

### **Hybrid Working Model: A pathway to Success or Failure**

#### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this case study is to find out how Covid-19 has impacted the working environment all across the globe. Remote workers and Hybrid Working Model are some of the concepts that many companies have started to adopt and implement for their employees. Here, the case of a Company has been presented – the Company's management has tried to implement the Hybrid Working Model to see if it will be a success or not. This case study mentions of the challenges they had to face and open the floor for the readers to see the problems management faces in real life and encourages them to put forward their knowledge on how companies can overcome such hurdles.

**Keywords:** Hybrid working model, remote working, management, critical thinking

#### **INTRODUCTION**

It was February of 2020, when Covid-19, a global pandemic, hit Pakistan after disturbing half of the world already. Every industry suffered the consequences. Many businesses were shut down due to bad economic conditions, while others had to downsize big time [1,2]. At the same time, some companies were lucky enough to survive, but had to face multiple hurdles that reduced the profits and overall business's efficiency. However, the problems didn't end with the reduction of Covid-19 spread. The work dynamics were changed completely, some harmful for business, meanwhile, there were some positive aspects as well for the companies who took the right measures at the right time [3,4]. The emergence of the concept of 'remote workers' and 'hybrid working model' during the global pandemic was a blessing in disguise. It has improved productivity for employees as well as the employers [5-7]. However, introducing this hybrid working system isn't easy to implement, as it creates a big communication gap between the employees and management.

The owner of The Company was also struggling to streamline the communication patterns and implementing the hybrid working model in November, 2020 - when companies were allowed to have few employees working from the physical location, while others from their home. Since operating from Pakistan and dealing with International clients, the technological struggle was real, and he couldn't afford to let the outcome be affected by the communication gap that Company had to face with remote workers. There were multiple issues like getting everyone together at one place on the same schedule, internet issues, not proper knowledge to utilize the communication tools, and hardware problems. Indeed, these concerns were a source of trouble for many companies around the world.

#### **COMPANY BACKGROUND**

The Company is a digital marketing agency that started its operation in 2012. The Company

has a headquarter in Ontario, Brampton in Canada, while most of its operations are carried from Lahore, Pakistan. They are one of the leading digital marketing services providers in Pakistan that deals with clients in different countries, including the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), Canada, and Australia.

The company's goal is not only to facilitate its clients, but also the employees, which is why they offer work flexibility. Aside from covid-19 SOP restrictions, companies allow work from home

in case of any emergency to promote healthy relationships between the employees and the employers. However, in the face of new dynamics, many managers and employees had to work hybrid, which though seems ideal for productivity, but had a number of problems in the initial implementation phase.

### **WHAT DOES HYBRID WORKING MODEL STATES**

Hybrid working model is a drastic transition from traditional working conditions. It has several variations, so the companies can implement whatever suits them best.

- **Option A**

Few employees work in-house, while others work remotely. The first option is also known as remote-first, which means companies encourage their employees to work remotely, and only those employees are asked to visit the office whose job requires their physical presence.

- **Option B**

All employees will work in-house for some days of the week, and the rest of the days remotely. This kind of flexibility is also known as office-occasional working. This happens when companies aren't entirely sold on the concept of remote working or don't want their space to go unused. This is also known as hybrid working, where employees work in the office for a few days a week and take work-from-home on the rest of the days.

- **Option C**

Combination of both options A & B. This kind of setting is known as office-first and then remote. This is the situation where team leaders work from the office. In this condition, the working becomes more office-centric, since they would want their rest of the team to be in the office rather than working remotely.

This work model is a blessing in disguise. It allows the workers to complete the tasks whenever they feel most productive. Also, it allows them to have a proper work-life balance - only if it is implemented properly.<sup>1</sup>

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF HYBRID WORKING MODEL GLOBALLY**

Regardless of whether it was a developed country or a developing country, Covid-19 spared no one. The work dynamics have been globally changed, and as Mckinsey & Company stated: hybrid working is now the future.<sup>2</sup> Many companies worldwide have successfully transitioned to this working mode and have seen great results. The biggest example of this model are companies like Microsoft, Allen & Overy, and many others.<sup>3</sup>

## **THE COMPANY BEFORE AND AFTER COVID-19: TRANSITION TO HYBRID WORKING**

Before Covid-19, the Company had only 20 employees working, while they had freelancers to complete the rest of the tasks. However, the Company decided to expand in 2019, and had around

10 more employees on-board, but the pandemic had other plans. The Company converted to total

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<sup>1</sup> <https://envoy.com/blog/what-is-a-hybrid-work-model/>

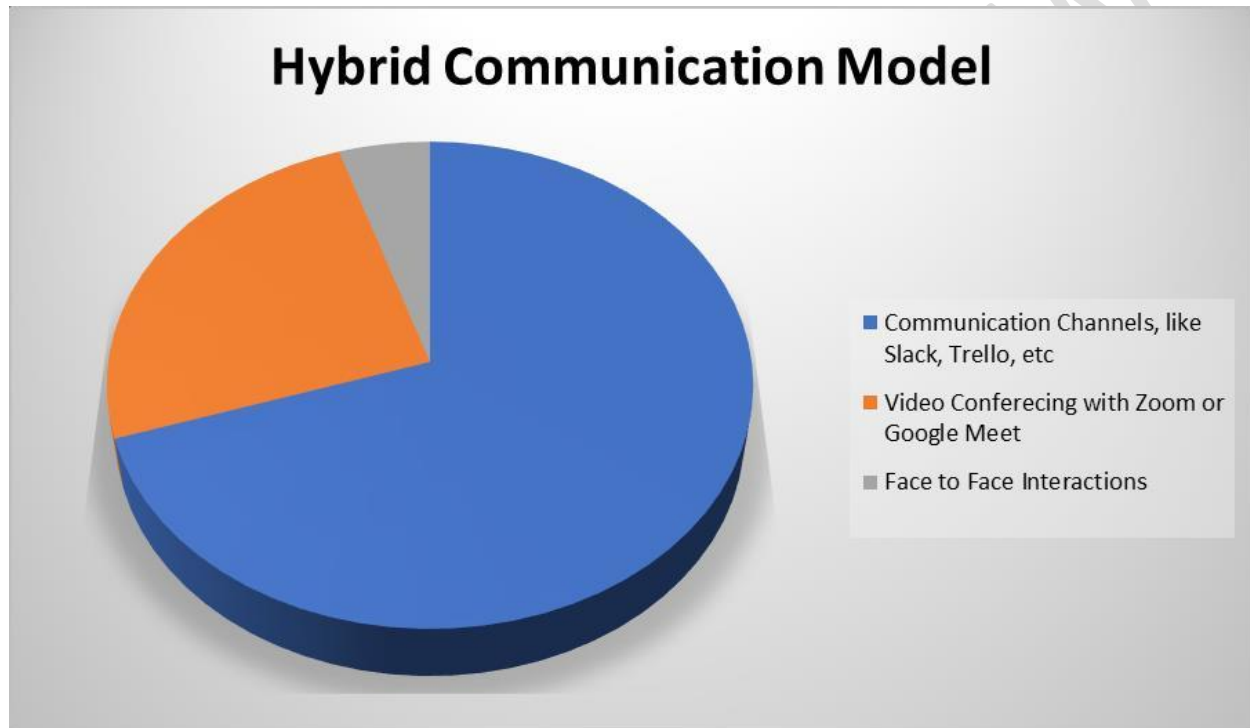
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/what-executives-are-saying-about-the-future-of-hybrid-work>

<sup>3</sup> <https://buildremote.co/hybrid-work/hybrid-work-companies-list/>

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work from home mode in March 2020. Since they were already dependent on freelancers, and few employees, they managed to survive the pandemic.

However, when everything started to open gradually and the team was expanding along with the introduction of hybrid working that was the time when communication barriers started emerging. They had people of different ages working together, some of them were tech-savvy, while others were below average skills when it came to using the technology to full-extent. It was easy for them to communicate face to face rather than using their devices; however, when the employees had to work from home, it wasn't easy to achieve the same level of productivity anymore.



**Fig 1: Hybrid Communication Model**

## COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS IN HYBRID WORKFORCE

When implementing the hybrid working conditions, The Company came across multiple communication barriers, which was making the execution of hybrid working difficult. With remote workers, the dependency on the internet also increased. The speed and quality of communication is directly reliant on how well the internet works, and that's one of the major problems companies have to face. The fluctuating and poor internet signals in Pakistan was the biggest threat for introducing remote working conditions.

The next problem at hand was the lack of knowledge to use different communication channels. The Company has a diverse team, with age groups from 17-40. Due to such age gaps, not everyone was tech-savvy, which created a problem in efficiently utilizing different channels like Zoom, Slack, Skype, and Google Meet. The Company introduced these channels to facilitate the communication between the in-house workers and remote teams, but instead, because of lack of expertise in using these online tools, the purpose wasn't fulfilled and results weren't as what

management expected.

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Teams working on hybrid modes had another critical issue, i.e., bringing everyone on one page. When working from home, employees had to face several issues, including difficulty in accepting the working culture by families and friends, lack of proficiency in using technology, and the availability of the internet in the area. All of these issues lead to delays in meeting task deadlines, unavailability to important client meetings, interruptions in team meetings, making the right strategies timely, and lack of getting updates, among others. It not only affected the performance of individual employees or one team, but brought down the Company's productivity overall.

The hybrid working mode carried one more problem for The Company. That was the hardware problems. Since there were people of different ages, not everyone had the facility of personal computers or laptops at their house. Even the employees that had these facilities were facing other problems, like slow PC's, poor internet connection, and physical damage to the device.

There were many companies that already had successfully launched hybrid working in their Company. However, The Company hasn't reached there due to all the problems occurring in the implementation phase of the concept.

To tackle the problem, the CEO of The Company called in his management team to see what they can do to make this execution successful. Due to the threat of Covid-19 still lingering over Pakistan and strict restrictions from the Government, going back to a full in-house team is not an option for the Company. Furthermore, considering the Company deals with international clients they also want some of the employees to be available till late hours to communicate with the clients and handle their queries timely. This required them to have proficient employees who can overcome all the technological challenges, and excel at delivering the tasks timely to contribute towards the Company's success.

The strategic management team had to come up with the solutions to defeat all the communication barriers to achieve the level of efficiency Company needs.

## **CONCLUSION**

The communication dynamics have changed all around the globe. The companies are now looking to find efficient solutions to streamline the communication processes, and The Company is one of those companies.

They are now thinking of introducing a Hybrid Working Model, but the implementation isn't as easy as they thought. They had to face several issues including hardware problems, diverse workforces, and lack of knowledge in using the latest software. So, they have to decide now:

How to ensure remote workers and in-house teams have a stable internet connection? Does every remote worker have the facility of personal computers and laptops? How to ensure everyone is available on the agreed upon time? How to make employees proficient and tech savvy? What other steps must be taken to streamline the communication process? What type of communication channels should the Company choose?

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