following dimensions: the agency of change, the main drivers that led to the new work configurations, the characteristics of the configuration, and the process of implementation (considering the behavioural, spatial and technological interventions).

TABLE 3 HERE

Agency of change

The results highlight distinct approaches to the implementation of hybrid work practices within two organisations, each shaped by different agents of change. ALPHA's strategy was developed collaboratively with the HR department and departmental managers, intentionally steering clear of a hierarchical, top-down approach starting in 2018. This method prioritised customisation to meet the specific needs and preferences of their workforce, indicating a responsive and inclusive model of change management. In contrast, the initiation of hybrid work practices at BETA was propelled by external factors like the Covid-19 pandemic, but also by a proactive decision from one unit leader in 2020. This decision underscored a strategic vision aimed at bolstering the unit's competitiveness, attracting talent, and aligning with employee preferences for flexible work arrangements. Here, the leadership's foresight and willingness to adapt played a pivotal role, demonstrating that the impetus for change stemmed from within the organisation itself, highlighting a leadership-driven model of transformation. To conclude the ALPHA approach is systematic and leads to organizational change, while the BETA approach is customized to only one unit.

“When I joined ALPHA company, I opened a suggestion box that had been placed to collect ideas, requests, and suggestions from employees. I believe it hadn't been opened for a long time, as it was covered in a thick layer of dust. To my surprise, I found numerous requests related to hybrid work, such as 'more hybrid work' and a more disciplined approach to hybrid work'. This directly influenced how we at ALPHA developed our Hybrid Work policy, in collaboration with the HR department and departmental managers, focused on addressing the unique needs of our team,” stated the HR manager of ALPHA company” (ALPHA HR manager).

“As the Sustainability and CSR Manager, I've witnessed how the pandemic catalyzed our adoption of hybrid working, enhancing performance and broadening its acceptance. Initially, there was a push to return to traditional methods, but our HR manager's arrival marked a transformative shift towards

prioritizing employee-centric policies. His leadership showed that remote working not only increased productivity but also employee happiness due to its flexibility. Over the past three years, this transition has been gradually accepted, supported by positive employee feedback and management endorsement. After COVID-19, the sudden return to full office work caused confusion and stress, but thanks to our HR manager's willingness to engage in dialogue, we are now finding a new balance between office and remote work” (ALPHA Sustainability e CSR manager).

"As the unit leader at BETA, my decision to introduce hybrid work practices wasn't just a quick fix in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was a strategic choice I made to boost our competitiveness, draw in the best talent, and cater to the preferences of our employees. It's evident that it was the leadership within our organisation, me included, that drove this significant change” (BETA manager of the Unit).

Drivers

The transition towards remote work at ALPHA is predominantly driven by the preferences of its employees, indicating that the company places a high value on understanding and catering to the needs and desires of its staff, with a focus on enhancing their comfort and work-life balance. Furthermore, sustainability emerges as a crucial factor behind ALPHA's push for remote work, as underscored by the HR manager. This reveals the company's dual commitment to not only improving the well-being of its employees but also to fulfilling its environmental responsibilities and minimising its carbon footprint. ALPHA's dedication to fostering a work environment that promotes the well-being and satisfaction of its employees is evident in its initiatives to introduce and expand the flexibility of work arrangements. This demonstrates a proactive stance in modifying work policies to better align with the principles of employee well-being and environmental sustainability, underlining ALPHA's holistic approach to corporate responsibility and employee support.

“At ALPHA, our approach to remote work is deeply influenced by our team's preferences, underscoring our dedication to their well-being and work-life balance. This commitment is twofold: not only do we strive to enhance the overall satisfaction of our employees by offering them more flexibility, but we also aim to meet our environmental responsibilities by reducing our carbon footprint, truly embodying our belief in sustainability as a core aspect of our work culture” (HR manager).

“Right after COVID-19 ended, everyone thought things would stay like they were during the pandemic. But suddenly, we all ended up back in the office, which really threw people off and stressed them out. Employees were asking why, after nailing it from home, we had to go back to a full 40-hour week at the office. This led to some lively chats among the staff, not really complaints, but more sharing thoughts, which got back to our HR manager. With his willingness to chat things through, we started thinking about finding a better mix between working in the office and from home” (ALPHA Marketing Manager).

In response to the pandemic, BETA initiated a transition to remote work within a single unit, reflecting an adaptive strategy to external challenges and operational continuity. This shift subsequently aligned with BETA's unit strategic objectives—enhancing competitiveness, fostering innovation, ensuring sustainability, and attracting talent. Under leadership guidance, the adoption of remote work served as both a reactive measure to immediate needs and a strategic change to achieve long-term business goals, illustrating a comprehensive approach to leveraging remote work for organizational advancement.

"In navigating through the pandemic, we swiftly transitioned to remote work, not merely as an immediate response but as a strategic alignment with our long-term goals of innovation, competitiveness, and talent attraction, thereby ensuring our organisation's resilience and future growth" (BETA web developer manager).

In promoting remote work, ALPHA shows a dual focus on employee welfare and environmental sustainability that drives towards flexible work arrangements that stem from an intrinsic motivation to benefit both employees and the planet. ALPHA seeks to enhance its work environment not just to meet external expectations or pressures but because it aligns with the company's core values and long-term vision. Conversely, BETA's approach, while also acknowledging the importance of meeting employee needs, is primarily strategic and externally driven. BETA views the adoption of remote work as a means to achieve specific business objectives. This includes enhancing competitiveness in the market and positioning the company as an attractive option for top talent. The focus is on leveraging remote work as a strategic tool for business growth and innovation. The shift towards remote work in BETA's case was significantly catalysed by external factors, notably the COVID-19 pandemic. This suggests that the move was more reactive, aimed at maintaining operational continuity and adapting to global changes, rather than stemming from an established corporate philosophy. Leadership in BETA is focused on fostering remote work with the intent of achieving these strategic goals. The approach is less about individual employee preferences or environmental considerations and more about aligning work practices with broader business strategies.

Hybrid work configuration

In the formulation of their hybrid work policies, ALPHA adopted a top-down approach, where strategic determinations regarding the balance between on-site and remote work were centrally made and subsequently adapted to suit the specificities of various roles. This methodology allows for a nuanced application of policy, providing flexibility within a pre-defined structural paradigm. Conversely, BETA's policy genesis still informal was fundamentally participatory, drawing extensively on inputs from employees at all levels to shape its guidelines. This democratic process resulted in a spectrum of work arrangements, ranging from entirely on-site to completely remote, with exclusions based primarily on the functional nature of roles. This comparative analysis underscores the divergent procedural orientations of ALPHA and BETA towards accommodating individual needs within their hybrid work models.

"We've established a Hybrid Work policy that was rolled out in July 2022. This policy, which we developed through a top-down approach, allows for a balance of 60% office presence and 40% remote work, tailored flexibly around individual roles and the nature of their work" (ALPHA HR manager).

"Regarding the new office spaces, there are long-term plans for the renovation and expansion of the offices, including the creation of a work environment that meets the needs and desires of employees. This starts with a collaborative design process that actively involves the company's employees" (ALPHA Sustainability e CSR manager).

"Our hybrid work setup, accessible to all our managers, executives, and employees of our unit, was crafted from a bottom-up approach. It provides the flexibility for 'always in-person', a '2 + 3' hybrid model, or even 'full remote' working arrangements, depending on the specific conditions and needs of our team members" (Employee BETA 1).

Implementation

The two cases exhibit distinct approaches to implementing hybrid work, differentiated by their strategies across behavioural, technological, and spatial components. ALPHA focuses on leadership development, autonomy, and the adoption of innovative work routines, supported by a robust technological infrastructure aimed at enhancing communication and collaboration, both in physical and virtual workspaces. This approach is underpinned by a leadership-driven model that seeks to inspire and guide employees towards embracing hybrid work principles. On the other hand, BETA's strategy is characterised by its employee-driven initiative, highlighting a bottom-up approach to organisational change. BETA places a strong emphasis on equipping employees with the necessary technologies and providing focused training to facilitate efficient remote work. The company also supports a virtual workspace environment, aligning with its flexible work model and adaptive company culture that values continuous innovation and improvement based on employee feedback. In essence, while ALPHA's approach is more leadership and development-oriented, focusing on creating a conducive environment for autonomy and accountability, BETA prioritises technological empowerment and spatial flexibility, driven by employee needs and feedback. Both strategies reflect each company's unique perspective on enhancing work efficiency and employee satisfaction within the framework of hybrid work.

"Our transformative journey towards hybrid work involved a comprehensive cultural shift, initiated by a leadership program developed in close partnership with our executive directors. This program was meticulously designed to embed the principles of accountability and flexibility within our work culture, emphasizing the development of leadership skills alongside fostering employee autonomy and trustworthy relationships at all organizational levels. Through a series of educational sessions, we've highlighted the importance of hybrid work, guiding our teams through necessary adjustments and our strategic action plan. The introduction of advanced digital tools and the adoption of new work routines like weekly sprints and Kanban-style task monitoring have significantly empowered our employees, granting them greater control over their roles. Additionally, we've modernized our communication channels with a new intranet and digital signage systems to ensure all employees, irrespective of their location, stay connected and engaged." (ALPHA HR manager).

"We are making strides towards a work culture that values autonomy and empowerment more, based on achieving objectives rather than strictly monitoring working hours. This process takes time and requires changes from both managers and staff, but the progress is clear and we are moving towards a more modern and inclusive work model" (ALPHA Sustainability e CSR manager).

"Our approach to implementing hybrid work was uniquely driven by our employees, a move that our forward-thinking company culture fully supported. By adopting a rotational system for work schedules, we've not only facilitated a predictable and organized work environment but also ensured uninterrupted customer service. This model was strategically chosen to not just streamline our operations but also to provide a framework that could adapt and evolve based on ongoing feedback from our teams, reflecting BETA's dedication to continuous innovation and efficiency improvement. To support this transition, we've equipped our staff with the necessary technological tools, including computers and secure VPN access, and have focused our training programs on enhancing process management and empowering our employees for the digital age" (BETA web developer manager).

"We already had laptops for office work, and for hybrid work, the only requirement was the installation of a VPN to securely access the corporate network and internal management systems. Moreover, having already the basic equipment such as a keyboard and mouse at home, the only requirement was a laptop provided by the company, which is essential, especially for those, like me, who work in graphics and require a high-performance computer" (Employee 2 BETA).

“Over time, we have adopted new tools to improve coordination and project management. We began using Taiga to insert cards related to clients and various tasks, and GitLab for more substantial projects that require intensive use of our internal CMS. This has allowed us to manage tasks and client needs more effectively compared to our previous use of Trello, which was less specialized for our needs. The introduction of these new tools required specific training, which the company provided by leveraging our weekly internal meetings. Taiga, being relatively simple, was explained in a short session, while GitLab, being more complex, required more time to fully understand all its functionalities. In case of doubts or problems, we could always rely on the support of our more experienced colleagues” (Employee 1 BETA).

4. Discussion of the findings

The analysis of the findings of the two polar cases ALPHA and BETA is depicted in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 HERE

The hybrid work configuration is found to be a strategic lever for the organisation and the HR function to achieve performance thanks to significant motivation and employee well-being. Regarding the agency of change role, it is clear a different orientation in terms of work design. In the case of ALPHA the role of the HR function is concerned with spreading a culture of trust to create commitment at the top level but also to highlight the role of individual leaders. The HOM is therefore successfully implemented and accepted within the whole organisation. On the other hand, BETA shows a more technological and operational orientation given the role of the leader of the unit limited to guide the behaviour of colleagues and achieve effective and efficient modes of designing workspaces and schedules. Thanks to a processual analysis of the HOM within two different case studies it is clear how the cultural orientation of the hybrid work design plays a significant role in the success of the whole HOM.

Overall, the results suggest that the impact of hybrid work includes a notable increase in employee engagement and commitment, alongside the attraction of highly skilled professionals, which are critical for organizational growth and innovation. It also significantly improves work-life balance, contributing to higher job satisfaction and employee well-being. Environmentally, hybrid work reduces the need for commuting, leading to a decrease in carbon emissions. Moreover, companies have observed enhanced productivity and ensured operational continuity by providing employees with the necessary tools for efficient remote work, demonstrating the multifaceted benefits of adopting a hybrid work model. ALPHA Company recognises the essential role of transparency and open communication with its employees in ensuring the success of its projects. In terms of difficulties, both companies experienced several challenges: for ALPHA, challenges include limited colleague interaction and relationship building, hurdles in managing asynchronous work and communication, and an increased need for self-discipline. In the case of BETA, the implementation of HOM involved only one unit and it experienced the risk of extending work hours due to heightened focus when working from home, alongside the requirement for greater discipline, and potential obstacles in asynchronous work and communication as well as difficulties in building trustworthy professional relationships.

5. Conclusions and managerial implications

Despite recognizing the virtual work design as an essential element in successfully implementing a HOM, existing research lacks a qualitative, procedural insight into hybrid organizational adoption (Maitland and Thomson 2014; Parker, Morgeson and Johns, 2017; Wang et al., 2021). This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the dimensions of HOM implementation and how it unfolds from an organisational perspective to attain effective outcomes. To deeper understand “*How to get the most out of remote working*” by also responding to a call for more qualitative investigations that can grasp the experience of workers and managers in developing new roles and services after the pandemic period in Italy (Klaser et al., 2023; Wang et al. 2021). The study's main contribution is to provide a processual overview of the HOM implementation with a work design perspective, applying a qualitative approach. Shedding light on the implementation process (an agency of change, hybrid work configuration, drivers and behavioural and technological components), this study enriches the literature with dimensions that have not been considered, thanks to the analysis of the process of initiating configurations (Gratton 2021; Wang et al., 2021)

This research holds practical implications for organisations striving to achieve various outcomes, including efficiency and employee satisfaction, in the face of digitisation's challenges. By shedding light on the successful design and implementation of HOM, our study contributes to the broader discourse on future work modalities, offering valuable insights for leaders and managers looking to stay competitive in a rapidly changing world.

We acknowledged that causal inferences cannot be established from the two case studies, as they do not exclude other possible explanations. Future studies should advance the understanding of the salient dimensions that need to be considered in designing hybrid workplaces enriching the debate on the different configurations that might emerge and their impact on organizational performance.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. Interview protocol

	Themes investigated
Human Resources Director	1. Initiation and Motivation: Investigating the reasons and key figures behind the adoption of hybrid work solutions. 2. Implementation Process: Examining the steps, stakeholders, and strategies involved in rolling out hybrid work arrangements. 3. Configuration and Flexibility: Details of the hybrid model's setup, including employee involvement, work schedules, and the adaptation of workspaces to support hybrid work. 4. Evolution of the Model: Insights into how the hybrid model has evolved over time in response to emerging needs and challenges. 5. Benefits and Outcomes: Assessment of expected versus realized benefits, including productivity, work-life balance, and organizational flexibility. 6. Challenges and Solutions: Identification of obstacles faced during the transition to hybrid work and the approaches taken to overcome them. 7. Evaluation and Adjustment: The role of performance indicators and the revision of internal processes to support hybrid work. 8. Cultural Impact: Exploration of how corporate culture has influenced the adoption and effectiveness of hybrid work models. 9. Work Organisation and Coordination: Considerations on task organization and the need for coordination within the new work model. 10. Future Prospects: Speculations and expectations for the future development of hybrid work models.
Directors and line manager	1. Communication and Coordination Challenges: Identifying key obstacles faced by teams in communicating and coordinating tasks effectively. 2. Strategies for Overcoming Communication Obstacles: Exploring the approaches adopted by leaders and teams to address and mitigate communication barriers. 3. Evolution of strategies Post-COVID-19: Examining how strategies for communication and coordination have changed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. 4. Preference for task location: Assessing tasks that are preferred to be done in-person versus remotely, and understanding the rationale behind these preferences. 5. Team Coordination Tools: Investigating the introduction of new tools or methods for team coordination and the effectiveness of these tools. 6. Challenges in Remote Work: Highlighting the major difficulties encountered in managing remote or hybrid teams. 7. Work-Life Balance: Exploring the ability to disconnect from work effectively in a remote or hybrid setting and understanding the challenges involved. 8. Ideal Work Model: individual preferences for an ideal work model, reflecting on personal experiences and desired work arrangements
Employee	• Experience and Perceived Benefits/Disadvantages of HW: Including productivity, work-life balance, and flexibility. • Preparedness and skill Development for HW: Assessing readiness and the necessity for skill enhancement. • Impact of HW on work meaning: How remote working influences perceptions of work's significance. • Sense of Belonging and Identification with the Organization: The effect of remote work on feelings of belonging and organizational identity.

	• Preferred Work Configuration: Preferences among in-person, remote, or hybrid work arrangements and their justifications. • Leadership adaptation and effectiveness: Adjustments in leadership styles and their effectiveness in the hybrid work model. • Management's flexibility and adaptability: Leadership's response and adaptability to the demands of hybrid working. • Employee well-being Focus: Attention to employee health issues like technostress and burnout within the hybrid model. • Facilitation and challenges of asynchronous communication: Tools, strategies, and obstacles in maintaining effective asynchronous team communication. • Training and onboarding for hybrid work: The provision, effectiveness, and areas for improvement in training and onboarding practices. • Organizational culture of trust and inclusion: Ensuring inclusivity and trust, particularly for remote employees, and initiatives to promote these values. • Performance measurement in Hybrid Work: Approaches to and opinions on the effectiveness and accuracy of performance measurement. • Spatial dimension and workspace redesign: Adaptations to workspace design and management to support hybrid work practices.
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Table 2. Participants involved in the study

Job title	Age	Gender	Time interview in hour
Alpha-HR manager	46 - 55	Male	2
Alpha-Marketing Manager	46 - 55	Female	1.5
Alpha-Accountant supervisor	36 - 45	Female	1
Alpha-Export manager	36 - 45	Male	1.5
Alpha-Customer service	36 - 45	Female	1.5
Alpha-Sustainability e CSR manager	36 - 45	Male	1.5
Beta-Food Regulatory Affairs Manager	36 - 45	Male	1.5
Beta-Web & digital manager	36 - 45	Male	1.5
Beta-Web designer developer	26 - 35	Female	1
Beta-Web designer developer	36 - 45	Male	1.5
			Tot: 14,5 hours

Table 3. Cross-case comparison

Dimensions	ALPHA	BETA
AGENCY of CHANGE	• ALPHA developed a Hybrid Work policy with the HR department and departmental managers, promoting a change guided by the company but avoiding a directive approach. • The agent of change was the HR unit through a collaborative effort that encompassed both listening to employee feedback and leadership action with. • The company's transformation towards hybrid work was not only a response to expressed employee desires for flexibility but also part of a strategic initiative driven by leadership to adapt to modern work practices. • This dual-faceted approach allowed the company to address specific needs and integrate hybrid work into their culture effectively.	• At BETA, the adoption of hybrid work practices stemmed from employee suggestions, which were embraced by the Unit manager, without involving the whole company. • The shift towards a hybrid working unit arrangement was originated from the unit leader's strategic decision to enhance the company's competitive edge, allure skilled professionals, and meet the preferences of the workforce. • This change was propelled by internal leadership, illustrating a proactive rather than reactive transformation, independent of the Covid-19 pandemic's influence.
DRIVER	• ALPHA fosters a work environment that enhances the well-being and satisfaction of its people. These elements have led the company to introduce increasing flexibility for its staff. • Employee preference for remote work, with sustainability as a distinct driving factor as collected by the HR manager.	• The onset of the pandemic and the subsequent need expressed by employees and fostered by the leader of the unit for competitiveness, innovation, and talent attraction.
HYBRID WORK CONFIGURATION	• The policy was developed by adopting a top-down approach. • It was introduced in July 2022, allowing for a 60% in-office presence and 40% remote work without fixed timeframes. • The policy allows: flexible entry and exit windows, with hybrid workdays determined based on role, activities, and projects. • Hybrid work is accessible to all managers, executives, and employees, excluding production and warehouse workers. •	• The hybrid work was configured adopting a bottom-up approach, focusing on addressing unique needs. • Hybrid work is open to all managers of the unit that introduced the hybrid work arrangements, executives, and employees, excluding roles incompatible with remote work, such as customer service and technical functions. • Flexible scheduling with options for "always in-person," "2 + 3" hybrid model, and "full remote" under specific conditions.
IMPLEMENTATION COMPONENTS	• Behavioural component It encompasses the changes in employee conduct and mindset that the leadership program aims to cultivate. This includes: 1. Leadership development: Collaborating with 12 executive directors to foster leadership skills, highlighting the program's emphasis on guiding and inspiring others.	• Behavioural Component The behavioural aspect of BETA's hybrid work initiative is rooted in its employee-driven approach, reflecting the company's adaptive culture and forward-thinking ethos. Key elements include: 1. Employee-Driven Initiative: The move towards hybrid work originated from the employees themselves, showcasing a bottom-

2. Promotion of autonomy and accountability: Educating employees about the importance of hybrid working, necessary changes, and the company's action plan to encourage self-management and responsibility for their actions and tasks.
3. Adoption of new work routines: Encouraging practices like weekly sprints, kanban-style task monitoring, asynchronous work, and co-authoring to enhance efficiency and self-reliance among employees.

- **Technological Component**

The technological component relates to the tools and systems implemented to support the cultural shift towards more flexible and accountable work practices. This involves:

1. Modern Intranet and Digital Signage System: Deploying a contemporary intranet solution and news broadcasting monitors to ensure all employees, irrespective of their location, remain informed, connected, and engaged.
2. Tools for remote work facilitation: Providing new tools that enable employees and teams to adopt new work routines effectively, supporting the seamless transition to remote or hybrid working models.

- **Space component:**

1. Enhanced communication platforms: The implementation of a digital signage system and a modern intranet serves as a spatial modification, utilizing both physical (monitors in facilities) and virtual spaces (intranet platforms) to keep employees connected and engaged with the company's culture and updates.

up approach to organizational change. This participatory model underscores BETA's openness to employee feedback and its readiness to adapt based on the workforce's needs.

2. Rotational System for Work Schedules: By implementing a rotational system, BETA ensured predictability and organization in work schedules. This approach not only facilitated smooth customer service operations but also catered to the needs and preferences of its employees, balancing work-life integration.
3. Continuous innovation and improvement: The hybrid work model at BETA is designed with the flexibility to evolve, indicating a commitment to continuous innovation. This behavioural shift towards embracing change and seeking constant improvement is reflective of an organizational culture that values adaptability and learning.

- **Technological Component**

The technological facet of BETA's hybrid work strategy is centered around providing the necessary tools and training to support remote work effectively. This includes:

1. Provision of Equipment and Secure Access: BETA equipped its employees with computers, VPNs for secure data access, and specialized tools for tasks like software development. This provision of technology is crucial for enabling efficient remote work, ensuring employees have access to the resources they need.
2. Training Programs: Focused training programs on effective process management and the use of technology for remote work were provided. These initiatives are aimed at empowering employees, enhancing their ability to manage work processes efficiently, and making the most of the technological tools at their disposal.

- **Space component:**

1. Virtual workspace environment: The implementation of VPNs and specialized software tools effectively creates a virtual office space, allowing employees to work securely and efficiently from various locations. This virtual space supports the rotational work schedule and the overall flexibility of the hybrid work model.

Figure 1. HOM's configurations of the two polar cases.

