
THE HYBRID WORK PARADOX: WHY WE ARE MEASURING THE WRONG OUTCOMES

Ogidiga Lawson Okpogberi.

Department of Business Administration and Management,
International Institute of Tourism and Hospitality.

Yenegoa Bayelsa State

ORCID:0009-0007-1992-6611

+23408130278314

Ozogu Erepmawei.

Department of Business Administration and Management,
International Institute of Tourism and Hospitality.

Yenegoa Bayelsa State

ORCID:0009-0008-3496-1764

+23408133678015

Abstract

Hybrid work has evolved from an emergency response to a structural feature of contemporary organizations. While research consistently demonstrates benefits such as enhanced autonomy, improved work–life integration, and stable or increased productivity, persistent organizational tensions remain. This paper argues that the paradox surrounding hybrid work does not stem from the model itself but from the outcomes organizations choose to measure. Most firms continue to evaluate performance using traditional presence-based and short-term productivity metrics that inadequately capture collaboration quality, innovation capacity, and equity implications in hybrid contexts. Drawing from organizational behavior, performance management, and remote work scholarship, this paper contends that hybrid work requires a redefinition of performance outcomes. Reframing evaluation criteria toward value creation, trust, and long-term organizational capability is essential for resolving the hybrid work paradox.

Keywords: Hybrid, Paradox, Management, Productivity, Integration, Measurement, Evaluation.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of hybrid work arrangements following the COVID 19 pandemic has fundamentally reshaped how organizations conceptualize space, time, coordination, and productivity. What began as an emergency response to a global health crisis has evolved into a

structural transformation of the modern workplace. Hybrid work refers to an arrangement in which employees divide their professional responsibilities between remote environments and traditional on site settings, often with varying degrees of temporal and spatial flexibility. This model allows organizations to combine digital collaboration with periodic physical interaction, thereby redefining long standing assumptions about where and how productive work occurs. A growing body of empirical research suggests that hybrid and remote work arrangements can sustain, and in some cases enhance, productivity while simultaneously improving employee wellbeing. For example, Bloom et al. (2015) demonstrated through a randomized controlled field experiment that employees working remotely exhibited higher productivity levels, largely due to reduced workplace distractions and increased concentration. Similarly, Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found in their meta analytic review that telecommuting was associated with higher job satisfaction, improved perceived autonomy, and lower turnover intentions. These findings challenge the traditional belief that physical presence in the workplace is a necessary condition for performance effectiveness (Obizue, Chuu-Uzomah & Joel, 2025).

Beyond productivity, hybrid work has also been associated with improved work life integration, broader talent access, and enhanced organizational resilience. Flexible arrangements enable employees to better manage caregiving responsibilities, reduce commuting stress, and allocate time more efficiently. From an organizational standpoint, hybrid structures expand recruitment pools beyond geographic constraints and reduce operational overhead costs. In principle, these advantages position hybrid work as a strategic asset rather than a temporary accommodation. Despite these documented benefits, skepticism persists among organizational leaders. Concerns frequently center on issues of accountability, diminished collaboration, weakened organizational culture, and reduced innovation capacity. Executives often question whether employees working outside the traditional office environment remain fully engaged or whether distributed work erodes spontaneous knowledge exchange and creative synergy. Such concerns have fueled public and scholarly debates about whether hybrid work ultimately undermines organizational effectiveness. This paper advances the argument that many of these concerns are misplaced. The tension surrounding hybrid work does not primarily originate from the structural design of hybrid systems. Rather, it emerges from the performance metrics used to evaluate those systems. When organizations assess hybrid employees using measurement frameworks originally developed for physically centralized environments, distortions arise. These distortions create the illusion that hybrid work is underperforming, when in reality the evaluation criteria are misaligned with contemporary work design. By continuing to rely on legacy metrics rooted in physical presence and observable activity, organizations risk misdiagnosing hybrid work as problematic and implementing corrective measures that undermine its strategic potential.

The Legacy Measurement Problem

Traditional performance management systems were developed within industrial and postindustrial organizational contexts characterized by centralized supervision and visible labor processes. In such environments, managerial oversight depended heavily on direct observation. Time spent at the workplace, responsiveness to immediate supervision, punctuality, and visible effort became convenient proxies for productivity. These indicators were relatively easy to track and appeared intuitively connected to performance outcomes. However, decades of research in organizational psychology and performance management demonstrate that these proxies are imperfect and often misleading indicators of true contribution. DeNisi and Murphy (2017) emphasize that performance appraisal systems frequently conflate observable behavior with value creation, thereby introducing bias and reducing evaluation accuracy. Observable activity does not necessarily correspond to meaningful output, strategic alignment, or innovation capacity. In knowledge intensive environments, where much of the value produced is cognitive and collaborative, visibility becomes an especially weak proxy for effectiveness. Telework scholarship further reinforces this critique. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) showed that autonomy is positively associated with performance when employees are evaluated on outcomes rather than monitored behaviors. Autonomy enhances intrinsic motivation, concentration, and task ownership. When employees are trusted to manage their work processes independently, they often respond with higher engagement and accountability. Bloom et al. (2015) similarly found that remote workers experienced fewer interruptions and greater sustained focus, contributing to measurable productivity gains. Importantly, these gains occurred in the absence of constant physical supervision, challenging assumptions that oversight is synonymous with output.

Despite this growing body of evidence, many organizations continue to rely on physical attendance patterns, email response frequency, digital activity tracking, and other forms of behavioral monitoring as central performance indicators. These measures prioritize presence over impact and activity over value. In hybrid contexts, such metrics disproportionately reward employees who spend more time on site, thereby introducing proximity bias. Employees who are physically visible may be perceived as more committed or productive, even when objective performance levels are equivalent. This misalignment between work structure and measurement framework generates what can be termed the hybrid measurement paradox. Organizations adopt flexible work arrangements designed to enhance autonomy and performance, yet simultaneously maintain rigid evaluation systems incompatible with those arrangements. The result is a contradiction in which hybrid work is judged by standards developed for a fundamentally different organizational model. Instead of adapting performance management systems to reflect distributed and knowledge based work realities, firms attempt to force hybrid systems into traditional evaluative molds. Consequently, any perceived decline in collaboration, innovation, or engagement may not stem from hybrid work itself but from the distortions introduced by outdated measurement practices. When metrics fail to capture relational dynamics, creative processes, and long term capability

development, leaders may incorrectly conclude that hybrid work is underperforming. The real issue is not the flexibility of the work arrangement but the rigidity of the evaluation framework.

Conceptual Framework

This paper advances the proposition that the paradox commonly attributed to hybrid work does not originate from the structural characteristics of hybrid arrangements. Instead, the paradox emerges from the performance measurement systems used to evaluate those arrangements. The central premise of the framework is that hybrid work is structurally neutral in its potential to enhance or constrain effectiveness. What determines its perceived success or failure is the orientation of the performance metrics applied within the organization. The framework integrates insights from telework scholarship, performance management theory, and paradox theory. Telework research demonstrates that autonomy, when paired with clear outcome expectations, is positively associated with job satisfaction, performance, and reduced turnover intentions (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Allen et al., 2015). Performance management theory emphasizes that evaluation systems shape employee behavior, motivation, and organizational culture by signaling what the organization values and rewards (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). Paradox theory provides a broader interpretive lens, suggesting that organizations must navigate persistent tensions rather than attempt to eliminate them (Lewis & Smith, 2014). In hybrid contexts, tensions between autonomy and control, flexibility and accountability, and independence and collaboration coexist and must be managed simultaneously. Within this integrated framework, performance measurement orientation functions as the key mediating variable linking hybrid work structures to organizational effectiveness outcomes. Hybrid work introduces flexibility in both temporal and spatial dimensions. Employees may alternate between remote and on site settings, engage in synchronous and asynchronous communication, and organize their tasks with greater discretion. This flexibility can enhance autonomy, concentration, and intrinsic motivation, which are known predictors of performance and job satisfaction (Bloom et al., 2015). However, the benefits of autonomy materialize only when employees are evaluated on meaningful outcomes rather than monitored behaviors. When organizations rely on presence based metrics such as physical visibility, office attendance frequency, or digital activity tracking, evaluation systems become misaligned with hybrid work design. These metrics prioritize observable behavior over substantive contribution. By contrast, value based metrics emphasize innovation capacity, collaboration quality, strategic alignment, and long term capability development. Such metrics are more congruent with the distributed and knowledge intensive nature of hybrid systems. The framework therefore proposes that hybrid work influences organizational effectiveness indirectly through the type of performance measurement orientation adopted. If evaluation systems emphasize visibility and short term output, hybrid work may appear less effective because employees who are less physically present may be undervalued. If evaluation systems prioritize strategic value creation, collaborative contributions, and equitable recognition, hybrid work is more likely to enhance overall performance, retention, and innovation capacity. In this sense, measurement orientation

determines whether hybrid work is perceived as a liability or a strategic advantage (Obizue, Isong & Dabo, 2025).



Figure 1. *Conceptual framework of the hybrid work measurement paradox*

Proximity Bias and the Illusion of Visibility

One of the most significant distortions introduced by misaligned performance metrics in hybrid systems is proximity bias. Proximity bias refers to the tendency to favor employees who are

physically present over those who work remotely, even when objective performance levels are equivalent. Organizational research has long demonstrated that visibility influences perceptions of commitment, competence, and promotability (Elsbach et al., 2010). Managers often rely on heuristics when evaluating performance and physical presence can unconsciously signal dedication or reliability. In hybrid environments, where some employees spend more time on site than others, visibility becomes unevenly distributed. Employees who are frequently present in the office may benefit from spontaneous interactions, informal conversations, and incidental exposure to leadership. These interactions can translate into greater recognition, more mentoring opportunities, and stronger social capital within the organization. Conversely, employees who work remotely more often may experience reduced informal networking, even if their task performance remains high. Allen et al. (2015) note that telework can enhance autonomy and job satisfaction, but may simultaneously reduce access to informal developmental opportunities. This dynamic creates structural inequities that disproportionately affect caregivers, women, individuals with disabilities, and geographically distant employees who may prefer or require greater flexibility. When promotion and evaluation systems implicitly reward presence, organizations risk entrenching disparities under the guise of performance objectivity. The illusion of visibility lies in the assumption that what is seen is inherently more valuable. Observable activity can create a sense of reassurance for managers accustomed to direct supervision. However, this reassurance may not correspond to actual contribution or strategic impact. By privileging physical presence, organizations inadvertently measure compliance with traditional location norms rather than value creation. The paradox becomes evident when firms publicly endorse flexibility while privately rewarding physical attendance. In doing so, they undermine the very flexibility they claim to support.

Measuring Output Instead of Value

A related limitation in hybrid performance evaluation lies in the conflation of short term output with long term organizational value. Many organizations emphasize quantifiable deliverables such as tasks completed, response times, performance dashboards, and numerical key performance indicators. While these indicators provide measurable benchmarks, they often capture only a narrow dimension of performance. Knowledge based organizations increasingly depend on collaborative problem solving, creativity, and relational coordination. These contributions are more difficult to quantify but are central to sustainable effectiveness. DeNisi and Murphy (2017) argue that performance management systems must evolve to reflect the complex and interdependent nature of modern work. An excessive focus on immediate output may incentivize employees to prioritize visible productivity over deeper collaborative engagement. Innovation research further supports this concern. Amabile and Pratt (2016) highlight that creativity frequently emerges from periods of autonomy, reflection, and asynchronous engagement. Hybrid work arrangements can facilitate such conditions by allowing employees to structure focused work time outside the interruptions of open office environments. However, the benefits of such autonomy

may remain invisible if performance systems emphasize rapid responsiveness or constant availability. When measurement systems prioritize immediate output over strategic contribution, organizations risk undervaluing essential but less tangible outcomes such as knowledge sharing, mentoring, and team cohesion. Hybrid work may then appear less effective simply because its long term advantages are not captured by short term metrics. The problem is not that hybrid employees contribute less, but that their contributions are assessed using indicators that fail to capture collaborative and developmental dimensions of value. Ultimately, measuring output instead of value narrows the definition of effectiveness. In hybrid contexts, where work is distributed and digitally mediated, organizations must expand their evaluative frameworks to include innovation capacity, relational trust, learning development, and equity outcomes. Only then can hybrid work be assessed in a manner consistent with its structural design and strategic potential.

The Autonomy–Collaboration Tension

Hybrid work embodies a central and enduring organizational tension between autonomy and collaboration. Autonomy refers to the degree of discretion employees possess over how, when, and where they perform their work. Collaboration, by contrast, reflects the extent to which individuals coordinate, communicate, and integrate their efforts toward shared organizational objectives. Both elements are essential to organizational effectiveness, yet they operate in dynamic tension. Autonomy enhances concentration, intrinsic motivation, and psychological well being. When employees are granted control over their work environment and scheduling, they often experience reduced stress, improved work life integration, and greater task ownership. These conditions can facilitate deep work, sustained attention, and higher quality output. Research in telework and job design consistently links autonomy with job satisfaction and performance improvement (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Autonomy is particularly valuable in knowledge intensive settings where creativity and problem solving require uninterrupted cognitive engagement. At the same time, collaboration is indispensable for innovation, collective learning, and organizational cohesion. Complex organizational challenges rarely yield to isolated effort. Cross functional integration, shared mental models, and spontaneous information exchange contribute significantly to creative problem solving and strategic agility. Edmondson and Lei (2014) emphasize that psychological safety within collaborative environments enhances learning behaviors and performance outcomes. Thus, collaboration provides the relational infrastructure necessary for sustained organizational success.

Paradox theory offers a useful interpretive lens for understanding this dynamic. According to Lewis and Smith (2014), tensions such as autonomy and collaboration are persistent and interdependent rather than mutually exclusive. Attempts to prioritize one dimension at the expense of the other often generate unintended consequences. Excessive autonomy without coordinated interaction can lead to fragmentation, weakened social ties, and knowledge silos. Conversely, excessive emphasis on collaboration and constant availability may erode focus, increase burnout,

and reduce individual productivity. In practice, many organizations respond to this tension by attempting to eliminate it rather than manage it. Attendance mandates and full return to office policies are frequently justified as necessary for restoring collaboration and cultural cohesion. However, such policies often overlook empirical evidence suggesting that structured hybrid systems can preserve collaborative benefits while maintaining autonomy. Bloom et al. (2023) demonstrate that hybrid models with coordinated in office days can sustain performance levels while improving retention. These findings indicate that collaboration does not require constant physical co presence, but rather intentional design and clear coordination norms. The core challenge, therefore, is not selecting autonomy over collaboration or vice versa. Instead, it is developing performance measurement systems capable of recognizing and rewarding both dimensions simultaneously. When evaluation frameworks privilege constant visibility and rapid responsiveness, they implicitly prioritize collaboration in its most observable form. When evaluation systems emphasize only individual output, they risk undervaluing relational contributions. Effective hybrid management requires metrics that capture focused individual performance as well as collaborative value creation.

Toward a Reframed Measurement Framework

Resolving the hybrid work paradox requires a fundamental shift from activity based evaluation systems toward value oriented measurement frameworks. Traditional metrics often emphasize observable behaviors such as hours logged, responsiveness speed, and digital activity levels. While these indicators offer convenience and apparent objectivity, they frequently fail to capture the deeper drivers of sustainable organizational effectiveness. A reframed measurement framework must align with the structural realities of hybrid work and the strategic demands of knowledge based organizations. Several interrelated principles emerge from the literature.

Outcome Orientation

Evaluation systems should prioritize goal attainment, quality of deliverables, and alignment with strategic objectives rather than mere time expenditure. Clear and measurable outcomes reduce reliance on direct supervision and physical oversight. When expectations are explicitly defined, employees can exercise autonomy while remaining accountable for results. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) demonstrate that telework arrangements are most effective when performance is assessed based on outcomes rather than monitored behaviors. An outcome oriented framework shifts managerial focus from process control to value creation. Importantly, outcome orientation does not imply neglect of collaboration or team contributions. Instead, it encourages clarity regarding individual and collective responsibilities within shared projects. By linking performance indicators to strategic objectives, organizations reinforce alignment while preserving flexibility.

Collaboration Quality Indicators

Hybrid environments require deliberate attention to collaboration quality rather than assuming that physical proximity alone ensures effective teamwork. Organizations should assess dimensions such as knowledge sharing, cross functional integration, communication clarity, and psychological safety. Edmondson and Lei (2014) argue that psychological safety is a critical predictor of learning and performance, often outweighing structural factors such as co-location. Measuring collaboration quality may involve assessing team level outcomes, peer feedback mechanisms, and indicators of collective learning. Such metrics acknowledge that relational dynamics contribute significantly to innovation and resilience. In hybrid systems, where communication channels are digitally mediated, intentional measurement of collaborative effectiveness becomes especially important.

Equity and Inclusion Metrics

Hybrid arrangements can unintentionally exacerbate inequalities if evaluation systems favor visible employees. Therefore, organizations must systematically monitor promotion rates, access to mentoring, performance rating distributions, and developmental opportunities across different work modalities. Fairness perceptions strongly influence engagement, commitment, and retention (Colquitt et al., 2013). Incorporating equity metrics into performance management frameworks ensures that location does not determine opportunity. This involves tracking patterns that may reveal proximity bias and implementing corrective mechanisms when disparities emerge. A transparent and inclusive evaluation system strengthens organizational legitimacy and enhances trust among employees.

Long Term Capability Development

Finally, effective measurement frameworks must extend beyond short term productivity indicators to capture long term organizational capability. Sustainable performance depends on innovation cycles, skill development, institutional learning, and adaptive capacity. Amabile and Pratt (2016) highlight that creativity and innovation are cumulative processes that unfold over time rather than within quarterly reporting cycles. Hybrid work can facilitate deep learning and reflective problem solving by allowing employees structured autonomy. However, these long term benefits remain invisible if measurement systems focus exclusively on immediate outputs. Incorporating indicators related to innovation pipelines, professional development engagement, and resilience capacity ensures that organizations assess performance in a manner consistent with strategic sustainability. Reframing performance measurement in hybrid contexts requires expanding the definition of effectiveness. Rather than equating productivity with observable activity or short term deliverables, organizations must evaluate how work arrangements contribute to innovation, collaboration, equity, and long term adaptability. When metrics reflect these broader dimensions,

the perceived paradox of hybrid work diminishes. What appears contradictory under narrow measurement systems becomes coherent under a value oriented evaluative framework.

Implications for Organizational Policy

The hybrid work paradox has profound implications for organizational policy and managerial practice. If organizations persist in measuring the wrong outcomes, they risk incorrectly attributing performance challenges to hybrid work arrangements rather than recognizing the limitations of their evaluation systems. Misdiagnosing structural flexibility as a source of underperformance may lead to unnecessary policy reversals, such as blanket return to office mandates, which can undermine employee engagement, retention, and innovation capacity. To address this misalignment, leaders must invest in the design and implementation of performance management frameworks that are explicitly aligned with the realities of distributed work. Such frameworks require a shift in focus from visible effort to value creation, from compliance with attendance norms to the achievement of strategic objectives, and from short term deliverables to sustainable organizational outcomes. The objective is not simply to monitor work but to assess contributions that drive long-term success. Operationalizing these frameworks involves several key managerial practices. First, trust based supervision must replace excessive monitoring. Managers should cultivate confidence in employees' ability to self-manage, establishing clear expectations and outcome metrics while providing autonomy in execution. Second, transparent goal setting is critical to ensure alignment between individual and organizational objectives. Explicitly defined deliverables, milestones, and evaluation criteria reduce ambiguity and provide employees with clarity on priorities and performance standards. Third, inclusive leadership practices are essential to safeguard equity in opportunity, recognition, and advancement across hybrid and on site modalities. Leaders must actively monitor mentorship access, developmental opportunities, and promotion pathways to prevent proximity bias from influencing outcomes.

Abandoning the assumption that physical co-presence equates to productivity represents a cultural as well as procedural shift. Organizations must recognize that hybrid work does not inherently reduce output or commitment. Instead, hybrid work challenges traditional notions of supervision and performance visibility. When evaluation systems are reoriented to account for autonomous work, collaboration quality, and strategic contribution, the apparent paradox of hybrid work diminishes. In this context, policy becomes a mechanism not for controlling presence but for enhancing alignment between work design, employee behavior, and organizational objectives. Ultimately, effective organizational policy in hybrid environments requires an integrated approach. Performance management, leadership development, communication practices, and equity monitoring must cohere to support distributed work. By redefining success metrics and aligning managerial behavior with these principles, organizations can fully leverage hybrid work's potential while mitigating the risks of misperceived underperformance.

Conclusion

The ongoing debate over hybrid work frequently centers on whether employees are “as productive” outside traditional office settings. This question, while superficially intuitive, reflects a deeper and more consequential issue: the inadequacy of legacy performance metrics. Traditional evaluation systems, anchored in visibility, observable activity, and short term output, are poorly suited to hybrid and knowledge intensive work environments. Consequently, the perceived paradox of hybrid work arises not from its structural design but from the misalignment between contemporary work realities and outdated measurement frameworks. Evidence from telework, performance management, and innovation research underscores that hybrid work can sustain or enhance productivity, improve employee well-being, and foster long term organizational capability when appropriately supported. The central insight is that the problem is not whether hybrid work functions, but whether the metrics used to evaluate it meaningfully captures the outcomes that truly matter. Metrics that prioritize value creation, collaboration quality, equity, and long term innovation offer a more accurate and actionable understanding of hybrid performance. Reframing performance measurement represents a pathway to resolving the hybrid work paradox. By shifting the focus from visible effort to strategic contribution, from attendance to outcome, and from short term deliverables to sustainable impact, organizations can harness the benefits of hybrid arrangements while minimizing misperceptions of underperformance. This reframing also enables organizations to foster equity, trust, and resilience, thereby positioning hybrid work not as a compromise but as a strategic enabler of organizational effectiveness. The ultimate question for organizational leaders is therefore not whether hybrid work works, but whether their evaluation systems are designed to capture and reward the outcomes that matter most for long term success. Addressing this question requires both conceptual clarity and deliberate managerial action, ensuring that hybrid work contributes to performance, innovation, and employee engagement rather than being hindered by outdated measurement paradigms.

References

- Allen, T. D., Golden, T. D., & Shockley, K. M. (2015). How effective is telecommuting? Assessing the status of our scientific findings. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 16(2), 40–68.
- Amabile, T. M., & Pratt, M. G. (2016). The dynamic componential model of creativity and innovation in organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 36, 157–183.
- Bloom, N., Liang, J., Roberts, J., & Ying, Z. J. (2015). Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 130(1), 165–218.

- Bloom, N., Han, R., & Liang, J. (2023). Hybrid working from home improves retention without damaging performance. *Nature*, 619, 134–140.
- Colquitt, J. A., et al. (2013). Justice at the millennium: A meta-analytic review of 25 years of organizational justice research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 425–445.
- DeNisi, A. S., & Murphy, K. R. (2017). Performance appraisal and performance management: 100 years of progress? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 102(3), 421–433.
- Edmondson, A. C., & Lei, Z. (2014). Psychological safety: The history, renaissance, and future of an interpersonal construct. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1, 23–43.
- Gajendran, R. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2007). The good, the bad, and the unknown about telecommuting: Meta-analysis of psychological mediators and individual consequences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(6), 1524–1541.
- Lewis, M. W., & Smith, W. K. (2014). Paradox as a metatheoretical perspective: Sharpening the focus and widening the scope. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 50(2), 127–149.
- Obizue M N, Chuu-Uzomah F.O & Joel Isaih Jutum (2025). Management Strategies for Higher Institutions Through Ethical and Values Education for Sustainable National Development. *International Journal of Education, Management Sciences and Professional Studies. (Iemps). Vol1 Issue 2. Pp 391-402.* [url:https://journals.iempsglobal.org/index.php/ijemps](https://journals.iempsglobal.org/index.php/ijemps)
- Obizue M N, Isong B E & Dabo S B (2025). Ethics of Higher Education Management in the Face of Digital Divide for Sustainability. *International Journal of Humanities, Economic Development and Contemporary Studies. (Ijhedcs). Vol1 Issue 2. Pp 60-65.* [url:https://journals.iempsglobal.org/index.php/ijhedcs](https://journals.iempsglobal.org/index.php/ijhedcs)