

TITLE PAGE

Title: Determining the factors of interpersonal trust in hybrid work arrangement: An employee-manager perspective

List of authors/contributors & affiliations: Marilyn Mathew, Dr. Lila Skountridaki, Dr. Kristina Potočník

Contact address and email:

Contact address:

Business School, The University of Edinburgh
29 Buccleuch Pl, Edinburgh EH8 9JS

Email:

Marilyn Mathew: m.mathew-1@sms.ed.ac.uk

Dr. Lila Skountridaki: lila.skountridaki@ed.ac.uk

Dr. Kristina Potočník: kristina.potocnik@ed.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Title & Summary:

Determining the factors of interpersonal trust in hybrid work arrangement: An employee-manager perspective

Our qualitative study focuses on identifying the key factors of interpersonal trust for employees and managers working in hybrid work environment. Given that trust develops between two or more parties, we conducted 76 semi-structured interviews with both employees and managers working in the United Kingdom across the public, private, and third sectors. Our findings revealed that for employees, the key factors were effective communication, managerial support, managerial capability, manager's work ethics and perceived reciprocation of trust. For managers, the key factors included effective communication, employee's work ethics, employee's performance, employee's capabilities and shared values and vision. Additionally, our study found that cognition-based trust dimensions were more prominent in a hybrid work setup for both employees and managers, indicating that individuals tend to look for evidence of trustworthiness, rather than relying on building interpersonal trust through emotional bonds.

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INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

The early months of 2020 saw the outbreak of COVID-19 being declared a pandemic (Kuntz, 2021), which prompted indefinite self-isolation, resulting in profound implications on the workforce (Kaushik and Guleria, 2020; Stalmachova, Chinoracky and Strenitzerova, 2021). This resulted in countries implementing severe restrictions and suspending many business activities, which prompted businesses to redefine their operations to ensure the creation of a safe and productive workplace (Stalmachova et al., 2021). This caused modification of daily operations and working from home (WFH) became the new norm (Kaushik and Guleria, 2020; Stalmachova et al., 2021). As the workforce has been returning to normalcy, the significance of various styles of “flexible working”, which is a type of working arrangement that provides flexibility on “how long, where, when and at what times the employees work” (Ayling and McCartney, 2021, para. 6), has been widely discussed. Some of these flexible working styles are given in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Definitions of different types of flexible work

TERMS	DEFINITIONS
Hybrid Working	Workers spend some of their time working remotely (usually, but not necessarily, from home) and some at the employer's workspace (CIPD, 2021, p. 3).
Remote Working	This involves "working from anywhere other than the office" (Glossary, 2022; Workplace, 2020, para. 5). Fully remote employees can work from anywhere in the world and are not required to visit the office. Whereas partly remote employees might be required to visit the office, at least a few times in a month (Workplace, 2020).
Teleworking	This involves employees "working all or part of their working week at a location remote from the employer's workplace" (Ayling and McCartney, 2021). It could be "any offsite location other than the official workplace; working from home, another branch office, café, bookstore, or even a co-working space" (Wrike, 2022, para. 6).
Working from home	This is a type of remote work that involves an employee working remotely, "but only from their homes" (Workplace, 2020, para. 13).

A survey by Barrero, Bloom, and Davis (2021) found that post-pandemic, 20 percent of full workdays were expected to be remote, up from 5 percent pre-pandemic. This shift was attributed to five factors namely, exceeding WFH expectations, new investments in remote work resources, reduced stigma, concerns about crowds and contagion, and technological advancements (Barrero et al., 2021). A study by Smite et al. (2022) found that while individuals benefited from better work organization, increased flexibility, and improved focus, they also faced challenges related to remote teamwork, collaboration, distractions, emotional issues, and inadequate home-office setups. Therefore, working fully remotely from home might have initially posed challenges and was not suitable for everyone (Smite et al., 2022). A surge in technological advancements and experimentation with methods to enhance remote teamwork and home-based work has been observed to address such challenges (Smite et al., 2023). These developments suggest a shift from traditional office-based work, with a growing demand for flexibility influencing corporate policies and employment decisions. Furthermore, the increase in demand for flexibility from job applicants during interviews suggests a need for novel corporate policies regarding remote work, with flexibility potentially becoming a decisive factor in employment decisions.

When organizations brought their remote workforce back post-lockdown, many employees

wanted to continue remote work part-time (Aratani, 2022; Baker, 2021). In the U.S., Microsoft led the way in bringing employees back to the office, with Google, Apple, and Twitter following suit (Aratani, 2022). However, the escalating demand for flexibility among employees led to organizations considering the integration of hybrid work arrangements. This initiative spurred the development and adoption of a diverse range of hybrid work styles (Aratani, 2022), which is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Definitions of different types of hybrid work

TERMS	DEFINITIONS
At-Will/Remote-First Model	Allows employees to prioritize their location of work (Hibob, 2022; Todd, 2021).
Office-First Model	Requires the employees to be more present in the office (Todd, 2021).
Split-week Model	Operates by "assigning days specifically for on-site work and remote work" (Hibob, 2022; Todd, 2021).
Shift-work Model	Requires "employees to be working in shifts; alternating between WFH and working morning or evening shifts on site" (Hibob, 2022).
Designated Teams Hybrid Work Model	Allows "assigning teams to hybrid working, depending on whether they should work at the office or home" (Todd, 2021, para. 43).

However, the success of a hybrid working model is shown to be dependent on how effectively the employees can establish and provide evidence of their trustworthiness, especially while working in a context of lower visibility (Mortensen and Haas, 2021). Additionally, the fear of lower performance of employees was determined to be speculative as remote working was observed to have higher levels of engagement, longer working hours, and an increase in learnings as compared to office workers (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021; Vargas et al., 2020). From the manager's perspective, online interactions were deemed to be incapable of replacing in-person interactions and were supposed to be prone to more misunderstandings (Hirsch, 2021). Managers also believed that hybrid working reduced control and co-ordination. Hence, this concern, along with the absence of trust enhancement mechanisms, is considered to lead to further distrust towards employees (Pournaras and Lazakidou, 2008; Sewell and Taskin, 2015; Edmondson and Mortensen, 2021; Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021). Hence, as organizations explore different hybrid work arrangements, understanding their impact on the dynamics of trust has become a crucial factor in determining its success, especially in post-pandemic workplaces (Pournaras and Lazakidou, 2008; Waller, 2022).

Several disciplines have explored and studied trust (Lyon, Mollering and Saunders, 2015). Hence, to determine the context of this study, we need to recognize that trust can be distinguished based on "trust at a level and trust in a referent" (Fulmer and Gelfand, 2012). Organizations have various levels of functional relationships (Chan, 1998; Klein, Dansereau, and Hall, 1994). Based on this, at its most fundamental level i.e., the individual level, trust signifies an individual's degree of trust. However, trust in a 'referent' pertains to the object of trust, known as the trustee, with "interpersonal referent" being directed towards specific individuals (Fulmer and Gelfand, 2012). Therefore, considering the context of hybrid working, which involves employers granting employees the choice to work from home, the office, or a combination of both (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021), the definitions of initial and interpersonal trust become important for this setting. Initial trust focuses on the encounter when both the trustor (i.e., the trusting party) and trustee (i.e., the party to be trusted) meet or interact for the first time; thereby excluding any prior exchanges with one another (McKnight, Cummings and Chervany, 1998). Whereas, interpersonal trust becomes crucial as the trustor and trustee subsequently move on from the initial trust (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995). Hence, in the present study, as the majority of the workforce would be

returning to their current organisations in the post-pandemic working conditions, it is expected that most of them already have initial trust built in place. Therefore, it is expected that the interpersonal trust would be more impacted by the hybrid work context than the initial trust. Additionally, despite its widespread adoption, hybrid work practices are largely new to most organisations, with interpersonal trust potentially playing a central role in the successful implementation of hybrid work arrangements.

Against this backdrop, we asked the following research question: *What factors influence the development of interpersonal trust in hybrid working conditions?*

As interpersonal trust inherently involves a relationship between at least two parties, we focus on understanding the development of interpersonal trust in hybrid working conditions by determining its relevant factors from both employees' and managers' perspectives (Mayer et al., 1995).

METHODOLOGY

An abductive approach was adopted for this study due to the limited research available on interpersonal trust in hybrid working arrangements. This helped in prioritizing exploration and obtaining insights within unique contexts; with the primary emphasis being on extracting meaning from participants' opinions and experiences (Almalki, 2016). The literature review highlighted the vast research that had explored and determined the factors of interpersonal trust in both in-person and virtual work environments, separately. However, because of the scarcity of research on interpersonal trust in hybrid work settings, the existing research on in-person and virtual work environments became the foundation for the interview guide that was designed for this study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both employees and managers who were working in a hybrid work set-up. To enhance the study's transferability and capture diverse organizational contexts, participants were invited from public, private, and third sectors, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of trust dynamics across different workplace settings. All participants had been working full-time and for at least 7 months with their current employee or manager – a minimum time duration that has been determined for the development of trust between two individuals (Ross, 2017). A semi-structured way of conducting interviews was followed, which helped in ensuring that the participants were able to reflect on their experiences in hybrid working conditions, without being constrained by the questions we had pre-prepared. Interviews typically lasted around 60-90 minutes. Over 12 months, 76 individuals were interviewed. We should note that five participants contributed to this study by being interviewed as both a manager and as an employee.

The study commenced with the interviewing of individuals from a third-sector organization, which has been pseudonymized as Organization A. We also managed to interview three employees from a public-sector organization, which has been pseudonymized as Organization B. However, upon facing challenges in securing participants from other sectors, we opted to utilize the Prolific academic platform (Litman et al., 2021) for data collection. To ensure the reliability of the interviews, we initially interviewed three employees and three managers from the third-sector via this platform. As these interviews resulted in data saturation for the third-sector, it confirmed the suitability of using the Prolific platform to recruit participants from both the public and private sectors. Interviews were conducted online via Teams and were stopped only upon reaching data saturation in each sector. All interviews were transcribed and then analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) as it is known to provide high flexibility in approach, which helps in providing a “rich, detailed and complex account of

data” (Nowell et al., 2017). The steps are outlined in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Detailed explanation of the use of reflexive thematic analysis

STEPS	EXPLANATION
1. Familiarization and reflexivity	Before analyzing transcripts, the primary researcher reflected and made an account of their emotions and made a note of the factors which were believed to have been repeated throughout the interview and their perception of the participant’s emotions. To ensure rigor and data familiarization, transcripts were read repeatedly. Once familiarized with the transcripts, the next session of reading the transcripts involved understanding the patterns and extracting meaning from the data. Guiding principles for interpretation and reporting strategies were discussed with the supervisors.
2. Coding	After actively immersing in the data, the researcher began generating initial codes to effectively organize the information. During the code-generation phase, the primary researcher revisited the research question and focused on gaining the relevant insights from the responses. All the interview transcripts were reviewed collectively as sectors and also alternately for both employees and managers to ensure thoroughness and rigor.
3. Generating initial themes	Themes were actively constructed from codes. The primary researcher went back and forth between the codes and the existing literature to generate relevant themes. Excel was used for this process.
4. Reviewing and developing themes	The primary researcher continued reviewing and refining the initial themes considering existing literature and theoretical frameworks. Through iterative discussions and constant comparison with established knowledge, the initial themes were refined and developed.
5. Refining, defining, and naming themes	Themes were refined, defined, and named to encapsulate their essence. Clear boundaries were established by iteratively moving between the data and identified themes to construct a coherent and internally consistent narrative.
6. Producing the findings	The final themes were used to provide insights into factors influencing interpersonal trust in hybrid work arrangements from both employee and manager perspectives.

The distribution of participants across different categories is shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4: Overview of participants

SECTOR	EMPLOYEES	MANAGERS	TOTAL
Private	Prolific – 16	Prolific – 8	24
Public	Prolific – 13	Prolific – 6	22
	Organization B – 3		
Third	Organization A – 16	Organization A – 8	30

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The demographic details of both managers and employees who participated in this study are shown in Tables 4 and 5. These figures show that there were a wide range of participants from different age groups, none of which are highly skewed, making this sample balanced with regards to age. However, in terms of gender, more women participated in this study, especially, in the sample of employees.

TABLE 5: Age of managers for all three sectors

DEMOGRAPHIC SPLIT – AGE OF MANAGERS WHO PARTICIPATED				
PUBLIC SECTOR	MALE	FEMALE	NON-BINARY	TOTAL COUNT
30-34	0%	0%	0%	0%
35-39	50%	25%	0%	33%
40-44	0%	25%	0%	17%
45-49	0%	0%	0%	0%
50-54	0%	25%	0%	17%
55-59	50%	25%	0%	33%
60-64	0%	0%	0%	0%
65-69	0%	0%	0%	0%
TOTAL COUNT	33%	67%	0%	100%
PRIVATE SECTOR	MALE	FEMALE	NON-BINARY	TOTAL COUNT
30-34	0%	25%	0%	13%
35-39	0%	0%	0%	0%
40-44	0%	50%	0%	25%
45-49	50%	0%	0%	25%
50-54	25%	0%	0%	13%
55-59	0%	0%	0%	0%
60-64	0%	25%	0%	13%
65-69	25%	0%	0%	13%
TOTAL COUNT	50%	50%	0%	100%
THIRD SECTOR	MALE	FEMALE	NON-BINARY	TOTAL COUNT
30-34	0%	0%	0%	0%
35-39	25%	0%	0%	9%
40-44	25%	14%	0%	18%
45-49	25%	29%	0%	27%
50-54	0%	29%	0%	18%
55-59	25%	14%	0%	18%
60-64	0%	14%	0%	9%
65-69	0%	0%	0%	0%
TOTAL COUNT	36%	64%	0%	100%

TABLE 6: Age of employees for all three sectors

DEMOGRAPHIC SPLIT – AGE OF EMPLOYEES WHO PARTICIPATED				
PUBLIC SECTOR	MALE	FEMALE	NON-BINARY	TOTAL COUNT
25-29	0%	0%	0%	0%
30-34	14%	0%	0%	6%
35-39	29%	13%	0%	19%
40-44	14%	25%	0%	19%
45-49	14%	25%	100%	25%
50-54	29%	13%	0%	19%
55-59	0%	25%	0%	13%
60-64	0%	0%	0%	0%
65-69	0%	0%	0%	0%
TOTAL COUNT	44%	50%	6%	100%
PRIVATE SECTOR	MALE	FEMALE	NON-BINARY	TOTAL COUNT
25-29	0%	8%	0%	6%
30-34	0%	15%	0%	12%
35-39	0%	15%	0%	12%
40-44	0%	15%	0%	12%
45-49	50%	15%	0%	24%
50-54	0%	0%	0%	0%
55-59	0%	15%	0%	12%
60-64	25%	15%	0%	18%
65-69	25%	0%	0%	6%
TOTAL COUNT	24%	76%	0%	100%
THIRD SECTOR	MALE	FEMALE	NON-BINARY	TOTAL COUNT
25-29	0%	18%	0%	16%
30-34	0%	6%	0%	5%
35-39	0%	12%	0%	11%
40-44	50%	12%	0%	16%
45-49	0%	24%	0%	21%
50-54	50%	18%	0%	21%
55-59	0%	6%	0%	5%
60-64	0%	6%	0%	5%
65-69	0%	0%	0%	0%
TOTAL COUNT	11%	89%	0%	100%

TABLE 7: Gender split for employees and managers for all three sectors

DEMOGRAPHIC SPLIT – GENDER OF EMPLOYEES WHO PARTICIPATED				
SECTORS	MALE	FEMALE	NON-BINARY	TOTAL COUNT
PUBLIC	44%	50%	6%	16

PRIVATE	25%	75%	0%	16
THIRD	11%	89%	0%	19
TOTAL	25%	73%	2%	100%
DEMOGRAPHIC SPLIT – GENDER OF MANAGERS WHO PARTICIPATED				
SECTORS	MALE	FEMALE	NON-BINARY	TOTAL COUNT
PUBLIC	33%	67%	0%	6
PRIVATE	50%	50%	0%	8
THIRD	36%	64%	0%	11
TOTAL	40%	60%	0%	100%

The main findings of the study refer to determining the factors that led to the development of interpersonal trust from an employee and a manager’s perspective, by combining the findings from all three sectors. Table 6 shows the key factors for both employees and managers. To determine the key factors, the most repeated themes were determined across employees’ and managers’ data, respectively. Additionally, it was also verified that these key themes were consistently found across all three sectors and were among the key factors when considered on a sectoral level. For the aggregate dimensions, affect-based trust and cognition-based trust as defined by McAllister (1995) are used. Cognition-based trust focuses on considering evidence of trustworthiness whereas affect-based trust is driven by emotional bonds between individuals (McAllister, 1995).

TABLE 8: Key factors of interpersonal trust for Employees & Managers

KEY FACTORS OF INTERPERSONAL TRUST FOR MANAGERS				
FACTORS OF INTERPERSONAL TRUST	PRIVATE SECTOR	PUBLIC SECTOR	THIRD SECTOR	AGGREGATE DIMENSIONS
Effective communication	✓	✓	✓	Affect-based trust
Employee’s work ethics	✓	✓	✓	Cognition-based trust
Employee’s performance	✓	✓	✓	Cognition-based trust
Employee’s capability	✓	✓	✓	Cognition-based trust
Shared values & vision	✓	✓	✓	Affect-based trust
KEY FACTORS OF INTERPERSONAL TRUST FOR EMPLOYEES				
FACTORS OF INTERPERSONAL TRUST	PRIVATE SECTOR	PUBLIC SECTOR	THIRD SECTOR	AGGREGATE DIMENSIONS
Effective communication	✓	✓	✓	Affect-based trust
Manager’s capability	✓	✓	✓	Cognition-based trust
Managerial support	✓	✓	✓	Affect-based trust
Manager’s work ethics	✓	✓	✓	Cognition-based trust
Perceived reciprocation of trust	✓	✓	✓	Cognition-based trust

Table 8 highlights that most of the top factors relate to cognition-based trust for both employees and managers. This could suggest that both employees and managers who were working in a hybrid work set-up consider evidence of trustee’s trustworthiness rather than solely relying on affect-based trust (McAllister, 1995). Another peculiar finding is that effective communication is the most important key factor which is common for both employees and managers. Hence, it

becomes important for the stakeholders to focus on effective communication while building or sharing strong evidence or practices, which would then lead to the development of stronger interpersonal trust between the employee and the manager.

However, considering the themes from a sectoral perspective, our study also highlights a few other factors as key considerations for specific sectors (see Table 9). Moreover, upon considering the overall factors for all the sectors, perceived reciprocation of trust and the manager's disposition to trust comes across as relevant factors for the development of managers' interpersonal trust towards their employees working in hybrid working conditions. Therefore, further research could help determine the relevance and importance of these factors in different contexts.

TABLE 9: Other relevant factors upon considering the key factors within each sector

OTHER RELEVANT FACTORS OF INTERPERSONAL TRUST FOR MANAGERS			
FACTORS OF INTERPERSONAL TRUST	PRIVATE SECTOR	PUBLIC SECTOR	THIRD SECTOR
Employee's Benevolence	✓		
Duration of engagement with employee		✓	
Employee exercising autonomy			✓
Relationship nurturing			✓
RELEVANT FACTORS OF INTERPERSONAL TRUST FOR EMPLOYEES			
FACTORS OF INTERPERSONAL TRUST	PRIVATE SECTOR	PUBLIC SECTOR	THIRD SECTOR
Work autonomy			✓
Manager's benevolence	✓	✓	
Manager's trustworthiness	✓		
Shared values & vision			✓

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study highlights the key factors from both managers' and employees' perspectives that play a crucial role in the development of interpersonal trust in a hybrid work setting. The above-mentioned findings might help in extending the current theory on interpersonal trust by adding evidence on how this trust is developed in the context of hybrid working, which has been under-theorised to date. It also enhances our understanding of how these factors can be used to build and strengthen interpersonal trust in the context of hybrid working conditions for individuals working in different sectors.

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