

RESEARCH REPORT

MAY 2022

# BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE IN A HYBRID WORLD



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**REPORT - DEVELOPED AND PRESENTED BY**

MINOTI PARIKH FROM TPL EXPERIENCES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
LANCASTER UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT SCHOOL

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on a detailed research and development initiative that was facilitated by TPL Experiences in partnership with students at the Lancaster University Management school.

The aim of the report is to better understand the impact of Hybrid working on the culture of SME organisations across the North of England. Within organisational culture, we have primarily focused on the impact on-

- Training and development needs
- Productivity
- Health and wellbeing
- Career development opportunities
- Overall employee engagement

## **The research process includes-**

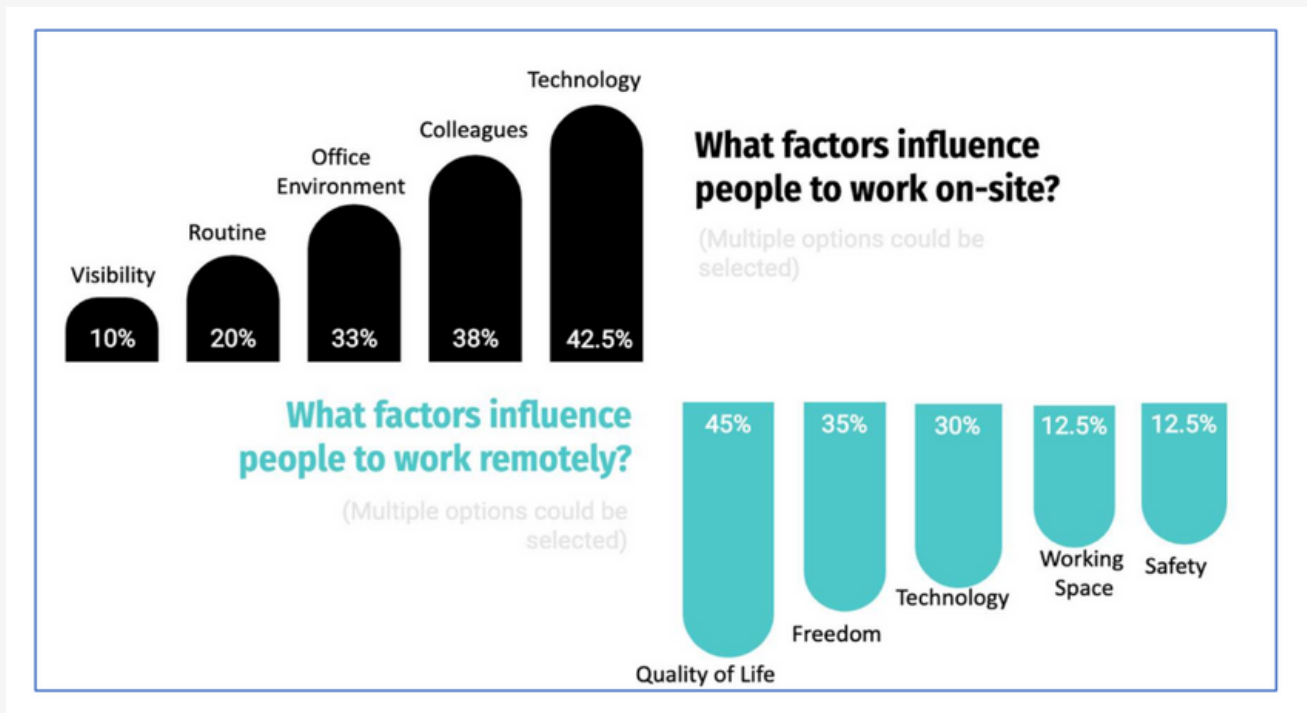
- Collecting survey responses
- One on one interviews with SME leaders
- Case study analysis

This report is based on responses collected from over 80 SME's (employees and leaders of these businesses)

## **Contents of this report-**

1. Key observations on impact of hybrid working on the Productivity, wellbeing, training and engagement of employees.
2. Key recommendations

# KEY OBSERVATIONS- OVERVIEW



While there is no such thing as one size fits all, it is safe to say that the positives of hybrid working definitely out way the drawbacks of hybrid working.

Some interesting highlights from our research shows that-

- 77.5% of employees prefer having an Agile Working Arrangement.
- Easier access to technology and physically working in the same space as colleagues are the top reasons for working in the office space
- 51% of the respondents felt that they could easily adjust to Hybrid Working, since they were adept with technology and enjoyed the flexibility provided by hybrid working.
- However, 49% faced difficulty in the transition as they believe that they could have been more efficient in the office environment and that it was difficult to separate work and life at times.

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# KEY OBSERVATIONS- PRODUCTIVITY

Unsurprisingly, conversations about productivity often included chats about wellbeing, training and career development opportunities, proving that all these factors are integral to being productive at work. Our research also shows that proactively addressing employee wellbeing and engagement can boost productivity and to achieve this, organisations must design adaptive workplaces.



- We observed a positive correlation between employee satisfaction and employee productivity and a negative correlation between employee productivity and employee turnover.
- Organisations that are able to build two way trust with their staff members found it easy to maintain and on many occasions exceed pre-pandemic productivity levels.
- Autonomy in work can result in higher employee participation as it engages people to be much more involved in the decision-making process, making them further invested in their role.
- Investing in training and communication enables teams to adapt to new processes, set goals and measure performance efficiently. 40% respondents felt more confident of their responsibilities due to adequate training provided to them. If organisations adopt a pragmatic approach to ensure effective training then that will assure a higher level of productivity.

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# KEY OBSERVATIONS- WELLBEING

After reaching record highs early in the pandemic, the number of workers who believe their organisation actually cares about their overall wellbeing has completely plunged.

In fact, according to a recent Gallup study, **just 24%** of workers strongly agree that their organisation cares about their wellbeing. Employers need to take these statistics seriously because data shows that employees who feel their organisations truly care about their wellbeing are 69% less likely than other workers to search for a new job, 71% less likely to report experiencing burnout and 5x more likely to advocate for their organisation. The impact of positive wellbeing is evident through our research too.

Some key observations from those who believe that their organisation cares for them-

- 78% could maintain the work-life balance while working in a hybrid set up and 51.2% thought the balance is perfectly maintained.
- Most of the respondents felt they could handle the workload easily. And 51.2% respondents considered they would have a better quality of life and a better work-life balance when working remotely.
- While the shift of working arrangements has brought significant changes to people's lives, most of them considered the changes to be positive for those who had the right wellbeing support. About 53% of the participants experienced positive lifestyle changes in the hybrid arrangement.

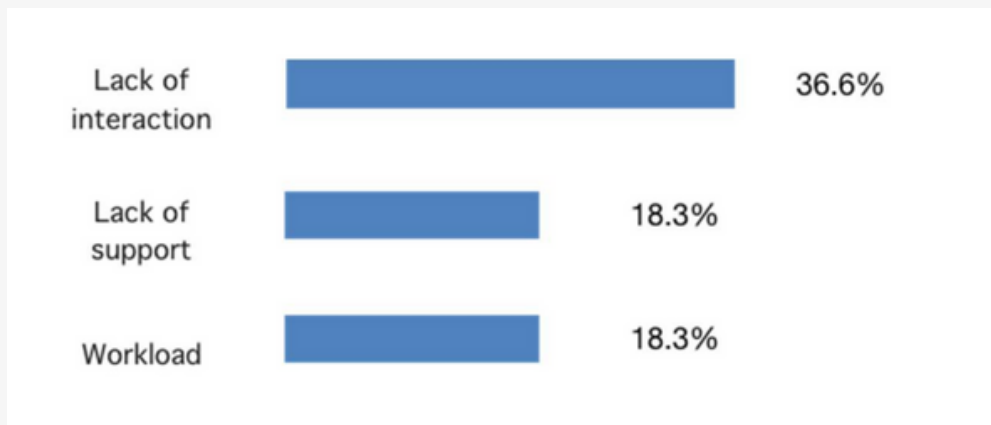
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## KEY OBSERVATIONS- WELLBEING

However, when organisations are unable to provide the right nurturing culture then we can see a negative impact on team's overall health.

We have seen higher cases of burnout and stress being reported over the past two years as well. 46.3% of SME Employees experienced middle to high level stress during hybrid working.

Through the study, we found that the three main causes of negative stress were-



When we dived deeper to understand if there were any measures already in place to support employees wellbeing we observed that-

- 49% of the respondents were unsure or unfamiliar with the well-being strategy of their organisations and were not aware of where they could find more information on it.
- Employees thought it would be helpful if there was better access to self-help material, courses, and webinars (26.8%), support for group sharing (24.4%), one on one counselling sessions with professionals (22%) and open spaces to discuss any challenges (14.6%).

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# KEY OBSERVATIONS- TRAINING

10% of the respondents believe that negative stress is mainly caused by inadequate training while 27.7% believe that they do not receive sufficient training. Additional feedback included that the technology needed for working from home are not up to a great standard and that often the working environment at home is not suitable for work. A majority of office workers found it difficult at first, but now the transition feels easier and more positive.

## **The top training needs of employees were-**

- 31.3% for digital technology
- 27.69% for leadership development training
- 26.15% for mental & physical wellbeing training
- 8% for life skills

## **Further observations include-**

- The respondents suggested that the training could be in the form of virtual training as 50% have a high interest in virtual training, but we still have 32.5% that have little interest in virtual training.
- 25% felt that the performance assessment with themselves was inadequate and 22% were less clear about the organisation's strategy and personal responsibilities in a mixed work context.
- On the flip side, 50% employees indicated that they did not attempt enough to be in regular contact with their managers to discuss their performance and concerns.

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# KEY OBSERVATIONS- ENGAGEMENT

Statistics around employee engagement also show us the importance of building inclusive communication methods to grow your team's culture.



Further observations include-

- 55% employees agreed that they could communicate and work quite well with their colleagues and not being face-to-face was not a major hindrance for them.
- However, maintaining co-worker relationships despite smooth communication was a major source of negative stress for 45% of respondents.
- 50% employees felt that they were not provided with adequate opportunities or any platform to discuss their concerns about excessive workload or conflicting deadlines.
- 35% employees suggested that they would prefer engagement activities to be in-person as they feel that it is much more effective to build relations in the workplace.
- Informal events such as social catchups or virtual competitions are helpful in providing employees an opportunity to unwind and connect.



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# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS- OVERVIEW



The Future of Work should consist of 'Adaptive Workplaces' where employees are provided with flexible choices where they can be the most productive.

SME's should ensure that even if they transition to the traditional or an altogether different working model, employees should continue to be empowered to have freedom of designing flexible working arrangements. A recent survey published by McKinsey states that senior executives from different industries and regions believe that the benefits of hybrid working far outweigh the drawbacks, leading not only to higher productivity as well as customer satisfaction, but also to happier employees and lower overheads.

Based on these results and observations, we have put together a series of practical recommendations that would help support and sustain your team's culture-

1. **Build "Trust in work"** - Employees do not need to stick to their work for a certain period. Instead, empowering them with the freedom to plan their work will help in reducing negative stress of employees at work.

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## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

**2.Co-design-** A sustainable structure is one where every individual working in the organisation feels heard. While going through any structural changes or introducing new ways of working, organisations should always include space for feedback and contributions from everyone working in their team.

**3-Taking action-**Intent on improving culture is not enough especially in today's working context, employees want to see actions and initiatives being delivered. Implementing ideas in a consistent way is key to maintain the culture of the organisation.

**4-Open communication-** Keeping your team informed through your internal communication system on the progress of any events/initiatives you are planning. If there are delays in the implementation then updating your team about this is also important. In some cases, some communication is better than no communication.

**5-Training needs-** Exploring the options of offering personalised training plans to your staff members. A brilliant example of this approach is Schneider Electric, the senior leadership at SE decided not to mandate any centre-based activities as they are less personal and effective. Instead, the managers were asked to observe and arrange individualised training which is a great way of building the internal talent of your organisation.

**6-Accessibility-**Providing access to self-help material, courses, and webinars, communicating the available support to employees for them to utilise it effectively is crucial in building a culture of learning.

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## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

**7-Career development and performance feedback-** Conversations around career development and performance evaluation need to be embedded into the monthly catch up meetings with your team.

Siemens set a commendable example in this space by having the managers schedule in 'growth talks' with their staff. This saw an increased focus on wellbeing and building trust. Career development, performance targets and each employee's unique working preferences are regularly discussed and considered.

**8-Including the family-** Hybrid working poses a great opportunity for us to increase the sense of belonging within employees, inviting family members of your team to join in on Friday lunches, special events is a brilliant way to build a positive mindset.

**9-Measuring impact-** The success of any initiative lies in evaluating its performance. While most organisation's have thorough processes to evaluate their customer's feedback, very few have got rigorous evaluation processes in place to evaluate the success of their employee wellbeing and engagement strategies.

**10-Start small-** This is something that I always recommend to my clients. Employee engagement and wellbeing and setting the right culture can feel overwhelming at times, the best way to find the right balance is by starting small, taking one challenge at a time and finding one solution at a time.

These recommendations are meant to be only a comprehensive list of recommendations. The aim is for this report to create a space for reflections for you and your team.

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# REPORT ANALYSIS TEAM

THE AWESOME PEOPLE BEHIND THIS PROJECT



**MINOTI PARIKH**  
TPL EXPERIENCES



**LANCASTER  
UNIVERSITY  
MANAGEMENT SCHOOL**

Minoti Parikh has over 17 years of international experience in working with organisations to improve the wellbeing and engagement of their teams. She has worked with over 100 organisations across 25 countries. For more informations about her work, feel free to connect with her via [LinkedIn](#)

Minoti is part of the Business Leaders in Residence program at the Lancaster University. As part of this collaboration, Minoti partnered with students at LUMS to run this research project. This project has helped the students to get to grips with the challenges that SME organisations face in the current times.

If you would like to receive a copy of the full report or would like to discuss any of the findings in this report then please feel free to get in touch with us on [minoti@tplexperiences.com](mailto:minoti@tplexperiences.com) or visit [www.tplexperiences.com](http://www.tplexperiences.com)