



“It’s just not the same”

**A critical realist grounded theory of hybrid work and
performance in the Welsh public sector**

Sally Evans, FCIPD, MSc

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The candidate has already achieved 180 credits for assessment of taught modules within the blended learning PhD programme.

Faculty of Health and Medicine, Division of Health Research

Lancaster University

Submitted February 2025

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted traditional work practices, rapidly shifting employees to work remotely and overturning existing work assumptions about remote performance. Hybrid work, working partly from home and partly from an agreed office location during the week, became increasingly prevalent. Prior to the pandemic, fewer than 7% of UK public sector employees engaged in hybrid work (ONS, 2021) but by March 2024, hybrid work had “become the ‘new normal’ for around a quarter of workers” (ONS, 2024). In 2022, the Welsh Government issued a strategy to reduce climate impact and increase employee flexibility, aiming for 30% of all employees to move to hybrid work by 2026. This qualitative study explores the experiences of Welsh public sector employees undertaking hybrid work and identifies factors influencing their performance. Using a critical realist grounded theory approach, the study employed purposive and theoretical sampling of 16 participants, representing a diverse range of roles and experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed systematically using retrodution to uncover underlying causal mechanisms influencing performance. Findings reveal that some employees extend hybrid work to become predominantly home-based working. A new theoretical model identifies key factors impacting hybrid work performance: *Knowing and Connecting* enable performance *and Avoiding and Losing*, which hinders it. Knowing and Connecting includes mechanisms such as relationship building, in-person interactions, role clarity, managerial capability and organisational citizen behaviour. The absence of Knowing and Connecting also negatively influences performance. In contrast, Avoiding and Losing includes mechanisms such as psychological detachment, social homeostasis, lack of accountability, absence of job redesign, and absence of social learning. This research advances understanding of hybrid work performance mechanisms, offering actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners. The findings suggest how

targeted hybrid work strategies can foster a more productive and sustainable public sector hybrid workforce in Wales and the wider UK.

Author's Declaration

This thesis records the work undertaken for the PhD in Organisational Health and Wellbeing at the Division of Health Research at Lancaster University from September 2020 to April 2025. The work presented here is the author's own, except where due reference is made. The work has not been submitted for a higher degree elsewhere.

Name: Sally Evans

Date: 15th July 2025

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
-----------------------	----------

Acknowledgements	7
Preface	8
Chapter 1: Introduction	9
1.1 Background to Hybrid Work	11
1.2 Hybrid Work in the UK and Wales	12
1.3 Research Aim	14
1.3.1 Research Question and Objectives	15
Chapter 2: Background Overview of Literature	16
2.1 Rationale for Overview of Literature	17
2.2 Defining Hybrid Work	17
2.3 Defining Performance	20
2.4 Pre-COVID Period Hybrid Working (Before 2020)	22
2.5 COVID Restriction Period Hybrid Working (2020-2022)	26
2.6 Research Gaps	29
2.6.1 Methodological Limitations	30
2.6.2 Theoretical Frameworks	30
2.7 Conclusion	32
Chapter 3: Methodology	33
3.1 Philosophical Position	33
3.2 Methodological Approach	36
3.2.1 Critical Realist Grounded Theory Methodology	38
3.3 Research Design	39
3.3.1 Research Aim, Question and Objectives	39
3.3.2 Recruitment Approach	40
3.3.3 Participant Sample	41
3.3.4 Data Collection	43
3.3.5 Analysis	45
3.3.6 Ethical Considerations	50
3.3.7 Researcher Positionality	51
3.3.8 Research Quality Principles	53
Chapter 4: Findings	56
4.1 Participant Sample	56
4.2 Hybrid Work Description	58
4.3 Experiences of Hybrid Working	58
4.4 How Hybrid Work Impacts Employee's Performance	60
4.4.1 Impact on Organisational Level Performance	61

4.4.2 <i>Impact on Employee Performance</i>	62
4.5 Factors that Enable Employee Performance when Hybrid Working	63
4.5.1 <i>Knowing</i>	64
4.5.2 <i>Connecting</i>	68
4.6 Factors that Hinder Employee Performance when Hybrid Working	79
4.6.1 <i>Avoiding</i>	79
4.6.2 <i>Losing</i>	92
4.7 A Theoretical Model of Work Performance and Hybrid Working	103
4.8 Summary	107
Chapter 5: Discussion	109
5.1 Evolving context: Post-restriction Period	109
5.2 Knowing: Relationships	112
5.3 Knowing: Performance and Role Clarity	117
5.4 Connecting: In-Person Activity	120
5.5 Connecting: Manager Capability	122
5.5.1 <i>Emotional Intelligence</i>	123
5.5.2 <i>Coaching</i>	124
5.6 Connecting: Organisational Citizen Behaviour	125
5.7 Avoiding: Emotional and Psychological Detachment	126
5.8 Avoiding: Social Homeostasis	129
5.9 Losing: Absence of Accountability	131
5.10 Losing: Absence of Job Redesign	134
5.10.1 <i>Asynchronous Working</i>	138
5.10.2 <i>Remote Induction</i>	139
5.11 Losing: Social Learning	141
5.12 Summary	142
Chapter 6: Conclusion	145
6.1 Contribution to knowledge	145
6.2 Theoretical Implications	147
6.3 Implications for Policymakers and Practitioners	149
6.4 Research Strengths and Limitations	150
6.5 Future Research	151
6.6 Conclusion	152
Appendices	155
Appendix A: The Analytical Process	156
Appendix B: Table of Literature	157

Appendix C: Examples of Terminology Used in Hybrid Work Literature	161
Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer	163
Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet	164
Appendix F: Participant Consent Form	167
Appendix G: Interview Guide	168
Appendix H: Code Mapping Table	170
Appendix I: Categorical Codes	174
Appendix J: Example of Memos	175
Appendix K: Retroduction Inference Illustration	177
Appendix L: Literature Search.....	179
References.....	179

Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to those who participated in this study. It was a pleasure to meet you all, and I am deeply appreciative of your contribution, without which this research would not have been possible.

I extend my thanks to my supervisors, Dr. Claire Hardy and Dr. Andrew Harding, for their support, guidance, and patience throughout the course of this PhD. Your insightful feedback and encouragement have been invaluable. I would also like to acknowledge the helpful insights provided by Professor Sarah Brearley during our discussion on grounded theory, which contributed to shaping the direction of my research.

I particularly want to thank the wonderful 'Little PhD group' for their constant encouragement, interest, and motivation. Your understanding of the stresses and strains, and readiness to support throughout our journey together has meant the world to me.

To my sons, Sam and Jack, whose interest in my work and whose approach to life is a source of inspiration. A very special thanks to my husband, Ceri, for his endless love, support, patience, and tea. Your encouragement and understanding have been fundamental to completing this journey.

Thank you all for being an integral part of this achievement.

Preface

This thesis is organised into six chapters. In Chapter 1, the research problem is outlined, alongside the aim and objectives, with contextual background provided to support understanding of how hybrid work impacts performance, particularly within the UK and Welsh public sector. The rationale for the study is established, and potential contributions to theory, policy, and practice are identified. Chapter 2 contains a review of relevant literature published both prior to 2020 and during the pandemic, covering hybrid and flexible work arrangements, definitions of performance, and the public sector context. Gaps in existing research are also identified. In Chapter 3, the methodological approach is described, including the application of a critical realist grounded theory framework and the processes used for data collection and analysis. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter 4, with particular focus on mechanisms influencing performance in hybrid work environments, and the grounded theory developed from the data is introduced. Chapter 5 includes a critical discussion of the findings in relation to existing and post-restriction period literature, drawing on the work of Urquhart (2013). In Chapter 6, the key contributions and limitations of the study are summarised, and recommendations for practice and future research are provided (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, a global “involuntary expansion” of remote work occurred (Rebolledo et al., 2021, p. 772), marking a significant shift in working practices and accelerating the adoption of hybrid work. Felstead (2022) defines hybrid work as a combination of in-office and remote work, usually from home during the week. During the post-restriction period, hybrid working became a permanent arrangement for many organisations globally (Aksoy et al., 2022; CIPD, 2021), with the UK seeing widespread adoption by 2022 (Davis et al, 2022).

For the purposes of this thesis, the following terms and timeframes are used to structure the analysis: the pre-COVID 19 period (before March 2020); the COVID restriction period (March 2020 to Spring 2022), characterised by emergency health measures and enforced remote work; and the post-restriction period (from Spring 2022 onwards), during which hybrid working became more formally embedded in organisational policy, despite the ongoing presence of the virus.

Before the pandemic, many organisations structured work around central teams, and remote work was rare, especially in the UK public sector (Felstead, 2022). Despite research suggesting potential positive effects of remote work on employee well-being (Felstead & Henseke, 2017) and performance (Kelly et al, 2019), fewer than 7% of UK public sector employees worked remotely in 2019 (ONS, 2021). Working remotely (away from the central office) in the UK and across Europe was only an occasional phenomenon (OECD, 2021; ONS, 2016, 2021) as many leaders believed productivity was higher with physical co-location (Kelly et al., 2019). Organisational policies on remote work were often not based on empirical evidence, as research on its impact on performance was inconsistent (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2011; Felstead, 2022).

1.1 Background to Hybrid Work

Prior to 2020, UK research predominantly explored remote work with little recognition of the concept of hybrid work (Kelliher & De Menezes, 2019; Kelly et al., 2019). Early studies often involved volunteers and focused primarily on measuring

individual well-being rather than organisational or employee performance (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Grant et al., 2013). A 2019 literature review indicated flexible work arrangements, including hybrid work, positively impacted employee well-being, but the relationship with performance outcomes remained inconclusive (Kelly et al., 2019).

The limited exploration of hybrid work as a unique way of working is further compounded by definitional ambiguity and methodological limitations. As Sokolic (2022) highlights, the term *hybrid work* is used to describe various combinations of remote and flexible arrangements, creating challenges in achieving consistent and comparable research findings. Furthermore, despite research undertaken pre-COVID (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2011) and during the COVID restriction period (Etheridge et al., 2020) noting adverse effects on performance, few studies explored how and why these occur.

Despite hybrid work's increasing popularity post the COVID restriction period, its adoption had also been limited across many European countries prior to the pandemic (Cedefop, 2022). Adoption rates varied widely across Europe, with southern European countries showing lower adoption due to traditional work culture and infrastructure limitations. Cultural norms in some regions, particularly Italy and Spain, emphasised office-based work as a key to collaboration and control (Cedefop, 2022). Concerns over productivity, loss of control, and potential inefficiencies contributed to the exclusion of hybrid work, with employers prioritising physical presence over flexible work arrangements (Eurofound, 2022). However, the Netherlands and Germany have seen significant growth in hybrid work, as organisations seek to balance flexibility with productivity demands (Eurofound, 2022). In the Netherlands, new legislation supports employees' rights to request remote work, aligning with the widespread cultural acceptance of flexible work arrangements (Eurofound, 2022). Similarly, Germany's emphasis on work-life balance has encouraged hybrid work, with research conducted during the pandemic suggesting that hybrid work improves employee satisfaction and retention (Stocker et al., 2023). Eurofound's (2022) foresight study of the future of

hybrid work, found that the pandemic forced a rapid shift in this paradigm, highlighting the potential benefits of hybrid work and prompting a reconsideration of previous work practices.

1.2 Hybrid Work in the UK

Initially a temporary crisis response, hybrid work has now become a permanent feature in many UK workplaces (CIPD, 2021). According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), the UK public sector was quick to continue and adopt hybrid practices post-restriction period (CIPD, 2021). Such decisions were borne from employee demand to continue working from home (Davis et al, 2022). Employees claimed to be as productive when working from home and technology, quickly introduced during the pandemic, such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom enabled ongoing team communication (Davis et al, 2022). Employees also claimed that reduced commuting and greater flexibility enhanced their well-being (Sampat et al, 2022).

Following employee demand for continued remote work post-restriction period, the Welsh Government introduced a Smarter Working (SW) strategy in 2022 aiming for 30% of the Welsh workforce to work at or near home by 2026 (Welsh Government, 2022). The strategy was designed to reduce carbon emissions and improve work-life balance by encouraging hybrid work. The Welsh public sector was expected to support the strategy (Welsh Government, 2022). As of March 2024, Welsh Government recorded a working population of 1.47 million, with over 450,000 employees employed in the public sector (StatsWales, 2024). Given the sector's size, and the central role it plays in delivering public services across Wales, understanding how hybrid work affects employee performance within this context is both practically and politically significant (Welsh Government, 2022). The Welsh Government defines hybrid work as "a mixture of working in the central workplace, at home, or at a local workspace in your community" (*Remote Working Policy*, 2021, p. 3). This definition differs from Felstead's (2022) by including the option to work from a local community workspace, neither home nor office, thus highlighting a unique aspect of hybrid work in Wales. The strategy did

not mandate a specific number of days employees should work from home. The strategy's impact assessment considered potential negative consequences, such as effects on employee health, the environment, the Welsh language and individuals with protected characteristics. However, it did not explore the critical question of how hybrid work impacts employee or organisational performance (Pierce, 2022).

Despite the shift to hybrid working, research remains limited on how these new work patterns impact in the UK (Felstead, 2022). Following the implementation of the Welsh Government strategy, in March 2024, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) mandated a minimum of two days per week in the office, leading to protests and a vote to strike among employees (BBC, 2024, April 5). This reflects the growing tension between employee expectations for flexibility and organisational demands for physical office presence. This tension is particularly visible in Wales due to the government's proactive hybrid work strategy. These dynamics highlight the pressing need to explore how hybrid work functions in practice and what conditions enable or hinder performance, particularly among those employees most affected by these shifts (Delbosc & Kent, 2024).

In a survey of UK organisations (N=2166) conducted by the CIPD (2022), overall, only 43% of employers believed their employees are more productive when hybrid working. 40% of private sector employers believe employees are more productive when hybrid working, compared to 50% of public sector employers. Public sector employers are "significantly more likely to think employees are more productive when they are working from home/in a hybrid way than those in the private sector" (CIPD, 2022, p. 7). Given the ongoing evolution of hybrid work policies and organisational expectations in the Welsh public sector (WPC, 2022), there is a clear need to understand the conditions, mechanisms, and factors that enable sustained and effective performance in hybrid settings. The lack of consistent definitions and measurements of performance across hybrid work arrangements, both in Wales and globally, complicates efforts to evaluate their effectiveness (Felstead, 2022). This

highlights the need for deeper investigation into the factors that enable or hinder performance in hybrid work environments, particularly in countries and sectors where hybrid working is being widely adopted. As organisations adapt to post-restriction period realities, understanding the mechanisms that influence performance in hybrid work is essential to optimise outcomes and minimise potential tensions.

This study also focuses specifically on knowledge workers within the Welsh public sector. Knowledge workers are employees who work primarily with information and knowledge rather than performing manual tasks (Drucker, 1959). They are valued for their analytical, problem-solving, and communication skills, and their roles are typically well-suited to remote and hybrid arrangements (Davenport, 2005). In the public sector, knowledge work is often collaborative, stakeholder-driven, and embedded in systems of accountability, adding complexity to how performance is enacted and evaluated in hybrid environments (Felstead, 2022).

Focusing on this group is both timely and theoretically meaningful. These employees were at the forefront of hybrid work adoption and represent a large, policy-relevant segment of the workforce most directly affected by the shift to hybrid models. Studying knowledge workers within the Welsh public sector offers rich insight into how devolved government policy translates into lived experience, how performance is reshaped in hybrid settings, and what factors support or undermine effective working. This provides a valuable contribution to both theory and practice in understanding the evolving nature of work.

1.3 Research Aim

This research aims to explore and identify the factors and mechanisms that influence the performance of employees undertaking hybrid work in the Welsh public sector, an area that is underexplored in empirical research. By focusing on this specific context, this timely research aims to address a gap in the literature and provide a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities within the Welsh public sector. The approach, critical realist grounded theory (CRGT), combines a

philosophical perspective with a methodological framework, offering distinct advantages that enable a deeper exploration of the causal mechanisms underlying hybrid work performance, as illustrated in Appendix A. This study contributes to theoretical discussions on hybrid work and enhances the understanding of performance in hybrid work environments. Additionally, it broadens the scope of hybrid work performance beyond the Welsh public sector, offering insights that can inform wider applications.

1.3.1 Research Question and Objectives

The central research question is: *What factors and/or mechanisms influence the performance of employees when they undertake hybrid work, post pandemic?*

This research focuses on the Welsh public sector context and will address the following objectives:

1. To identify ways in which Welsh public sector employee's experience hybrid working.
2. To explore whether and how hybrid working impacts employee's performance.
3. To explore employee's perceptions of the issues that enable or hinder their performance when hybrid working.
4. To explore and understand the factors, conditions, mechanisms, experiences or events that affect employee performance when hybrid working.
5. To develop a grounded theory model of factors that enable or hinder employee performance, when hybrid working.

This study uses CRGT to explore the mechanisms driving performance in hybrid work environments (Oliver, 2011). Grounded theory's inductive approach allows insights to emerge from participants' experiences (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021), while critical realism uncovers the causal structures influencing those experiences (Looker et al., 2021). Together, they provide a comprehensive understanding of hybrid work and its impact on employee performance. The findings will inform policy and practice in the

Welsh public sector and beyond, helping to optimise hybrid work arrangements in the future.

Chapter 2: Background Overview of Literature

An overview of the literature relating to hybrid work and performance is provided in this chapter (Dunne, 2011). Gaps in knowledge and understanding of hybrid working are identified, informing the rationale for this current research. The

chapter begins by explaining the need for a literature review before data collection (section 2.1) (Thornberg & Dunne, 2019). This chapter reviews relevant literature on hybrid working definitions (section 2.2) and employee job performance (section 2.3), drawing from business, psychology, and related fields. The chapter also reviews research on hybrid working both prior to (section 2.4) and during the pandemic (Section 2.5), highlighting shifts in empirical insights, particularly on performance. This review identifies critical gaps in both knowledge and theory (Section 2.6), justifying the need for the current study and its approach.

2.1 Rationale for Overview of Literature

This study aims to develop a theory explaining the causal mechanisms influencing performance through a grounded theory approach. To ensure "theoretical sensitivity" and engage critically with underlying assumptions, a literature overview is conducted prior to data collection (Dunne, 2011, p. 116). While grounded theory typically recommends a limited literature review before data collection (Charmaz, 2006), an overview is valuable when there is insufficient existing knowledge or difficulty operationalising new concepts (Dunne, 2011). It helps identify knowledge gaps, strengthen the research justification, and provide context on how hybrid work and performance have been studied (Thornberg & Dunne, 2019). Additionally, this overview offers preliminary insight into how hybrid work and performance are defined and applied across various contexts, considering factors, whether social, psychological, or conceptual, that may influence performance (Mingers & Standing, 2017; Vincent, 2018). Ultimately, it highlights the need for new knowledge, supporting the formulation of the research question (McGhee et al., 2007). A table of the literature used in this overview is provided in Appendix B.

2.2 Defining Hybrid Work

Hybrid work is described using various terms such as flexible work, remote working, and teleworking, which lack consistent definitions in the literature (Vartiainen & Vanharanta, 2023). This inconsistency complicates the development of a coherent

research base, as highlighted by the variety of terminologies used across studies.

Vartiainen & Vanharanta (2023) found, in a European review of these terms that while they all refer to work arrangements that mix remote and in-office activities, they do not always align in how they are operationalised.

A table illustrating examples of the terminology is provided in Appendix C. Virtual and agile working (CIPD, 2021; Welsh Government, 2022) are also referenced in relation to hybrid working arrangements in the UK. The lack of clarity in literature titles and abstracts supports the necessity for an overview of the field to consider the range of available literature, as terms may be used synonymously. For example, Hackney, Yung and Somasundaram (2022) titled their systematic review “work from home”, yet included studies on flexible working, fully remote working and hybrid working. Vartiainen and Vanharanta (2023) identified 93 different definitions of hybrid work in use across Europe, noting the most common focus is on the physical (where) and temporal (when) location of work.

Several issues with the operationalisation of hybrid working have been uncovered. Although a range of concepts are discussed in the literature, they often lack clarity or are used interchangeably. At least twelve overlapping or related terms have been identified. For example, *flexible work* typically refers to employee discretion over when and where work is undertaken (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2011; van der Meulen, 2016), while *remote working* and *teleworking* often imply working away from the central office, but not necessarily in a hybrid pattern (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Golden et al., 2008). The term *working from home* may include both fully remote and partially remote arrangements (Bloom, 2014; Bloom et al., 2015), whereas *homeworking*, or *work at home* (WAH), usually refers more narrowly to permanent work based at home with little or no office attendance. Other related terms such as virtual, agile, mobile, and telecommuting reflect variations in location, autonomy, or connectivity, but do not always include regular in-office presence. These terms are sometimes used synonymously with hybrid working but differ in emphasis; for example, “virtual work”

highlights technological mediation, while “agile work” often refers to flexibility in both time and space (CIPD, 2021; Welsh Government, 2022).

In this study, hybrid work is operationalised as a pattern of working in two or more locations across a typical working week, most commonly combining remote working (such as from home) and in-office working, with some employees also using community-based workspaces, as defined by the Welsh Government. Specifically, the Welsh Government’s Remote Working Policy (2021, p. 3) defines hybrid work as “a mixture of working in the central workplace, at home, or at a local workspace in your community.” This adds a layer of spatial complexity that differs from broader UK definitions (Felstead, 2022), where community workspaces are less commonly included. This definition is adopted here due to the study’s focus on the Welsh public sector and its unique strategic commitment to hybrid work.

Historical research also highlights inconsistency in terminology. Halford (2005, p. 5) defines hybrid work as arrangements where employees “work both from home and from an organisational workplace, using virtual technologies to connect the two spaces.” Her mixed methods longitudinal study of insurance office workers (N=48) is among the earliest to explicitly use the term ‘hybrid’ work. Earlier studies, including Bailey and Kurland’s (2002) systematic review of telework (N=80) and Golden et al.’s (2008) study of U.S. IT teleworkers (N=261), examined arrangements that resemble hybrid work without consistently using that terminology.

The absence of a consistent definition, combined with overlap in related concepts, creates ambiguity in the literature and poses challenges for understanding the specific effects of hybrid work on employee performance (Felstead, 2022). This study addresses that gap by adopting a clearly defined and contextually appropriate operationalisation of hybrid working, that reflects both the policy-led structure in Wales and the empirical reality of how work is experienced across multiple settings.

2.3 Defining Performance

Performance in the context of work has many definitions. Employee performance and organisational performance represent distinct but related concepts (Sethibe & Steyn, 2015). Employee performance refers to individual contributions within job roles, such as productivity, task completion, and skill development (Atatsi et al, 2019). Organisational performance encompasses the overall success and efficiency of the organisation, including financial outcomes, strategic goals, and sustainability (Neely et al, 1995). Organisational performance is influenced not only by employee performance but also by leadership, culture, and factors such as innovation (Sethibe & Steyn, 2015). Focusing on employee performance, rather than organisational performance, aligns with a critical realist perspective, as this paradigm seeks to uncover the causal mechanisms that influence at the individual level (Edwards et al, 2015). Since organisational performance is often an aggregate of individual contributions, understanding employee performance at the micro level can provide valuable insights into broader organisational outcomes (Atatsi et al, 2019).

Employee performance has been a focus of organisational research for decades, yet is difficult to define (Atatsi et al, 2019). Early studies defined employee performance in terms of task-related outputs (such as efficiency), and context (such as collaboration and teamwork) (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 2003). Campbell (1990) defined performance as behaviours or actions relevant for attaining the organisational goals and measurable by the level of contribution to those goals. These behaviours are distinguished from effectiveness, which is the impact that behaviours have on outcomes (Campbell, 1990). Employee performance is considered broader than *productivity*, which is often measured by the volume of work done or results achieved in a given timeframe (Koopmans et al., 2011). While productivity focuses on the quantity of work completed, employee performance incorporates both quantitative aspects, such as task completion and qualitative aspects like problem-solving, innovation, and teamwork (Koopmans et al., 2011). Taris and Schaufeli (2015) further distinguish

between *process* performance, how work is performed, from *outcome* performance, whether goals are achieved. Employee performance is also defined in the broader context of Armstrong and Taylor (2023), as the extent to which an individual successfully fulfils their job responsibilities and contributes to organisational goals through a combination of behaviours, competencies, and outcomes. Employee performance includes not only the quantity of work but also its quality, creativity, adherence to standards, and collaboration with colleagues (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

The terms *productivity* and *performance* are frequently used interchangeably in research, creating inconsistencies and hindering a clear understanding of hybrid work's impact on employee outcomes (Felstead, 2022). Whilst existing literature provides broad definitions of employee performance, this study adopts a flexible approach (Morse, 1994). By allowing participants to determine what constitutes their performance (Morse, 1994), this research contributes to a more context-specific understanding of how hybrid work influences employee outcomes (Bryman, 2016). Rather than imposing a fixed definition of performance, this study adopts an interpretive approach that is consistent with both the exploratory nature of grounded theory and the ontological assumptions of critical realism. In the context of knowledge work, where outputs are not always measurable or standardised, performance is best understood as a context-dependent construct shaped by how individuals experience and interpret their work. Knowledge workers typically engage in tasks that involve judgment, problem-solving, and collaboration, which may not always align with output-based metrics. Therefore, allowing participants to define what performance means in their own roles ensures that the theory developed reflects their realities, rather than being constrained by pre-existing assumptions. This approach also aligns with the aims of CRGT which seeks to uncover underlying mechanisms, requiring sensitivity to how participants interpret causality in their own working lives (Kempster & Parry, 2011).

2.4 Pre-COVID Period Hybrid Working (Before 2020)

Hybrid work arrangements before the pandemic were rare in the UK, with 7% of employees working in this way (ONS, 2016). Flexible working arrangements, where employees work their own schedules and chosen locations, had similarly low uptake globally, with most organisations favouring traditional in-office models (Moglia et al., 2021). In 2019, only about 10% of employees in Germany, 17% in France, and around 20% in Scandinavian countries were working remotely or flexibly, highlighting the limited adoption of hybrid work models prior to the pandemic (Eurofound, 2019). This low prevalence motivated a series of studies on hybrid work arrangements to address knowledge gaps, often using broader terminology like *telework* (Solís, 2017; Spilker, 2014) and *telecommuting* (Golden & Gajendran, 2019) as discussed in section 2.1. These studies investigated employee productivity, engagement, and well-being in what they termed “remote” or “partially remote” settings (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Partially remote work referred to an arrangement where employees divide their time between working remotely and working in the office or another physical workspace. This became known as hybrid work in the UK (Felstead & Henseke, 2017), though the term had been used previously by Halford (2005) in her study of Insurance sector employees.

In their systematic review of flexible working studies (N=148), defined as arrangements which “allow employees to vary the amount, timing or location of their work”, De Menezes and Kelliher (2011, p.453) examined the relationship between flexible working and employee performance outcomes. 18 papers related to a mix of home and office-based work specifically. Their examination which included meta-analyses (n=7), literature reviews (n=11) and empirical studies (n=112) found inconclusive evidence, with some studies reporting positive effects on wellbeing and work-home conflict, while others indicated no significant impact or even negative effects on performance. The authors attributed these mixed findings to variations in study designs, methodologies, and the specific types of flexible work implemented.

They concluded that a clear business case for flexible work could not be established based on the existing literature at that time and that multilevel approaches are needed to explore *why* a work arrangement was introduced and *who* benefits most, employer or employee (De Menezes and Kelliher, 2011).

Despite limited application of hybrid work, early studies began to explore the potential impact. Golden et al's (2008) correlational study of U.S technology workers (n=261) and their supervisors (n=522) found a positive association between team interactions, social support and employee performance. Fairness, trust and support were considered essential for performance when hybrid working (Delanoeije & Verbruggen, 2020; van der Meulen, 2016). However, the blurring of work / home boundaries was considered to impede team knowledge sharing, highlighting the complexity of these relationships (Sampat et al., 2022; Taskin & Edwards, 2007). Taskin and Edwards (2007) and van der Meulen (2016) both identified managers' relationships and communication skills as important influencers when hybrid working. However, Golden et al (2008) argued for further research into causation, noting that the more employees teleworked, the more distant employees became, finding a negative association between professional isolation and job performance. According to Golden et al (2008), it was not the location of work, i.e home or office, but rather relational factors, such as feelings of isolation, that potentially affected outcomes such as job performance.

Pre 2020, studies generally found that remote work disrupted the social connections essential for performance, through professional isolation (Golden et al., 2008; Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). Professional isolation refers to the absence of key connections needed to build networks and maintain social interactions (Golden et al., 2008). In their study of U.S technology employees (N=783), Golden et al. (2008) found that isolation arises not just from physical separation, but from a decline in social connection, concluding that "technology may never be able to fully substitute for the richness of interacting face-to-face" (p. 1418). While some research highlights the role

of managers in fostering connections (van der Meulen, 2016), studies often overlook how social structures and interactions are redefined in hybrid work environments, such as how relationships are formed, and work-related networks developed. Pre-COVID period research is also limited into how cultural, environmental, and organisational factors may shape isolation and social engagement (Bloom et al., 2022). For example, Bloom et al's (2015) RCT study of Chinese call centre workers (N=957) reported that some employees missed office social interactions, yet did not explore how broader factors, such as work nature, organisational policies, home environment, or societal norms affect these feelings.

Hackney et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review of 37 studies from 27 countries, with 10 from the U.S., covering various sectors and samples of between 57 and 9500 participants. The review found that hybrid work has the potential to enhance productivity and performance, primarily through increased focus and autonomy. However, the review's findings are constrained by inconsistencies in terminology and reliance on self-report data, which raise concerns about the reliability and validity of the conclusions. Bailey and Kurland (2002) questioned assumed benefits of hybrid working, such as performance and well-being, noting that studies often relied upon self-report data which may obscure underlying factors like employees escaping negative workplace environments. However, autonomy has been a key theme throughout pre-COVID period studies, with research highlighting that the voluntary aspect of flexible arrangements significantly shapes employee perceptions and outcomes (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017; Taskin & Edwards, 2007). When hybrid work is policy-driven (top-down) rather than employee-led (bottom-up), it often diminishes performance, as autonomy, a key factor in motivation and engagement, is limited (Hackney et al., 2022). De Menezes & Kelliher's (2016) correlational study of four private sector organisations in the UK (N=2617), found that formal, policy-driven flexible work arrangements were negatively associated with performance.

The tension between the organisational drive to limit office space and the employee requirement to choose their work location was a further theme identified in the pre-COVID period literature (Halford, 2005; Wheatley, 2022). This tension may indicate deeper mechanisms at play such as how organisation efficiency goals and the employee's need for control matter. In a cross-sectional study of Australian engineers (N=37), researchers found that "sit anywhere" office seating negatively impacted performance when participants attended the office, illustrating how the work and psychosocial environment can influence behaviour (Rahaman et al., 2020, p. 3). The study found a direct association between increased face to face office-based communication and higher employee productivity, suggesting in-person interactions may act as a mechanism for performance. The authors concluded that autonomy to choose when and where to work on office days is crucial for performance (Rahaman et al., 2020).

Two empirical studies have been conducted on hybrid work and performance in the pre-COVID period that present contrasting findings on employee performance. Delanoeije & Verbruggen's (2020) randomised control trial (RCT), conducted over 3 months with Belgian engineers and office workers, found no statistically significant difference in self-reported job performance scores between those that worked fully in the office (n=39) compared to those that worked 2 days in the office and 3 days at home (n=39). The involvement of managers in selecting the employees to participate represents a limitation of this study. Additionally, the small sample size and focus on a single organisation constrain the generalisability of the findings. In contrast, Bloom et al (2015) found 13% performance improvements in their nine-month RCT of 250 Chinese call centre workers. The experiment included two treatment arms: one where employees were randomly assigned to work from home four days per week, and a control group where employees continued to work in the office. The use of random selection for volunteers and performance metrics reported by managers enhances the validity of this experiment. 'Work from home' employees worked four days from home

and one day in the office (hybrid) and reported that reduced commuting time and better technology connections contributed to work intensification from longer work hours. However, 50% of the treatment group and 30% of the control group (office-based workers) opted to return to office working fulltime following the experiment, citing social isolation concerns. Work intensification, where employee's work longer hours than previously, was also a key finding in Halford's (2005) earlier study of UK office workers (N=48), raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of increasing performance through extended working hours.

Prior to 2020, hybrid working was rare. Research was often discussed in the context of employee well-being using terms such as telework or telecommuting, highlighting issues regarding definitions and terms. Reviews of flexible working, including home-office work practices similar to hybrid work, highlighted how factors such as autonomy, social isolation and communication quality may influence employee performance, but results were mixed. Employee-led, voluntary arrangements were preferred over policy-driven models, with autonomy identified as a key driver of motivation and performance. Tensions between organisational efficiency goals, such as reducing office space, and employees' need for control over their work environments impacted performance. Performance gains were linked to reduced commuting and longer working hours, raising concerns about sustainability due to blurred work-home boundaries. Whilst fairness, trust, and support were considered important, limited research explored deeper mechanisms like organisational intent or team dynamics. The research gaps and critique of the research is discussed in more detail in section 2.6 below.

2.5 COVID Restriction Period Hybrid Working (2020- Spring 2022)

In March 2020, the global pandemic caused governments worldwide to implement strategies to prevent the virus from spreading, including the UK government's 'stay at home' mandate, which required all employees who could work from home, to do so (UK Government, 2020). This marked a significant shift away from

pre-COVID period norms where flexible work options were largely discretionary. By April 2020, 46.6% of the UK working population reported working from home part of the week (ONS, 2020). As pre-COVID period research suggested mixed impacts on performance, employers had feared that working remotely would negatively affect employee performance (Felstead, 2022). However, the pandemic period provided an opportunity to test these assumptions, leading to studies that, whilst constrained by the unique context, revealed nuanced insights into hybrid work effects on productivity, performance, autonomy and well-being.

The period between 2020 and 2022, however, continued to offer mixed results. Choudhury et al.'s (2022) randomised controlled trial (RCT) of 103 Bangladeshi office workers, conducted over eight weeks, found no statistically significant manager-reported change in performance when employees worked in a hybrid arrangement. The strengths of this study include the random selection of participants and managers assigning performance ratings. However, as with similar studies, performance was not effectively defined, with only a basic rating system used. Similarly, in a prominent study conducted in a Chinese technology sales environment (N=1612) evaluating a RCT of hybrid working during the COVID restriction period, authors concluded that there was no overall impact on performance (Bloom et al., 2022). However, despite using objective performance measures in the study, divergent views were noted between employees (n=1219) reporting positive performance outcomes and managers (n=393) who reported negative performance outcomes (Bloom et al., 2022). In a study of skilled Asian IT technology professionals (N=10384), data across a 17-month period from April 2019 to August 2020 revealed that employees worked longer hours and spent more time in online meetings, leading to a productivity decrease of nine to 18% (Gibbs et al., 2021). Authors noted productivity varied depending on employee characteristics, the presence of children at home, and commute time.

However, employee autonomy also emerged as a critical factor in hybrid work performance, during the COVID restriction period. Choudhury et al's (2022) RCT found

that whilst the office day attendance was predetermined, employee's sense of autonomy positively impacted their experiences. A study of Nigerian publicly employed academics (N=277) also concluded that performance is supported where hybrid work offers "time autonomy"; the ability to optimise and choose their own work hours (Naqshbandi et al., 2024, p. 18). Similarly, a mixed methods study of Austrian insurance employees (N=65) found that performance was directly associated with the employee's desire to work remotely (Beño, 2021). A reported decrease in productivity by those who felt less comfortable when mandated to work from home, aligns with findings from pre-COVID period research by De Menezes & Kelliher (2017), emphasising that choice remained fundamental to achieving positive outcomes.

The pandemic context also amplified health concerns as a driver for hybrid work adoption. Sampat et al. (2022) found in their study of 281 employees across India and Germany that health consciousness played a major role in employees' preferences for hybrid work, linking well-being with workplace flexibility. However, as UK government restrictions eased in February 2022, hybrid work persisted as a dominant trend. By Spring 2022, 38% of UK employees were hybrid working (ONS, 2022), defined in the ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey as "both working at home and at their usual place of work". Whilst this figure had reduced to 28% overall a year later, the public sector reported hybrid working at 35% in early 2023 (ONS, 2023). The pandemic therefore established hybrid work as a viable work mode, shaping expectations and practices that continue to evolve.

Research undertaken during the COVID restriction period (2020-2022) mirrored pre-COVID (before 2020) research, emphasising the importance of autonomy and relational factors in hybrid work performance, with employee-led arrangements continuing to yield better outcomes than mandated ones. A meta-analysis by Gajendran et al. (2024, p. 1352) ($k=110$, $N=45288$) of remote work intensity (defined as the "frequency or amount of time spent working remotely"), incorporated both pre- and COVID restriction period studies. Whilst their research hypothesised that autonomy

and isolation have indirect and opposing effects on remote work performance, their conclusions on causality were tentative due to the correlational and cross-sectional nature of the studies. Gajendran et al (2024) found that perceived isolation increases with the number of days spent remote working, aligning with the pre-COVID period findings of Golden et al (2008). They acknowledged that many studies, including their own, often focus broadly on remote work's effects, without exploring critical factors such as temporal differences, technological challenges, or the impact of colleague interactions. However, Mishra and Bharti's (2024) research found that social support mitigated the psychological stress caused via hybrid working, in their study of 531 Indian IT employees. Therefore, COVID restriction period research highlighted new challenges such as productivity declines from overwork, increased burden of online meetings, and health concerns, reinforcing the pandemic's unique context as a catalyst for hybrid work adoption and its nuanced impacts on performance.

Whilst the pandemic led to a rapid shift to hybrid working, with almost half of the UK workforce working from home part-time by April 2020 (ONS, 2020), studies conducted during this time explored effects on productivity, performance, and well-being, revealing mixed results. Research, such as Choudhury et al.'s (2022) RCT, found no significant change in performance with hybrid working, while studies like Bloom et al.'s. (2022) showed divergent views between employees and managers on performance. Autonomy was identified as a key factor, with studies suggesting that employee control over work hours improved performance. Health concerns also played a major role in hybrid work preferences. By 2022, hybrid work had become a prominent trend, especially in the public sector. COVID restriction period research reinforced pre-COVID period findings, emphasising the importance of autonomy and social support in mitigating stress, though challenges like overwork and isolation remained.

2.6 Research Gaps

Although limited, previous research has identified factors influencing employee performance in hybrid and flexible work, yet many studies are constrained by

conceptual, methodological, and temporal limitations. Conceptually, terms like work from home, teleworking, and flexible work are used interchangeably (Hackney et al., 2022). Despite differences in meaning or scope, this leads to ambiguity in understanding hybrid work's impact on performance. Additionally, a temporal gap exists, as the effects of the post-restriction period work arrangements and employee expectations have yet to be fully explored.

2.6.1 Methodological Limitations

A key limitation in hybrid work literature, noted by authors themselves, is the reliance on volunteer participants, introducing self-selection bias, which can skew findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In RCTs conducted by Bloom et al. (2015) and Choudhury et al. (2022), participants were selected by the organisation, raising concerns of selection bias and limiting generalisability. Similarly, in the 12-week longitudinal study of Belgian engineers (N=78) measuring the impact of hybrid working on performance by Delanoeije & Verbruggen (2020), participants were chosen based on prior high performance, further limiting study validity.

According to Felstead (2022), those who opt to work from home are more likely to self-report increased productivity, highlighting the need for a more critical examination of how individual choices interact with broader structural factors. Bailey and Kurland (2002) suggested that employees may volunteer to avoid conflict with colleagues, indicating deeper causal mechanisms. They called for grounded theory, qualitative studies to explore *why* employees embrace the arrangements and *how* employee performance is facilitated. Furthermore, many studies rely on private sector participants, particularly call centre or IT professionals, where performance is more easily measured through recorded output.

2.6.2 Theoretical Frameworks

The lack of strong theoretical grounding has been highlighted as a critical issue in both pre- (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2011) and post-restriction period research

(Toscano et al., 2024). Toscano et al (2024, p.13) argue that existing theoretical frameworks, such as the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), fail to explain the “how and why” hybrid work influences performance. The JD-R model illustrates how job demands can lead to stress and burnout, whilst job resources can enhance motivation and performance, with both factors influencing employee well-being and outcomes. Such employee performance theories were primarily tested and developed in office-based work settings, where conditions such as direct supervision, face-to-face communication, and stable work environments prevailed. While the core concepts may remain relevant, their application to hybrid work, characterised by flexible work locations and diverse experiences have received limited attention. For example, the JD-R model does not address new hybrid work related demands, such as social isolation, or resources, such as concentration, identified in Toscano et al.'s (2024) eight-day diary study of Italian civil servants (N=203). Demerouti and Bakker (2023) also call for a more contextualised application of the JD-R model, acknowledging that remote work introduces unique challenges requiring tailored responses. Consequently, further research is needed to explore how these theories operate or whether they require adaptation to account for emerging factors such as virtual collaboration, varying levels of autonomy, and the physical separation of teams, which may all alter performance dynamics.

The structural and societal changes brought about by the pandemic have transformed employee's work realities, emphasising the “conditional nature” of established theory (Fletcher, 2016, p. 184). Organisations may need to “rethink the traditional building blocks” of work arrangements (Sokolic, 2022, p. 216). This shift necessitates a re-evaluation of how hybrid work influences employee performance (Felstead, 2022). As there is also a paucity of qualitative research in this area, to further advance this field of study, qualitative approaches could provide deeper insights into these changes, potentially leading to the development of new, emergent theories that capture the nuances of hybrid work dynamics (Delbosc & Kent, 2024).

2.7 Conclusion

This literature overview examined how hybrid working is conceptualised and its potential impact on employee performance. Despite limited studies focusing explicitly on hybrid work, several further gaps were identified, including conceptual ambiguities and the pandemic's reshaping of research priorities, which created a temporal divide in work and organisational studies (Felstead, 2022). The overview highlighted a lack of consensus on hybrid work terminology and an absence of theoretical frameworks explaining factors influencing employee performance. Many studies, such as Bloom et al. (2015), were conducted 5 -15 years before the pandemic, limiting their relevance as the normalisation of hybrid work and technological advances have shifted employee expectations (CIPD, 2022; Felstead, 2022). Additionally, no research has yet explored the impact of hybrid work within the UK or Welsh public sectors, both significant employers. Given the Welsh public sector's strategic adoption of hybrid work, understanding its influence on performance is crucial. This study aims to fill these gaps by exploring employees' experiences of hybrid work and the effect on their performance in Wales.

Chapter 3: Methodology

An outline of the research methodology employed to explore the factors and mechanisms influencing employee performance in hybrid work environments within the Welsh public sector is provided in this chapter. The content includes the philosophical foundation (section 3.1), research methodology (section 3.2), study design (section 3.3), data collection (section 3.3.4), analysis methods (section 3.3.5), and ethical considerations (section 3.3.7) that guide this study.

3.1 Philosophical Position

Research paradigms seek to address the nature of reality (ontology) and how the phenomenon comes to be understood (epistemology). The choice of paradigm informs the research method used to discover knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The aim of this study is to explore employees' views and experiences of their performance when hybrid working. The research objectives include understanding the causal factors that influence employee performance and the development of a theoretical model of hybrid work. The research paradigm therefore needs to support an exploration of the changing work context in the post-restriction period and also enable an understanding of causal influences of employee performance (Oliver, 2011).

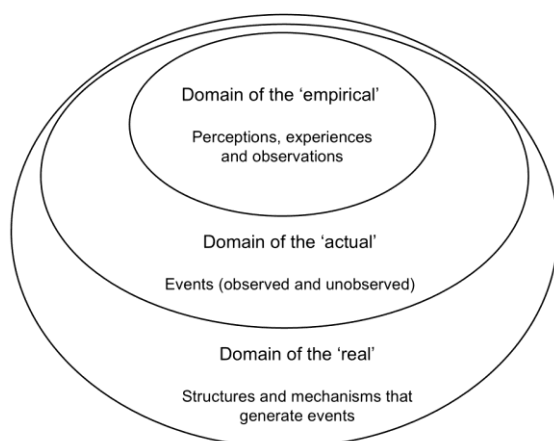
Critical realism was selected as the paradigm to underpin the research. Alternative paradigms, such as positivism, interpretivism, and constructivism differ in their assumptions about the nature of reality and the process of knowledge acquisition (Bryman, 2016). Positivism asserts that reality is objective and can be discovered through empirical observation and quantifiable data. Interpretivism emphasises understanding the subjective meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences (Bryman, 2016). Constructivism proposes that knowledge is co-constructed by the researcher and participants, viewing reality as socially constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In contrast, critical realism bridges these perspectives, acknowledging the existence of an objective reality while accepting that the understanding of this reality is

influenced by social, cultural, and contextual mechanisms (Hoddy, 2019). This makes critical realism a suitable choice for this study, which aims to explore employees' experiences of hybrid work but also to explain the causal mechanisms behind the impact of hybrid work on performance, at an individual and organisational level.

Adopting a critical realist approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the complexities of hybrid work, considering both observable phenomena and underlying causal structures (Danermark et al., 2019). Critical realism assumes there is a reality that exists independently of human minds, making it ontologically realist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, it acknowledges that different approaches can produce diverse interpretations of this reality, so is epistemologically relativist (Bhaskar, 2014; Oliver, 2011). This distinction between the existence of reality (ontology) and how that reality is known, determined and comes to be understood (epistemology) is central to critical realism (Danermark et al., 2019). Critical realists also recognise a “stratified reality”, where data or observations may be influenced by causal mechanisms (Edwards et al., 2014, p. 92). The stratified levels of reality are illustrated in Figure 1 by Hoddy (2019).

Figure 1

Critical Realist Stratified Ontology



Critical realist research considers three levels of reality: the *empirical* (experiences and observations), the *actual* (events that occur) and the *real* (underlying mechanisms), to infer the causes of observed events (Oliver, 2011).

Critical realism asserts a single view of reality, but acknowledges there may be equally valid perspectives, often expressed through language (Maxwell, 2012). For employee's, reality encompasses the work environment, social relationships, and organisational context (Maxwell, 2012). A critical realist approach helps uncover the underlying mechanisms that shape employee perceptions, revealing how hybrid work impacts performance in ways not immediately observable. Critical realism aims to challenge existing ideologies, grounding findings in participants' experiences (Edwards et al., 2014; Looker et al., 2021).

Understanding the social world requires acknowledging and exploring the underlying structures that may cause events to occur. A researcher's ability to distinguish between an event and the arrangement or structure that causes it, is therefore scientifically important (Edwards et al., 2014). Crucially, critical realists also consider that reality exists independent of perceptions and theories and may be socially constructed (Maxwell, 2012). As reality can only be fallibly known, theories must remain open to revision (Cruickshank, 2011). The ability to engage in contemporary causal explanation and critically evaluate theory, makes critical realism particularly powerful for analysing challenges and identifying solutions for significant structural and societal change (Oliver, 2011).

The epistemological position for this research is therefore that social actions arise in the workplace yet are influenced by a potential array of complex, emergent mechanisms occurring in "open systems" (O'Mahoney, 2016, p. viii). It is not possible to determine a mechanism independently of its context, as ontologically, the world of work is structured socially, and often "value drenched" (Bhaskar, 2014, p. 74). According to Bhaskar (1998), the characteristics or values of existing social structures can

determine the form of social phenomena. It is necessary to therefore explore employee's perspectives to better understand the mechanisms that influence performance when employees undertake hybrid work. A critical realist paradigm fits well with this objective (Oliver, 2011).

For this study, critical realism provides the foundation to identify and understand the causal mechanisms shaping employee performance in hybrid work environments. The value of critical realism lies in its capacity to bridge the gap between subjective employee experiences and the objective structures influencing those experiences. In the context of hybrid work, this allows for an in-depth exploration of how employees' perceptions of performance are shaped by both individual and organisational factors, leading to a more comprehensive model that can inform both theory and practice. As a result, critical realism will guide the exploration of emergent mechanisms in hybrid work environments and the development of a theoretical model that can better inform policies and practices in the future.

3.2 Methodological Approach

This section explains why and how qualitative methods were utilised to explore employee's experiences when hybrid working. Qualitative research methods have become increasingly prominent in organisational studies, driven by a growing interest in establishing employee perspectives, which has increased in recent years (Edwards et al., 2014; Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). As the goal of this study was to seek deeper levels of explanation and understanding, the methodology is positioned towards inference and interpretation rather than quantification (Edwards et al., 2014). A qualitative approach is particularly suited to exploratory research that investigates emerging concepts and emphasises the pursuit of meaning over measurement (Frederiksen & Kringelum, 2021). Qualitative methods are well suited for illuminating complex concepts and relationships, offering a richness of understanding through interactive discourse and narrative descriptions (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). Open-ended, intensive interviews, provide an effective method for achieving this, enabling

participants to reflect deeply on their experiences while allowing the researcher to clarify details and adapt the conversations to explore emerging themes (Charmaz, 2014; Foley et al., 2021). This flexibility is most applicable for uncovering insights into underexplored or novel phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Additionally, qualitative methodologies are effective for exploring aspects of the organisational or social environment that constrain or enable employee behaviour, facilitating an emic (insider) analysis of the dynamics (Cohen et al., 2017). While generalisations from qualitative research may not always be empirical, the theoretical foundations developed may have lasting relevance and contribute to broader understanding (Danermark, Ekström, et al., 2002). Finally, qualitative research underpinned by a critical realist philosophy, supports the exploration of causal inference and is particularly valuable when exploring new theory or challenging existing theories (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This makes qualitative research a suitable choice for a study exploring the mechanisms shaping employee experiences within the context of hybrid work.

Several qualitative methodologies enable the exploration of perceptions and context, including phenomenology, ethnography, action research and grounded theory. However, not all could meet the requirements of critical realist research. For example, phenomenology describes reality through an understanding of an employee's lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Phenomenology is not designed to identify causal mechanisms of the employee's performance and action research necessitates the recognition of specific theory before commencing the research process. As hybrid working is a new phenomenon, applying an extant theory at the start of the study would hinder discovery of mechanisms that support an employee's interactions across an organisation. For these reasons neither action research nor phenomenology were considered appropriate methodologies (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Ethnography also did not meet the requirements of the research question, as it is fundamentally interpretive. An interpretive approach often focuses on sense making in a situation, whereas critical

realism requires a realist approach suggesting that a deeper understanding of the phenomenon is achievable (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

3.2.1 Critical Realist Grounded Theory Methodology

In light of the research aim to focus on hybrid work and employee performance outlined in chapter 2, grounded theory methodology was chosen to capture participants' experiences and perceptions, leading to a theoretical understanding of hybrid work and performance in this evolving work context. Traditionally, grounded theory provides a structured framework for developing theory through the analysis of narratives and exploration of emerging phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014; Kempster & Parry, 2011). Constructivist grounded theory focusses on inductive analysis (Charmaz, 2014), whereas critical realism enables identifies underlying causal mechanisms (Oliver, 2011). Critical Realist Grounded Theory (CRGT) bridges positivist and constructivist perspectives in grounded theory, acknowledging a single reality shaped by interpretation (Oliver, 2011; Hoddy, 2019) and revealing causality beyond immediate observations (Maxwell, 2012). This methodology is particularly valuable in the post-restriction period context, where employee performance and hybrid work remain under theorised (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021). The rapid shift to hybrid working has introduced complexities that traditional models do not fully address. A critical realist focus will uncover underlying causal mechanisms and allows for a deeper understanding of the factors influencing performance (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017).

CRGT also allows for epistemic relativism, acknowledging that there are many ways of knowing (Oliver, 2011) and asks, 'what must be true for this to be the case?' to theorise causal mechanisms (Edwards et al., 2014). This approach delivers improved conceptual clarity and the refinement or creation of new theory (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017). This methodology is effective for addressing the complexities of hybrid work and employee performance by focusing on context and underlying structures (Timonen et al., 2018). CRGT is a methodology that combines grounded theory's inductive approach with critical realism's focus on causal mechanisms, providing a robust

framework for exploring and theorising about the evolving dynamics of hybrid work and employee performance (Hoddy, 2019).

3.3 Research Design

The following sub-sections outline the approach to participant sampling, data collection, analysis methods, ethical considerations, and potential limitations.

3.3.1 Research Aim, Question and Objectives

The aim of this research is to explore employee's experiences of hybrid working and its impact on their performance, with a particular focus on the factors that contribute to, or hinder employee performance when hybrid working. To address this aim, the research focused in the Welsh public sector. As referenced in section 2.7, Wales was chosen as the context for this research due to its national strategy to encourage and embed hybrid working, particularly within the public sector post-restriction period. The accelerated adoption of hybrid work in Wales provides a timely and relevant opportunity to study its impact, especially given the varying practices across the UK. Being situated within this context can also enhance understanding, further strengthening the relevance and applicability of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The study sought to address five key objectives:

1. To identify ways in which Welsh public sector employees experience hybrid working.
2. To explore employees' perceptions of the issues that facilitate or act as barriers to their performance when hybrid working.
3. To explore whether and how hybrid working impacts employees' performance.
4. To explore and understand the factors, conditions, mechanisms, experiences or events that influence employee performance when hybrid working.
5. To develop a theoretical model of the factors that facilitate or act as barriers to employee performance when hybrid working.

The research question that guided the study is:

What factors or mechanisms facilitate or hinder the performance of Welsh public sector employees when they undertake hybrid work, post Covid-19 pandemic (2022 -)?

3.3.2 Recruitment Approach

In Wales, over 440,000 people are employed across 1500 public sector organisations (StatsWales, 2024), which include central government departments, 22 local authorities, schools, colleges, devolved organisations and the Welsh Government but exclude GP practices and higher education establishments (ONS, 2016). This study specifically focused on participants from the Welsh public sector and local government organisations that have introduced hybrid working as a standard operating practice and operate in alignment with the Welsh Government's strategic initiative. NHS employees were excluded due to their varied work practices.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1) were applied to select participants who directly addressed the research question and met the study's specific requirements (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). These criteria were crucial for ensuring relevance, maintaining the focus on the Welsh public sector, and upholding rigour in selecting participants capable of offering meaningful insights into hybrid working experiences. Recruitment took place between July and November 2023 through several channels. Initially, a flyer (Appendix D) was shared on LinkedIn and HR Directors promoted this within their organisations. Additional promotion followed, through LinkedIn's Organisation Development Network and Twitter in November 2023. To maintain open recruitment, HR Directors served only to distribute the advertisement without acting as gatekeepers. Participant interview numbers were not strictly identified prior to commencing this study (Foley et al., 2021). Interested individuals signed and returned consent forms (Appendix F) via email, after which online interviews were scheduled via Microsoft Teams.

Table 1*Table of Exclusion and Inclusion Criteria for Sample*

Criteria Type	Description	Purpose
Inclusion	English-speaking employees, aged 18 or over, currently employed	Ensure participants can fully engage with the research and meet minimum employment and language requirements (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021)
	Employees working in the Welsh public sector (e.g., Local Authority, Welsh Government) or UK public sector offices located within Wales	Focus the study on participants with experiences specific to the Welsh public sector and hybrid working environments.
	Employees from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives	Capture a wide range of insights to enrich data and theory development.
Exclusion	Private sector employees	Maintain focus on the public sector to align with the study's scope.
	Self-employed or contract workers	Exclude participants whose employment circumstances differ significantly from those in long-term, public-sector roles.
	Employees on sick leave or long-term disability leave	Ensure participants are actively engaged in work to provide relevant data on hybrid working and performance.

3.3.3 Participant Sample

Both purposive and theoretical sampling were employed in this study. Purposive sampling aims to capture a diversity of cases, seeking heterogeneity (Emmel, 2013), whilst theoretical sampling employs a different logic, prioritising depth by selecting participants to develop and refine emerging categories (Conlon et al., 2020). This

iterative process allowed evolving categories to guide subsequent interviews, focusing on exploring category dimensions. Sample characteristics were not predetermined, supporting the study's goal to develop theory grounded in the data collected (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

Purposeful sampling was initially employed to select a small heterogeneous sample from diverse backgrounds within the Welsh public sector (Emmel, 2013). The first four volunteers provided a broad range of experiences, fulfilling the purposive sampling goal of diversity. Following this, theoretical sampling guided participant selection based on emerging theoretical concepts. After each interview, coding and data analysis informed the selection of subsequent participants from a waitlist, aligning with grounded theory methodology which develops theory from meaningful data (Conlon et al., 2020). Participants were added to a waitlist on a "first response" basis, and the first five interviews conducted in August 2023, revealed key themes, despite contextual variation. The next four participants, selected for further diversity in roles, gender, and seniority, were interviewed through August and September 2023. After nine interviews, analysis paused for comparative coding of emerging categories (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

Recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was reached. This was defined as the point where an emerging theory achieved sufficient "explanatory power" and no significant new insights were arising (Conlon et al., 2020, p. 957). An anticipated sample range of 12 to 30 participants was expected to yield a reasonable "conceptual output" for theory building through data analysis (Charmaz, 2014).

The final sample comprised 16 participants, employed across a range of Welsh public sector organisations, including six from UK central government located in Wales and the Welsh Government, and ten from eight different local authorities. Local authorities in Wales are responsible for delivering a wide range of statutory services such as education, social care, housing, environmental services, and planning, in accordance with legislation such as the Local Government Act 2000, Social Services

and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. In contrast, the Welsh Government focuses on devolved policy development, public sector strategy, and resource allocation across areas such as health, education, and economic development. UK central government departments represented in the study are responsible for non-devolved matters such as taxation, justice, statistics and immigration.

While the organisations differ in terms of scale, policy remit, and proximity to service delivery, they share common characteristics as public sector employers operating in Wales. All were subject to the wider Smarter Working policy agenda and had adopted some form of hybrid working in the post-restriction period. Most used similar digital infrastructure (such as Microsoft Teams, cloud storage, and shared technology platforms) and framed hybrid working through corporate policies that emphasised flexibility, sustainability, and workforce well-being. However, variation existed in how policies were implemented. Local authorities tended to allow service areas or team leaders discretion over office attendance and patterns of hybrid work, while central government departments were more likely to follow national policy mandates, such as the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) two-day office attendance requirement. These organisational differences were considered during data collection and analysis, in line with the study's use of theoretical sampling and a critical realist grounded theory approach.

3.3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews (Charmaz, 2014), conducted via Microsoft Teams, a widely accessible and secure video conferencing platform. This method allowed for a flexible and in-depth exploration of participants' experiences while providing a consistent framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Using Microsoft Teams enabled remote interviews, overcoming geographical constraints and facilitating participation from a diverse range of individuals. The platform's recording feature ensured that interviews were accurately captured for later transcription and

analysis. An interview guide was created as a starting point, recognising that semi-structured interviews evolve (Foley et al., 2021) (Appendix G). Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, with an average interview time of 55 minutes and was guided by the set of pre-determined open-ended questions.

In line with a critical realist paradigm, a realist, open style of questioning focused on asking what, how and why an event occurred (Mingers & Standing, 2017), aiming to uncover the causal factors impacting an employee's performance (Brönnimann, 2022). Participants were asked to define performance from their own perspective, a participant-driven approach that aligns with grounded theory methodology (Morse, 1994). This allows the study to capture a more nuanced and contextually rich understanding of performance, grounded in the individual experiences and perceptions of employees (Charmaz, 2006; Bryman, 2016). Openness to exploring and explicitly seeking clarification from participants ensured accurate interpretation of data. Theoretical sampling allowed an "opening up" of the inquiry in order to progress toward building theoretically positioned perspectives (Foley et al., 2021, p. 3). During the interviews, summarising and seeking participants agreement or clarification was conducted.

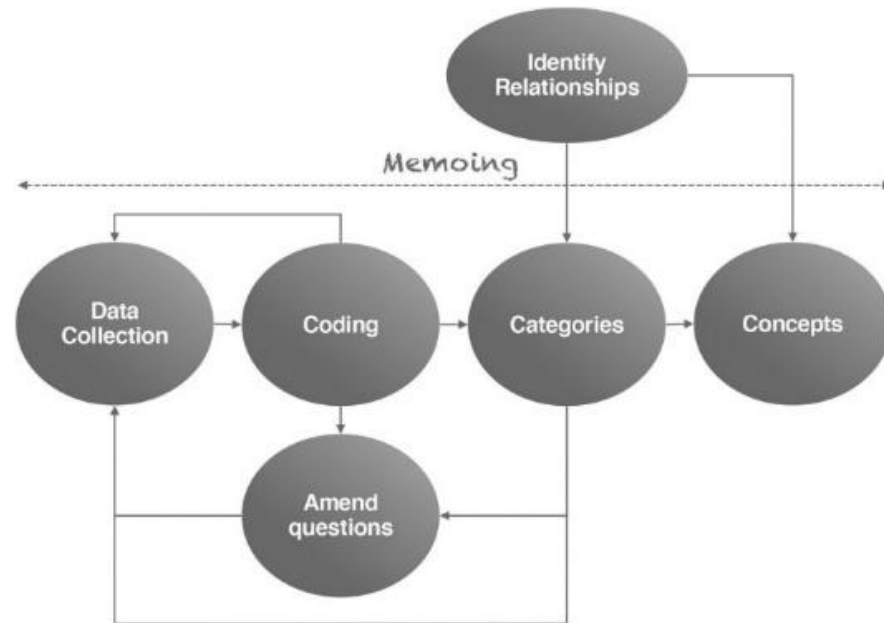
A standardised approach to data collection was adopted, with initial coding conducted immediately following each interview, to facilitate categorisation to form initial themes (Charmaz, 2014). The process of constant comparison, comparing data, codes and categories across different stages of data collection was applied after every interview. This encouraged the researcher to formulate new questions and gain fresh insights from subsequent participants (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). The approach also ensured systematic refinement of codes and categories, and the development of a conceptual framework grounded in the data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). Constant comparison also enabled a more manageable code list (Makri & Neely, 2021). The development of the codes then directed subsequent inquiry, with questions designed to "fill out the dimensions" of the emerging categories (Conlon et al., 2020, p. 955).

Demographic data, including participants gender, age, role/occupation, length of service, home and office location and qualifications were collected verbally at the close of each interview to effectively describe the sample and provide context (Charmaz, 2014).

In designing this study and interpreting the data, a range of contextual information was drawn upon to inform theoretical sampling, research question development, and analysis. This included Welsh policy documents such as the *Smarter Working Strategy* (Welsh Government, 2022), the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*, and public sector recovery plans following the COVID-19 pandemic. Sector-wide developments, such as digital transformation initiatives, staff resourcing challenges, and high-profile debates around mandatory office attendance, also provided important context. Additionally, media commentary, government announcements, and organisational strategies available in the public domain helped situate participant narratives within the wider sociopolitical environment. This contextual knowledge informed both the development of the interview schedule, and the interpretation of the mechanisms identified, in line with the critical realist aim of connecting individual experiences to underlying structures and causal processes.

3.3.5 Analysis

An iterative approach was undertaken, with each interview analysed immediately following completion, and subsequent interviews informed by earlier ones (Hoddy, 2019). Following initial coding, focused coding generated higher order categories, linking and comparing codes to explore variations under different conditions (Hoddy, 2019) and identify causal mechanisms (Makri & Neely, 2021; Meyer & Lunnay, 2013). As new data emerged, earlier transcripts were revisited to refine codes. Figure 2 explains the data analysis process.

Figure 2*Grounded Theory Data Analysis Process*

Note. From “Grounded Theory: A Guide for Exploratory Studies in Management Research” by Makri and Neely, 2021, Sage Journals. Reprinted with permission. (Makri & Neely, 2021)

Line by line coding of interview transcripts facilitated a detailed examination of the narrative (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). ATLAS Ti (v22) was used to store and organise all transcript data. Key codes and themes were identified using grounded theory techniques (Hoddy, 2019). Codes are labels assigned to segments of data to summarise and categorise them (e.g ‘relationships’), whereas themes are broader concepts that emerged after coding (such as ‘knowing’) (Charmaz, 2006).

Open, axial, and selective coding were used in the analysis process. Open coding generated initial codes directly from the data, while axial coding refined and related these codes by exploring their relationships. Selective coding then integrated these codes into a core category, identifying factors that influence performance (see Appendix H) (Hoddy, 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). This approach enabled systematic analysis within a critical realist grounded theory framework, with open coding identifying key concepts, axial coding exploring their relationships, and selective

coding synthesising them into a core theoretical framework (Kempster & Parry, 2011). The codes developed are defined and shown in Appendix I).

In addition, memos recorded the reflections of the researcher. These recorded a continual information flow between coding and comparing categories, contributing to explanations (Conlon et al., 2020). Appendix J provides examples of a memo. These highlight how memo'ing enabled the researcher to move beyond description to deeper analytical insights, ultimately strengthening the development of the grounded theory. In grounded theory, researcher reflexivity, especially "hypothesising" about the direction of inquiry focuses the researcher to pursue a fuller understanding of the topic under study (Conlon et al., 2020, p. 955).

3.3.5.1 Retroduction. The final analytical step involved retroductive analysis (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013). Whereas grounded theory usually employs an inductive logic, retroduction was employed in this analysis approach (Mingers & Standing, 2017). Deductive logic allows the comparison of data to an initial theoretical framework and inductive logic moves from specific observations to broader generalisations. However, retroductive analysis involves inferring the most plausible causes or mechanisms of an observed phenomena, as mechanisms can also be hidden (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013). Retroductive inference is a form of "counterfactual thinking" that provokes the researcher to understand the conditions under which something occurs and identify the circumstance without which something cannot exist (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013, p. 7). Retroduction enables the movement from describing what is happening, to inferring why it happens (McEvoy & Richards, 2006; Pawson et al., 2005). The use of retroductive logic allowed "a more comprehensive analysis of theoretically driven data", as data outside of any preexisting theoretical framework is considered meaningful to the discussion of the findings (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013, p. 1). Retroduction also identifies the contextual conditions aligned to the observations made, for a particular mechanism to take effect (Fletcher, 2020). An example of retroductive inference is shown in Appendix K.

Employing this more nuanced analytical inference enables an explanation of events and the social practices that may trigger events (Danermark, Ekstrom, et al., 2002). This approach differs from either inductive or deductive approaches as it facilitates novel theories and due to its context rich application, can allow for the modification of existing theories (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). Furthermore, retroductive inference enables the creation of a framework of explanation, illustrating mechanisms, events, and experiences which are best placed to demonstrate causal impact (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). The conceptual framework that emerged from the data and process of retroduction is described and illustrated in chapter 4 (Looker et al., 2021).

3.3.5.2 Discussion Chapter Approach. After the analysis, a systematic search for relevant literature ensured the emerging theoretical framework was grounded in the data rather than shaped by prior theoretical assumptions (Oliver, 2011). This review of literature aimed to support, refine and critically discuss the theory developed and is explored in chapter 5 (Thornberg & Dunne, 2019).

To ensure transparency and rigour in this phase of the study, a structured approach was adopted, whilst retaining flexibility consistent with the principles of grounded theory. Searches were conducted across multiple databases including Business Source Complete (EBSCO), Web of Science, and Google Scholar between March and May 2024, informed by the theoretical categories and mechanisms. Search terms combined keywords such as *hybrid working*, *remote work*, *teleworking*, *flexible work*, *employee performance*, *public sector* along with mechanism terms such as *manager*, and *organisational behaviour*. Boolean operators were used to connect concepts (for example “hybrid work” AND “performance”). Filters were initially applied to prioritise peer-reviewed journal articles published post-2015, aligning with post-pandemic relevance. However, as the review progressed, seminal or classic works were identified and included through backward citation tracking. These foundational texts, such as Bandura’s work on social learning (1977), did not always appear in digital searches but were referenced frequently in more recent papers. This ensured

the inclusion of conceptually significant sources beyond the indexing limits of modern databases. Studies were included if they offered conceptual or empirical insight into hybrid work conditions, particularly in knowledge intensive or public sector contexts. Exclusion applied to literature lacking discussion of performance, work design, or psychological/social factors.

The literature was reviewed using a constant comparison approach, with emerging mechanisms guiding selection and interpretation. Key findings and arguments were compared with data-derived categories. For example, the mechanism of *emotional and psychological detachment* was explored through related concepts such as *self-efficacy*. Similarly, *Knowing and Connecting* was explored through literature such as *organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs)* and *role clarity*. Unlike the initial review (chapter 2), this process was not exhaustive, but aimed for theoretical sufficiency, engaging with literature until no significant new insights emerged (Nathaniel, 2022). This aligns with the retroduction and theory-building logic of CRGT.

The scope of the review was intentionally broad, encompassing adjacent disciplines where relevant. For instance, in exploring *social learning*, foundational psychological theories were included where direct research on hybrid contexts was lacking. The search and selection were iterative and responsive, adapting to each mechanism as it emerged from the analysis. A summary of search strings and combinations is provided in Appendix L.

Decisions to conclude individual searches were also informed by the practical boundaries of doctoral research, including time constraints and the need to maintain focus on theory development rather than comprehensive mapping. Within these constraints, care was taken to ensure that searches were broad enough to capture both contemporary and foundational literature and deep enough to interrogate each mechanism meaningfully.

As Nathaniel (2022, p. 56) argues, literature reviewed at this stage need not be “an exhaustive” review of all related literature but should meaningfully enrich the

understanding of findings. This approach also supports the integration of literature as supplementary data to validate, extend, or refine theory (Charmaz, 2014; Hoddy, 2019). The process enhanced conceptual clarity and provided a more comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms influencing performance in hybrid work settings.

3.3.6 Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with Lancaster University's Faculty of Health and Medicine ethics guidance and procedures, which outlines the fundamental ethical principles and processes for proper governance and ethical oversight. Ethical approval was granted by the Lancaster University Research Ethics Committee, approval number: FHM-2023-3381-RECR-3. The research fully complied with the requirements embedding considerations such as lone working, data retention, data storage and deletion into both the study design and execution. The research was designed to prioritise and safeguard the welfare and interests of the participants. Key ethical principles were rigorously adhered to, including minimising the risk of harm; obtaining informed consent; protecting anonymity and confidentiality; avoiding deceptive practices; and granting the right to withdraw informed consent within two weeks following the interview. For example, whereas all participants are represented in chapter 4, if any person, team or organisation could be identifiable, a ['x'] in parenthesis has replaced the identifiable name or characteristic.

A potential risk for participants was identified regarding participants experiencing some distress during the interviews. Given that interview questions related to day-to-day professional experiences, this risk was assessed as low. Nevertheless, mechanisms were in place to safeguard participants. Participants were informed that they could pause or discontinue the interview at any time or withdraw their data without consequence within two weeks of the interview. If someone withdrew from the study, all transcript files and demographic information would be permanently deleted. All participants completed the study; none asked to withdraw. One participant

asked to pause the interview for ten minutes. Informed consent was obtained through a transparent process outlined in the 'Data Collection' section of this chapter.

To further protect confidentiality, strict measures were implemented to anonymise all personal and professional identifiers within the data. Digital files were transcribed directly through Microsoft Teams and stored on the secure university OneDrive. All data were password protected, and transcripts were anonymised by removing any identifiable organisational data prior to analysis. Identifying information will be retained for 10 years post-study after which it will be destroyed. Interviews were transcribed verbatim automatically using Microsoft Teams built-in transcription feature. Quality assurance and corrections were made by the researcher to facilitate familiarisation and gather initial insights (Fryer, 2022). Each participant was assigned a respectful pseudonym to further protect anonymity (Heaton, 2021). No repeat interviews were conducted, and transcripts were not returned to participants for comment or correction. Contact details for participants who requested to receive a summary of study results were retained. Only the researcher had access to the raw data, which was stored securely in compliance with data protection laws. By actively addressing these ethical considerations throughout the research, the study complied with formal ethical standards, demonstrated a deep commitment to safeguarding participant well-being, and ensured the integrity of the data collection process.

3.3.7 Researcher Positionality

The researcher worked in the UK public service in Wales for 30 years, across five government departments. During this time, workplace culture did not support flexible working, and she worked exclusively from the office. As a senior leader, she approved flexible working requests, recognising their importance for employee welfare and performance. However, these requests were typically for reduced hours rather than hybrid working, as at the time, available technology did not support effective remote communication between office-based and remote colleagues.

The researcher left the public sector 10 years ago, which created some distance from current workplace challenges, including advancements in communication technologies and evolving employee expectations. However, her work as a consultant in workplace performance keeps her informed of current practices. Her familiarity with recent research through Masters' level study in areas such as autonomy, self-determination theory, and leadership style, enhances her awareness of performance facilitators, which may introduce unconscious bias, but also offers theoretical sensitivity (Charmaz, 2006). Archer (2003) however, highlights that while reflexivity shapes how researchers interact with social systems, the existence of these structures are not dependent on the researcher's perspective. This differs from more relativist approaches, that see knowledge as shaped by the researcher's perspective.

To mitigate potential biases, such as considering theoretical assumptions, the researcher actively engaged in reflexive practices throughout the study, regularly reflecting on how her personal experiences and assumptions could influence data collection and analysis. Reflexivity is central to critical realism, where acknowledging the researcher's positionality is crucial for ensuring rigor without allowing personal perspectives to determine the nature of the inquiry. The researcher used participant validation by summarising conversations to ensure her interpretations aligned with participants' perspectives, helping to mitigate any imposition of her own assumptions (Etherington, 2004). Constant memo'ing (Charmaz, 2006) also helped as a critical tool to track the development of ideas and potential biases, ensuring transparency and critical self-evaluation during the analysis process. This reflexive approach aligns with Archer's (2003) emphasis on how researchers' internal conversations shape their engagement with social structures while recognising that those structures exist independently of any one perspective.

Personal experience informed the choice of a CRGT approach, as the researcher's view is shaped by a belief in the relationship between organisations and employee performance. The researcher acknowledges that organisations strive to

construct workplaces in a manner that facilitates performance using policies, processes and structures (O'Mahoney, 2016). However, they also acknowledge that performance is shaped by social interactions and contextual factors, such as individual perspectives (Edwards et al., 2014). Experiences such as teamwork, managerial effectiveness and communication play a significant role influencing employee performance (Breevaart et al., 2015). Additionally, the researcher recognised that social relationships and beliefs exist regardless of an employee's awareness of them (Sparrow & Cooper, 2014). This perspective of the coexistence of social structures and human agency shaped the researcher's philosophical approach. By reflecting on how these factors influence this research, the researcher was aware of how their background and experiences may shape data interpretation.

Critical realism and grounded theory are particularly suited to studying work and organisations, especially in the post-restriction period context where organisations seek to reconcile individual employee preferences with the external reality of work performance demands (Edwards et al., 2014). Importantly, Archer (2003) emphasises that while researchers must acknowledge their own positionality, unlike other paradigms, their subjective perspectives do not determine the reality being studied. Instead, critical realist research enables the focus to be on uncovering objective structures and mechanisms that exist independently of the researcher.

3.3.8 Research Quality Principles

This research methodology was evaluated against Yardley's (2008) four quality principles: transparency and coherence, commitment and rigour, impact and importance and sensitivity to context. Transparency regarding the study's motivations and an openness to new information and concepts are essential for this grounded theory approach, representing both quality and rigour (Thornberg & Dunne, 2019). Data collection was conducted thoroughly and systematically, initially using line by line coding. This transparency was further evidenced through detailed memo'ing, which became more definitive as data collection progressed (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

By following a systematic approach, deeply exploring the participants' worlds and seeking emerging patterns, the research ensured a common treatment of data, enabling transparency in researcher decision making (Ritchie et al., 2013). This robust, transparent process, coupled with a deep engagement with the data via retroductive analysis, increased commitment and rigour (Ritchie et al., 2013).

Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) argue that the credibility of qualitative research lies in detailed, transparent descriptions of data and collection methods. Credible findings must resonate with the context in which they are applied and be accessible to practitioners in the field (Yardley, 2007). This study achieves credibility by grounding the findings and the conceptual framework in participants' experiences, offering valuable insights into the evolving phenomena of hybrid work. The resulting framework enhances our understanding of hybrid work but shows practical applicability. By reflecting the social realities of the participants, it offers explanatory power, enabling practitioners to interpret how the theory might function in their own contexts. This alignment between theoretical insight and practical relevance ensures that the research is both impactful and meaningful (Yardley, 2007). Furthermore, the framework's coherence and applicability reinforce its value, aligning with Charmaz and Thornberg's (2021) criteria for impactful and credible qualitative research.

To enhance the rigour of this research, supervisory discussions provided critical assurance regarding data interpretation. These discussions helped avoid assumptions and misinterpretations, challenged emerging themes and categories and supported the re-conceptualisation of employee performance in hybrid working settings. This iterative process of critical engagement with the data supported the development of a theory that is both rigorous and credible. Furthermore, the research demonstrates a sensitivity to context and coherence, two key principles of quality in qualitative research (Yardley, 2008). The methodology emphasises realist validity, which focusses on developing causal mechanisms through the close correspondence with participants' interview data (Brönnimann, 2022). Realist validity ensures that findings accurately reflect the

mechanisms, structures, and contexts shaping hybrid working (Maxwell, 2012).

Additionally, the resulting conceptual framework was compared to existing theoretical literature, highlighting key differences and extending theoretical understanding. Finally, this research illuminates both the applied and sociocultural impacts of hybrid working contributing valuable insights to the field and demonstrating the broader impact of the research (Yardley, 2007).

Chapter 4: Findings

This findings of this research study are presented in this chapter, beginning with an overview of the sample (section 4.1) and a description of hybrid working (section 4.2). The ways in which employees experience hybrid working are explored (section 4.3). Findings are presented according to each research objective. Sections 4.5 and 4.6 provide a detailed analysis of the ten causal mechanisms identified. These include five enabling mechanisms that support performance: strong relationships, clear performance expectations, in-person opportunities, managerial capability, and organisational citizenship behaviour. Conversely, five hindering mechanisms are identified: emotional detachment, low social homeostasis, low accountability, lack of job redesign, and absence of social learning. The chapter concludes with the presentation of a critical realist grounded theory model of performance in hybrid work settings (section 4.7), which was developed directly from the data and emphasises the factors and mechanisms that influence employee performance in these environments.

Throughout this chapter, participants describe both their own experiences and their perceptions of others' behaviour. Where relevant, whether the account is based on personal experience, management practice, or observed/assumed behaviour is noted.

4.1 Participant Sample

The following section provides an overview of the study's participants and their diverse characteristics. A total of 16 public sector employees participated in the study between July 2023 and March 2024 (see Table 3). 7 participants were male and 9 participants female. Participants ranged in age from 25 years to 63 years with a median age group 45-60. Organisation tenure ranged from three months to 34 years. Ten participants were employed by eight different Local Authorities. There are 22 Local Authorities within Wales. Six participants were employed by either UK, Welsh Government or an organisation regulated by Welsh Government whose office and home are located within Wales and subject to Welsh public sector policies. The sample

included two junior executives, four middle executives, four middle leaders and six senior leaders.

Quotations are used to illustrate the data throughout, and participants are identified by the letter “P” and a number (1 through 16).

Table 3

Participant Characteristics

Participant	Age range	Gender	Position ⁱ	Organisation ⁱⁱ	Tenure ⁱⁱⁱ (years)
1	45 - 60	Female	Senior Leader	Local Authority	30
2	45 - 60	Female	Junior	Local Authority	5
3	18 - 29	Female	Senior Leader	Local Authority	<1
4	45 - 60	Male	Middle	Local Authority	25
5	45 - 60	Female	Senior Leader	Local Authority	<1
6	30 - 44	Male	Middle Leader	Local Authority	2
7	45 - 60	Female	Middle Leader	Local Authority	8
8	45 - 60	Female	Senior Leader	Central Government	5
9	18 - 29	Male	Middle	Welsh Government	<1
10	45 - 60	Female	Senior Leader	Local Authority	30
11	45 - 60	Female	Middle	Local Authority	33
12	45-60	Female	Senior Leader	Welsh Government	5
13	30-44	Male	Middle Leader	Local Authority	<1
14	30-44	Male	Junior	Local Authority	2
15	45-60	Male	Middle Leader	Local Authority	34
16	45-60	Male	Middle	Local authority	8

ⁱ Junior (includes administrative, executive roles) and Middle (includes higher executive and senior executive roles) denotes the equivalent pay band of participants without team leadership responsibility. Senior Leader (roles above senior executive officer) and Middle Leader (roles above higher executive officer) denotes those participants managing teams ranging from 2 to 200+ Institute for Government. (2017). *Grade Structures of the Civil Service*. <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/grade-structures-civil-service>.

ⁱⁱ Local Authority denotes organisations such as County and Town Councils. Welsh Government denotes either the Welsh Government or public organisations that are sponsored or regulated by Welsh Government. StatsWales. (2024). *Employment in the public and private sectors by Welsh local authority and status* StatsWales. <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Business-Economy-and-Labour-Market/People-and-Work/Employment/Persons-Employed/publicprivatesectoremployment-by-welshlocalauthority-status>

ⁱⁱⁱ Tenure means years in the current organisation.

4.2 Hybrid Work Description

All participants reported that their current hybrid work arrangements required them to attend the office two or more days per week. Participants confirmed that hybrid working was not in place in their organisations prior to 2020. A shift to remote working began in March 2020 due to the pandemic, and hybrid arrangements had continued after the pandemic-restriction period. Despite the publication of the All-Wales Remote Working Strategy in September 2020, which encouraged public sector organisations to implement hybrid work arrangements, only one participant had experienced contractual changes explicitly setting out hybrid work expectations. Most participants expressed a preference for working at least three days from home and were confident that this arrangement would remain unchanged in the future. Throughout this chapter, references to the number of days participants attended the office are included where relevant to contextualise their experiences.

4.3 Experiences of Hybrid Working

Attention was given to the organisational implementation of the hybrid work arrangement. Participants indicated the arrangement had naturally continued informally after the pandemic restriction period, with no discussion between the organisation and employee and no contractual change. The ambiguity of arrangements was highlighted by almost all participants:

There's nothing formalised really, and you could work five days a week from home if that's what you wanted to do, and it's sort of just built upon sort of an understanding that people do come in to do work occasionally. (P13)

Such opaqueness has led to hybrid arrangements morphing into more “*working from home*” arrangements, with one participant confirming that only “*between 10-20% of our office space is being used, if that*” (P10). This has led to a significant reduction in office attendance and arrangements more akin to remote working.

Only one of the employing public sector organisations represented in this study had negotiated a deliberate policy decision to move to hybrid working after the pandemic restriction period. This commenced late 2021 and followed a job design project to separate organisational roles into three categories. One of the categories comprised hybrid / agile working. Implementation involved Trades Union negotiation and contractual changes for all employees. Employees were clear regarding office attendance and ‘*work at home*’ days which were specified in writing. No on-site health and safety risk assessments had been undertaken: “*no one visited anyone's home*” (P16). One participant captured how responsibility for the employer to support a safe, healthy work location within an employee’s home has been largely overlooked, with all the implications this may have for inequality:

Quite cheeky to expect that every individual has got the best broadband because that's something that the individual has to pay for, and we haven't really grasped that I don't think, as employers on a grand scale. And not everybody has somewhere lovely to work from and wherever they live, and they might be in a shared accommodation, they might only have a studio flat. They could have seven children and now they could have their parents, there's a whole host isn't there? And the more we all use our backdrop, the more oblivious to some of that chaos we become, don't we, about what's going on? (P5)

According to a senior leader (Participant 1), the organisation missed an opportunity to re-clarify work/family boundaries and performance expectations during the transition to home working. They believed this contributed to contradictions

between policy and observed practice. This participant associated the lack of clarity to what they described as current unsatisfactory performance levels. Reflecting on the early pandemic period, they noted that because home working appeared to function adequately at the time, there was no urgent need to reset expectations, which in hindsight has led to longer-term ambiguity: “[*During the pandemic*] *It was working for us, and we made this assumption that would be the experience for everyone. But it's not panning out like that at the moment*” (P1).

In November 2023, during the research period, following concerns that employees were remote working extensively, the UK government mandated that all hybrid working civil service employees should return to the office for a minimum of two days per week from March 2024. This included all central government employees located within Wales, impacting three of the study participants. Each were asked their intentions. They all indicated that they were establishing a new pattern of a minimum two days in-person office attendance. One commented: “*And I'm glad, as I was going to go back anyway. I was missing people at home*” (P15). Another commented that a return to more office working was needed because: “*It's just not the same*”.

4.4 How Hybrid Work Impacts Employee's Performance

To understand performance in the context of this study, each participant was asked to explain how they and their line manager interpreted their performance. Many commented that in the past, performance was stated within objectives as part of an annual performance appraisal process conducted by their line manager. Since 2020, many public sector organisations in Wales have ceased formal performance appraisal systems, preferring instead to focus attention on informal discussions involving goal setting and personal development. Many participants stated these conversations no longer took place, leaving room for “*confusion*” or “*uncertainty*” over what constitutes performance. Furthermore, almost all participants were unable to clearly set out how their performance is formally measured. Participant 1 shared that:

As a Council, we probably are struggling to measure performance. So, we just use productivity and people say, 'oh yeah, I'm a lot more productive when I work from home'. You know, I'm not standing in the kitchen chatting, so I do churn out a lot more work than I used to do, but I don't know if my performance has improved.

All participants except three, felt that their productivity had improved, though not necessarily their performance. Productivity was characterised as responding promptly to emails, participating in virtual meetings, and being online for longer. There were frequent references to a lack of commuting enabling longer working hours: *"I save time on my commute into the office so I can just start straight away, start working. I work longer hours"* (P13), though it was unclear how the hours were utilised.

For the purposes of this study, participants described the factors that supported their own performance, based on their individual understanding of what performance meant in their role. These self-defined performance outputs varied by role and included activities such as participating in stakeholder meetings, writing policy documents, responding to customer queries, engaging in team discussions, leading and managing others, compiling data analysis, and writing reports. Some participants described their own direct actions, while others, particularly those in managerial roles also reflected on the performance of their teams or colleagues.

4.4.1 Impact on Organisational Level Performance

Participants shared measures such as customer service, complaints, staff sickness absence, and turnover as indicators of organisational performance. These were described as commonly used measures within their teams or departments. No participants provided clear evidence that these measures had improved following the implementation of hybrid working. However, several participants, particularly those in leadership roles noted a perceived decline in these metrics. One senior leader explicitly

linked the shift to hybrid working with what they described as a deterioration in overall organisational performance:

Complaints. They're back to the levels that they were previously. Our sickness absence is back to the level it was pre-covid. So even though we've got hybrid working, [employee] absence is up.....we've got stress and fatigue going together and mental health as a category and we've just done an analysis and we've seen it going up. (P1)

Furthermore, employee turnover has increased in several organisations partially attributed to an inability to connect with colleagues and the organisation: *"that is resulting in quite a lot of people leaving, a lot of people saying that they don't see how their role fits into the organisation"* (P12). Two participants commented upon increases in whistleblowing claims, subject access and freedom of information requests from inside and outside the organisation. A disconnection between service providers, communities and employees was blamed for driving a decline in trust: *"I question the link there with the visibility of the [organisation] and connections. The number of whistleblowing complaints has gone up"* (P10). Increases in claims of inequity from employees unable to hybrid work have also increased: *"we've got case management like we've never experienced before"* (P10).

4.4.2 Impact on Employee Performance

This study was not designed to quantitatively measure the impact of hybrid work on performance but to explore the factors that influence it. The context within which these mechanisms operate was a key consideration. Although public sector employees are expected to engage in performance discussions and agreements, evidence of such accountability was limited. Managers expressed discomfort with their inability to reliably measure employee performance, highlighting ongoing concerns regarding trust. However, the shift to hybrid work has decreased the reliance on *"non-verbal"* (P15) cues such as body language and increased the use of written communication instead.

This shift has created a new way to assess remote performance, as written records provide tangible evidence for managing colleagues' remote performance: *"You go looking at a Team's chat, a long Team's chat, or you're looking through your emails and you've got a lot more evidence quite quickly that actually I'm not making this up"* (P8).

Most participants were unable to provide evidence of any performance improvement attributable to hybrid working. Whilst many appreciated the comfort and convenience of working from home, some noted that different performance standards are being applied in this context: *"I guess at home, there's like a much lower bar, isn't there?"* (P14). Several participants, including managers also expressed concerns about employee performance declining: *"I think in terms of performance now we're in a lull"* (P12). A lack of transparency and consistency regarding perceptions of performance was evident across the sample. The inability to identify clear examples of improved performance aligns to the absence of both outcome measurement and productive discussion regarding efficiency. Indeed, one senior leader reflected on this reluctance to confront performance concerns, stating: *"I think we're a lot slower to accept that it may not be working for everyone [be]cause we don't want it to change"* (P1). Participants' experiences highlighted significant ambiguity around performance in hybrid work settings, with perceptions often shaped by subjective impressions rather than measurable outcomes.

4.5 Factors that Enable Employee Performance when Hybrid Working

"You know, having good working relationships with people helps me to perform" (P1)

Data revealed that conditions that facilitate 'knowing' about people, work and processes are helpful to performance when hybrid working. Knowing refers to knowing colleagues across the organisation and within one's team and includes interpersonal relationship building, harnessing shared understanding, and enabling mutual support. This

leads to building social capital, the ability to create networks and build trusting relationships, that enable individuals to work together effectively to achieve shared goals (Dubos & Cook, 2017).

4.5.1 Knowing

Knowing who and how colleagues are within the organisation enables performance. When employees have an existing network of social relationships and actively maintain that network, they are more able to know who to ask for help and less likely to feel vulnerable or judged for help seeking. When employees know colleagues, they are more prepared to share knowledge and information and are more open to learning from others. Employees are more likely to engage in debate and discussion with colleagues they know. Knowing enables employees to feel competent. When working remotely, employees do not always know who to ask or where to access information resulting in making poor judgements, avoiding work, or making mistakes. Whilst knowing people provides access to fresh resources and diverse insight, not knowing who people are reduces opportunities for growth and performance. Overall, work-based relationships increase the potential for feeling safe and competent. In addition, knowing the organisation, its processes, systems and culture means employees feel more connected to what is required to perform.

Knowing who people are and what they do, optimises 'connections', builds trust for increasing knowledge and accessing resources, and initiates cooperation and reciprocity. Such conditions emphasise the significance of in-person contact over online communication, encouraging a greater balance of remote and in-person contact that truly defines work that is 'hybrid'. Participants shared how deeper connections across the organisation improves their skills and teamwork and can enhance their competence and self-efficacy. Knowing enables connections with other people and with information. In turn, connecting facilitates knowing what is required to perform; both are key factors that enable performance.

4.5.1.1 Building and maintaining relationships. All participants commented on how important it was to know who people were in the organisation, to enable their own performance and build ongoing relationships. Good relationships facilitate speed of communication and learning through the ability to take “short cuts” by easily knowing who to call and asking for help or advice. The importance of asking questions when unsure and feeling comfortable to call colleagues was emphasised. This is enabled through existing trusting relationships: *“I’m really lucky in that respect because I’ve got really good working relationships, and you never feel like you’re being judged if you ask a question”* (P7). Existing connections more easily enable the ability to ask for support and build professional confidence: *“Helps you organise your thoughts, when you’re talking out loud with people [you know]”* (P11). Additionally, the importance of building secure relationships underpins the social interaction required for help seeking:

You could build relationships if you see people more regular. You do kind of build that informal relationship and that does help you. Then if you need to ring someone for a bit of help, you know them a little bit, you’re probably gonna feel a bit more comfortable ringing them to ask some questions. (P6)

Conversely, new employees are at a disadvantage without existing relationships. They are unable to understand the relatedness between people, departments, and processes. Being assisted with an introduction schedule when arriving in an organisation is one way to help establish new relationships: *“I had a good skeleton of who to see and what to do, and some of the things I found more difficult, is working out who’s who to ask”* (P5). Being proactive when new is also key to performance success: *“I found a rhythm of when other people that I’d like to see face to face, were more around or less around”* (P5). Therefore, identifying who may need help when working remotely is a key requirement when hybrid working. Demonstrating pro-social behaviour and cultivating *“the habit of noticing”* (P8) who requires what, are important

attributes for employees to feel connected and supported. Existing employees were also keen to know new employees and find it problematic and frustrating when there is no process for introducing new employees into teams and across the organisation:

If there was a new starter before, managers would take them around the office and introduce them to people. So, you put a face to a name virtually straight away. I was talking to one of our [x] officers last week, she'd been with us for six months and it was the first time that I had spoken to her. So, I think that's probably, it's a shame because how did I know? (P1)

Knowing people also enables managers to identify who *“can be trusted to push on that elastic a lot more because they'll get the job done”* (P5). When managers know people well, they are better able to support performance: *“I like having quite an informal understanding of where everybody is ... Whether that's a good thing or a bad thing”* (P5). Maintaining relationships and authentic interest in others facilitates a healthy reciprocal relationship: *“we find reasons to ring people on a regular basis even if we don't want to talk work, just to keep those relationships going”* (P1).

4.5.1.2 Clarity of Performance. Participants shared how knowing their role and required deliverables facilitates performance. Several managers also noted how hybrid working requires a greater level of clarity and a shared understanding over expected outcomes due to the lack of spontaneous opportunities to realign or correct assumptions. One senior leader reflected: *“Some people need that. You know, they need to know that they've got those very firm square boundaries, and they are there, and this is it”* (P5). When employees are unclear, it leads to frustration: *“I'm doing lots of work and I'm presenting it to them, but I don't know if that's what they want”* (P12). Knowing what is expected when working remotely is helpful as hybrid work limits the potential for regular, incidental feedback or clarifying conversations. Despite this need, several participants commented that opportunities to create clarity are lacking: *“one to*

ones are still supposed to take place on a regular basis, but the reality is they don't (P16). Indeed, the disconnect between clarity of expectations and real time delivery was illustrated by one manager who expressed: *"People are busy, but they're not busy doing the right things"* (P12).

Keeping in contact and creating new ways to understand the *"temperature"* of the employee and the team supports clarity of understanding: *"because you don't see people, you have to find a way to do that temperature check, if you're not seeing them all the time"* (P5). *"Daily catch ups"* (P15), informal one to one weekly *"check-in"* meetings and monthly in-person sessions to discuss work progress and *"problems"* (P7) are effective ways to support hybrid performance and verify employees are aligned around the team goals. In addition, such contact *"facilitates performance. I suppose that's a bit of a motivational thing, just to keep in contact, keep the regular communication going to help motivate"* (P7). Several managers felt that regular in-person team sessions also offer an opportunity to enable belonging, providing a *"sense of being part of an organisation"* (P16) and facilitate a team performance focus, *"anchoring"* (P9) employees to the organisation. One senior leader employs a regular face to face meeting of their teams to share news directly:

What's going well, a bit of a brag about what they've achieved, whether there's any digital transformation, whether they've heard anything, all of those nice things that you should know about what's going on. And then anything that they really think is getting on their nerves and no one's done anything with. (P5)

Encouraging teams to take joint responsibility for their team performance outputs and present together regularly to senior leadership or colleagues on team contributions was one way shared by a manager to ensure responsibilities were fully understood and performance delivered across a team:

Each of the directorates go in and present to the Executive Committee the performance of the year for your team. So, you know it, which is good because you're able then to showcase, you know, the work that you've been doing in the year, but also on the flip side of that, that helps the team. (P12)

Several managers believed that coming together enables employees to feel connected to the organisations purpose through collective problem solving and recognising their collective contribution in a meaningful way: *"We've got a lot of solutions to offer as one team rather than as a marginalised, disparate group of people"* (P5).

4.5.2 Connecting

Coming together in-person enables connections. When employees connect with others, resources and knowledge are more likely to be shared. Employees are more able to *"connect the dots"* and understand how individuals contribute to the wider organisation and how teams interconnect instead of operating *"in a bubble"*. Importantly, employees feel more or less connected to others contingent on time spent in-person together. The more days colleagues spend in person, discussing work, sharing progress and socialising, the more feelings of connection are felt leading to improved performance. The quality of the connection felt with managers is also a consideration. Failing to connect with colleagues or managers reduces the potential for sharing knowledge, mutual commitment, and collaboration.

4.5.2.2 In-person: Optimising Learning and Knowledge Sharing. All participants shared the importance of connecting with others in-person to better understand work progress and issues and to learn from each other. Managers particularly, highlighted the importance of in-person connections to also build relationships of trust. In-person time was highlighted to raise energy levels as colleagues discuss what is happening in teams:

So, in-person. You might connect to them a bit more. You'll have more of a bounce, and if you're not building up that trust early on, it's taking longer, I think. So, I personally don't think it's as effective unless you build regular check-ins with people, but that's in-person. (P12)

Being together in-person encourages sharing of ideas and access to resources enhancing performance in a way that online meetings fail to do: "*There's that element of discussion, isn't there? I think it just it releases ideas and things when you discuss stuff*" (P11). In-person conversations also enable more effective influencing: "*I met with the half a dozen people who I wanted to sell it to....online, it wouldn't have been the same*" (P4).

Whilst employees recognised the value of office days for "*the social aspect*" (P2) and "*to basically be mixing with people to see people and to have an adult conversation*" (P15), the perception for most participants is that days working from home are more productive: "*most people say they find they're much more productive at home. Obviously from a managerial perspective, it's harder to sort of monitor what your team are doing*" (P9). Managers disagreed, emphasising in-person sessions as crucial to create a sense of team cohesion and professional development: "*People are not really connecting with each other to really help them to grow. More of that action learning set approach is needed where people learn and hear from each other*" (P11). This dissonance is highlighted by some participants expressing resistance to the requirement to attend in-person activities. Feelings of guilt when attending the office were also shared as time there did not always feel productive: "*Haven't seen them for ages, but I really shouldn't be talking to them because I've got to get on with work*" (P11). Overcoming such resistance when creating in-person opportunities requires intentional managerial effort and planning:

They've got to keep in touch with their staff. They can't be like, blasé about things. They can't just sort of hope that things sort of carry on working and someone's gotta be like smart to be able to schedule work ... Planning ahead [is needed]. (P13)

Perhaps predictably, participants reported feelings of disconnection from colleagues they no longer saw regularly, sharing how they avoided people and conversations: *"I genuinely do feel conflicted sometimes when I'm there trying to, you know, like get on with my stuff. If I'd been working there every day, I would have had that conversation"* (P11). These patterns of behaviour lead to decoupling from others and reduce collaboration and connections: *"this organisation is fragmented because people are entrenched into silos and what they're not doing is that cross team connection"* (P11). Several managers identified that encouraging employees to embrace any unease associated with attending in-person and lean into the need to flex between home and office locations is a new phenomenon and a much-needed capability required for performance of both employees and managers:

I've unpicked that with my own team. There was an administrator in the office, and she said 'Oh well, I don't clear as many emails in the office. I said, well, let's look at what we talked about today. What have you learned today? I've heard about this, this and this. I said, you wouldn't have learned that at home, she said 'no, I wouldn't have'. (P11)

Several managers described the importance of reframing the purpose of in-person or office attendance to help overcome negativity associated with returning to the workplace. One senior leader suggested positioning the office as *"a place of learning now, with a different output from home"* (P12) in contrast to the more individualised, task-focused nature of home-based work. By helping employees see the

office as a place to “*connect*”, “*learn*” and “*problem solve*”, managers could counteract a growing perception that office attendance is a “*distraction from work*”. This reframing requires intentional communication from managers, as the same senior leader explained: “*By me pointing it out to them it's a different type of work. You're learning this*” (P12). Another manager proposed that leaders more actively identify “*moments that matter*” (P8), creating time that adds value to employees, enabling teams to share expertise and collaboratively problem solve leading to increased self-efficacy and confidence. These purposeful interactions were seen as enhancing team self-efficacy and confidence. When facilitated with quality questions, in-person connections make a difference to performance, as they described: “*Works really well. They'll come up with topics. How can we make this better? Are we working as effectively as we can? How are we communicating amongst each other*” (P8).

4.5.2.3 Manager Capability. As hybrid working enables increased employee autonomy and independent working, the role of the manager as a facilitator of team cohesion, is exemplified. Enabling performance through “*facilitated*” relationships when teams are “*dispersed*” (P10) was considered critical to the success of hybrid working.

4.5.2.3.1 Emotional intelligence. Both employees and managers maintained that the ability to perceive, interpret, and use emotions to communicate with and relate to others constructively is considered a key factor for performance when hybrid working. Participants felt that being alert to changes in an employee’s mindset and well-being, particularly when they are mainly working remotely, is prerequisite for managing effectively:

They need to build their emotional intelligence and resilience. I think they're two key elements which are important. Managers are not understanding themselves before they understand others. So, I think that is a key component particularly for new managers. (P12)

Participants aligned this attribute to the benefits of in-person time with managers, expressing how managers displaying emotional intelligence contributes specifically to their performance. In-person contact also enables managers to engage dynamically and provide clear direction:

It's about building relationships, trust, understanding. You know, I'm quite a fast worker and across (MS)Teams, fast don't always swallow, you know. So, I think it's being able to have that human dynamic, just to set the right path and not for people to be on parallels. To push for performance to make sure things are clear. (P10)

Displaying emotional intelligence enables managers to motivate employees directly and demonstrate how the organisation values and recognises the importance of what they do: *"I suppose it's keeping the business on track, isn't it? And then there's the, you know, you're a valued worker in [this organisation]. You're working in my team. Let's be in the team together"* (P10).

However, the change in context to hybrid from office working means acknowledging the ambiguity of employees flexing their hours to suit their own circumstances. This arrangement creates new performance risks: *"I think that's part of what we're going to have to manage going forward because otherwise some people will do everything, and some people will do nothing"* (P5). Both the cultural and context shift following the pandemic, also creates wider organisational risks. The significance of navigating new employer responsibilities and work boundaries when employees work within their own homes is highlighted by the following quote. It sheds light on a new challenge for employers, as children at home during a working day featured in several interviews:

Our managers mentioned potential safeguarding concerns. That you even care for the children properly, depending on what their ages are and things like that? It is

difficult from a people perspective because obviously we're just looking at the employee, aren't we? Just trying to provide support and help the manager manage it. I wouldn't say we're necessarily experts around those wider safeguarding concerns. (P14)

Navigating individual employees work autonomy and the ensuing resentment of colleagues is also a new capability. Employee led arrangements require sensitivity to manage, particularly when work responses are delayed, and colleagues are not contactable despite access to technology at home:

To have your child home all day and work all night, it's really not a good option for them, for their well-being. Plus, if you need to contact that person, you can never get hold of them. They're working all night, so that's where it's gone. Where people say, well, actually, it doesn't work for me. I can never get hold them because they're working all evening, and the work is delayed. (P12)

The ability of managers to handle increasingly sensitive situations was doubted. Managers at all levels were considered ill-equipped to cope with contemporary hybrid management. The emotional sensitivity required to pursue difficult conversations when employees work remotely was strongly emphasised: *"I think some managers just find it really difficult to have some of those conversations online. They feel very direct, it feels much more like an interrogation rather than a conversation"* (P5). This finding is significant as whether the line manager was perceived as approachable and supportive or inaccessible and indifferent was key to how the employee was experiencing hybrid work and was associated with their performance. Explicitly spending one to one time with employees and displaying *"compassionate leadership"*, *"coaching skills"* and *"empathy"* were all important attributes when managing hybrid workers: *"so that we understand what their needs are"* (P5). Participant 3 shared how the close relationship

with their manager was integral to their work approach and how a lack of suitable contact impacts performance:

For me as an employee, I like being line managed. I really enjoy it. It just makes my life so much easier. However, I do think it [hybrid work] must have such a huge impact on performance and how people perform because I don't feel like I perform as well as I could. It cannot go on forever in this same way.

In addition to the manager attributes and qualities, the nature of the relationship between employee and manager was also a factor for performance. Participant 11 revealed how the transactional behaviour of their manager affected them adversely: *"He contacts me on e-mail. He will e-mail criticisms and issues that he's got. He doesn't tell you or see your face"*. Similarly, one senior leader shared how they are becoming more disconnected from their team as they find it difficult to have quality, caring conversations with employees remotely. Their story of wanting to show empathy yet feeling distant highlighted this:

As a manager of more years than I think, I'd have had somebody come in a room, we'd have had a proper discussion and that kind of allowed him to be upset and allowed him that time to sort of talk through that and talk about how he was feeling. And I probably feel that it's easier now to shut me down in a virtual environment. (P8)

4.5.2.3.2 Skills. The skills required to manage performance in a hybrid environment are therefore distinct from those required in a traditional wholly office environment where relationships develop, and performance management occurs spontaneously. The shift in priorities to supporting people for remote and independent performance requires a level of proactivity and intentionality: *"Just dip in here and there*

to just quality check that it's [performance] where it should be, saves lots of time in the long run" (P5). Developing the thoughtfulness to engage with individual team members and taking the initiative to facilitate regular check-ins for effective teamwork are important new skills. *"Performance coaching"* skills (P10) that enable independent thinking and self-directed problem solving are now required for performance: *"I've got a new manager in my team and it's, yeah, it's taking a bit of work. It's the communication skills and it's about coaching style, using a coaching approach as well is key"* (P12). The expectation that such conversations are undertaken *"face to face"* (P10) for *"building relationships"* and ensuring *"understanding"* was emphasised by several participants.

Specific communication skills are required to provide absolute clarity regarding roles and expected performance outcomes. These skills involve careful *"explaining"*, *"discussion"*, *"questioning"*, and *"listening"* leading to agreement. Facilitating regular performance discussions ensures *"expectations"* about performance are shared and understood. Understanding and regularly discussing the wider organisation purpose and setting aligned goals and targets avoids confusion and can act as a mechanism for rebutting any possible substitutes for performance: *"So we've got what we call goals. They're measured and discussed. I think the phrase is a 'culture of conversation'"* (P8). Following the introduction of hybrid working, bringing employees together to regularly understand the organisation's wider purpose and celebrate achievements in the context of public service has declined. A decrease in senior leader in-person *"visibility"* and communicating the wider *"organisation purpose"* (P4) was reported. The absence of *"motivational"* contact from managers and leaders was commented upon by several participants, leading to opportunities *"being taken away to push ambition and to fire people up"* (P12). Furthermore, the ability to see the scale of one's departmental team through an in-person event, connect with new colleagues, create new *"stories"* and understand more of the organisation's culture and common purpose is seemingly absent. When allied to a failure to role model in-person relationship building this

contributes to the disconnect felt by employees: *“What is the culture of an organisation that principally runs online?”* (P16).

Participants felt encouraged to attend in-person when there was some *“value”* provided for them. Addressing the need to create an environment of diverse perspectives, that adds value and encourages attendance, requires new skills such as planning and facilitation. However, many employees are taking the opportunity to avoid contact with certain colleagues: *“when he doesn't like people, he tries to avoid the office”* (P2). Allowing employees to remain connected only to those with similar approaches and views can breed distrust whilst limiting the potential for learning and growth. This pattern of behaviour leads to employees operating within an echo chamber of ideas despite the need for diverse perspectives being acknowledged: *“you learn a lot by listening to perspectives of other people and what they're doing”* (P14). Facilitative behaviour can support employees to turn towards one another rather than avoid one another. Such collective engagement is an important contributor to team understanding and shared performance. In addition, practising facilitation skills supports team exploration on the delivery of goals and ensures the team performs when working independently of each other. One participant shared how this is achieved in practice: *“They'll take a case study on something they've been doing. Do a retrospective. How do we work? What could be better? Who's got ideas on this and doing those sorts of exercises”* (P8).

Managing and supporting the performance of hybrid working employees requires a new and distinct skillset. The shift to hybrid working has meant many managers are unprepared for this change, and public sector organisations often lack the training resources to address these emerging needs. Moving forward, managers could adopt roles as coaches and facilitators, fostering performance support by using a *“curiosity”* driven approach and open-ended questioning to guide and support their teams. Developing these skills will enable employees to thrive in hybrid work settings while maintaining high performance.

4.5.2.4 Organisational Citizen Behaviour. Welsh public sector hybrid work expedites autonomous behaviour that benefits the individual employee, for example, working when and where they prefer. Study data highlighted that this shift of power from employer directed hours of attendance to employee driven arrangements, can be problematic for team performance, especially when asynchronous working:

"[colleagues] choose their own rotas you know, so they can fit round their own needs" (P1). The data revealed that one enabler is in displaying behaviour whereby colleagues acknowledge the needs of others beyond their own. This has been described as organisational citizenship (Organ & Paine, 1999; Smith et al., 1983). Whilst the paradigm of hybrid work would suggest employees have both the agency and opportunity to work in this way, participants indicated that some colleagues do not. Colleagues not being accessible due to their chosen work patterns or failing to respond were consistently noted. However, participants shared that employees who do display altruism, courtesy or conscientiousness, voluntarily committing to actions over and above their role, contribute to their own and to colleagues' performance, through increased connections and motivating colleagues. The capability to derive meaningful connections between one's own preferences yet consider collective team needs is a new capability that fosters performance through greater team cohesion. Such behaviour fosters performance through overt actions such as intentional negotiation and forward resource planning, where colleagues coordinate to agree work progress or arrange in-person meetings: *"you're going to have to have the skills to negotiate and plan. Who's coming in? When they're coming in"* (P16). In addition, such behaviour implies mutual commitment to the wider team and can include volunteering support or actively showing caring towards colleagues despite their remoteness: *"two of the ladies mums are poorly at the moment, which isn't nice, but we're all in there supporting them and asking them if they need any help or if there's anything they wanna chat about"* (P7).

Despite a lack of contractual reinforcement, the autonomy to choose working hours and location is an important aspect of hybrid work that is highly valued. However, there was no evidence that autonomy per se contributes directly to performance outcomes. Notwithstanding this finding, participants confirmed the freedom to determine whether and when to attend the office was universal with the employee, suggesting a move away from the employer having the power to stipulate the work location:

So, you can choose to come to the office every day and some people do, not in our team. And you could though if they wanted to, they could completely homework if it suits them, or they can have a hybrid, the mix of it. (P9)

The paradox is that this preferred idiosyncratic arrangement creates tensions between colleagues, resulting in delays to work progress, poor communication and feelings of unfairness and injustice that act to hinder performance: *“never let people home-work because it's just not as efficient is it, let's be honest. People don't work the same”* (P13). An alternative perspective is that those participants who extend beyond the freedom to choose their working hours, instead demonstrating consideration for others, claimed it impacted performance positively. When colleagues demonstrated timely and thoughtful interventions, such as offering or asking for support or considering the impact of decisions and actions on others, employees felt *“part of something”* (P2). Displaying organisational citizenship, whereby employees advocate for the organisation, constructively support colleagues and demonstrate team loyalty benefits the wider team performance through feelings of agency: *“it's give and take, isn't it? So, I'm more likely to, you know, do a little bit of work on the weekend just to make sure that I'm ready for Monday”* (P1).

4.6 Factors that Hinder Employee Performance when Hybrid Working.

“I think it's an organisational and personal loss, because people don't feel connected with people anymore” (P12)

The data revealed that conditions that isolate, devalue, or undermine an employee's confidence and competence are factors that hinder performance when hybrid working. The key factors identified are caused by avoiding (people, work and communication) and losing (relationships, social capital, knowledge, resources, time, social learning). These factors are underpinned by several causal mechanisms which are enabled by distance in time and space: psychological detachment, an imbalance of social contact, a lack of accountability, an absence of thoughtful job redesign and loss of social learning. The less time employees spend together, the greater likelihood that avoidance occurs. As a result, a decline in the quality of working relationships and a reduction in “*shared knowledge*”, “*exchanging ideas*”, “*team spirit*”, “*accountability*” and “*scrutiny*” combine to hinder performance through both employee and organisational loss. Avoiding people, conversations and work leads to losing knowledge, opportunity and creativity; both avoiding and losing are key factors that hinder performance.

4.6.1 Avoiding

The nature of hybrid work facilitates remote, independent, and autonomous working, but it also creates opportunities for avoidance. This includes avoiding colleagues, customers, work tasks, accountability, and difficult or necessary conversations - all of which negatively impact performance and result in missed opportunities. Avoiding colleagues, particularly those with different perspectives, limits the potential for diversity of thought, problem solving and innovation. Avoiding customers can lead to reputational damage and increased complaints. Avoiding work tasks slows team progress, whilst avoiding necessary conversations can undermine clarity around responsibilities and accountabilities. Avoidance is a significant

behavioural barrier, diminishing both individual and team performance. The underlying causes of avoidance are further explored in this section.

4.6.1.2 Emotional and Psychological Detachment. The data revealed a recurring theme of avoidance, often driven by a lack of connection to the workplace, organisation or colleagues, leading to detachment. One participant noted: “*But that detachment, when you don't see people, then those kinds of interactions just don't happen*” (P11). Emotional detachment refers to an unwillingness or inability to connect with others on an emotional level, characterised by ambivalence, avoidance and a preference for solitude. For some, it occurs as a coping mechanism in response to adversarial or challenging work conditions: “*It's easier to just ignore people when you're at home*” (P3). Psychological detachment, however, refers to an employee's ability to disengage from work to maintain healthy boundaries and manage stress. While detachment in this context can reduce work related stress and burnout (Bakker et al., 2004), participants suggested that hybrid work has not alleviated stress. As one senior leader observed: “*We're so concerned about that. But we're looking at stress management, and how to manage stress in the workplace...and helping individuals to manage it as well*” (P1). However, the data emphasises the tension between detachment and connection. Whilst detachment may offer temporary relief, emotional connections with colleagues are widely recognised as beneficial for psychological well-being and performance (Bakker et al., 2004; Breevaart et al., 2015). These connections foster collaboration, enhance morale, and help mitigate the isolating effects of hybrid work. Addressing detachment and fostering meaningful interactions may therefore be essential for both employee well-being and organisational performance.

The pandemic, swiftly followed by the implementation of hybrid work changed the work paradigm considerably, whereby the opportunities to connect communally with others are reduced by at least half each week. Working remotely for part of the week now enables colleagues to distance themselves both emotionally and physically, avoiding factors that could naturally contribute to their performance such as colleagues,

customers, work tasks and necessary conversations. This is partially due to employees getting “*more stuck in your own sort of bubble*” (P13) and maybe due to unconscious choice. Choosing to distance facilitates avoidance of people who have different views and opinions to one’s own: “*No more butting heads or personality clashes, we can just avoid the people we don’t want to speak to*” (P6). Whilst employees may choose to remove themselves from unwanted or anticipated conflict, the commensurate withdrawal from collective engagement leads to colleagues turning away from, rather than towards each other, with one manager noting that colleagues seemed “*quite happy not to see team members*” (P1). Several managers commented that such behaviour leads to a loss of shared experience and knowledge with the potential for an echo chamber of views and perspectives and limited diversity of thought. At its worse, it can lead to the perception that employees don’t matter: “*if they go off sick, no one notices, no one cares*” (P5). Furthermore, a failure to display any vulnerability, remaining passive and distant from colleagues leads to a failure to seek help, “*share ideas*” or challenge ways of working. The subsequent lack of connection contributes to “*a sense of isolation*” (P16) that in turn feeds feelings of low self-efficacy as shared by Participant 2, who constantly questions: “*Have I done that the right way? And then you start to doubt yourself*”.

Whilst participants generally favoured working from home over office working, participants highlighted how distance had led to relationships with team members becoming attenuated: “*The cohesion of our team is not the same as it was*” (P10). Several participants noted colleagues “*not wanting to make the effort*” to engage with colleagues. For new employees, detachment results from an absence of early connection and can lead to a reluctance to engage with the organisation: “*I didn’t go into the [x] office for the first four weeks because I didn’t have a pass, and no one was in a rush to get me a pass and I wasn’t in a rush to try and get one, cause I’m more than happy being at home*” (P3). The more employees work from home, the more

distant team members become, leading to an avoidance of people and failure to build resourceful networks:

I think people's reluctance to come in, is because you know, if they don't really get on with a lot of the other team and I guess the flipside of that again is they're not gonna get that chance to build those relationships. (P6)

Some participants commented how pre-COVID, in-person working created a social benefit that built resilience and teamwork: *"you might meet your partner in work and there would be a social side to work as well. You know, you'd engage in, you might go bowling, quiz nights, all those sorts of things. And that's all gone"* (P16). The opposite is now being observed, whereby psychological detachment, the inability or unwillingness to be involved with others, is demonstrated. When *"team relationships are tense"* (P1), there is little *"social resilience"* (P10) displayed. Despite the wish sometimes to reengage with remote colleagues, internal conflicts can arise with the expectation to connect with others in the office: *"So even though you want to have that connection with people, it makes it worse because you're saying to yourself now, I must get on with this work"* (P11). Such detachment can lead to work disengagement or indifference as shared by Participant 3: *"I just ignore things. Nothing bad happens"*. Ultimately, the outcome is poor performance. Importantly, data suggests the psychological behaviour of employees change because of their social environment, impacting performance. Loss of confidence, changes to self-efficacy and increases in social anxiety were reported by participants in themselves and colleagues, particularly for those working more often from home. These changes result from excessive time, over three days per week spent working alone, resulting in feelings of isolation:

It can seem like it's an ideal thing cause you haven't gotta go anywhere, but you haven't gotta go anywhere! Particularly if you live on your own and then you see

no one, you talk to no one, you don't interact, you don't get on a bus, you don't walk down the street. And we talk a lot about older people and how they are really struggling because they're always on their own. And yet we're now saying, well, half the workforce can now be on their own and I think that's a hindrance.

(P5)

4.6.1.3 Low Social Homeostasis. Social homeostasis refers to the ability to balance individual needs for social interaction (Matthews & Tye, 2019). It is shaped by the interplay of individual, social, cultural, and environmental factors. Participants reported that an imbalance in social homeostasis is hindering performance, as hybrid working introduces unique challenges. For example, the blurring of work and home life has disrupted employees ability to meet their social needs and different employee “*personality types*” (P1), experience hybrid work differently. Employees with a preference for talking through issues reported difficulty sharing concerns or seeking input from colleagues, negatively affecting their performance: “*That is not going to help with my performance, not being able to talk to people and discuss things*” (P11). Conversely, others found reduced interaction to be beneficial, indicating that preferences, work style and family commitments significantly influence whether employees perceive themselves to thrive in hybrid work environments: “*I think it depends on the individual. Because I think some people will thrive better in those environments, some people won't thrive as well in those environments*” (P14). Addressing these varying needs is critical to supporting employee performance and fostering a sense of social balance in hybrid work contexts.

However, as employees opt to increase their work from home days and reduce the element of ‘hybrid’, they naturally seek out the social settings they prefer and are comfortable in. Consequently, an increase in feelings of individual comfort and control are exchanged for a reduction in social interactions with colleagues. This is despite all participants acknowledging that: “*You don't get the same experience as being with*

someone face to face" (P13). Detaching from colleagues reduces access to resources and opportunities for alternative ideas and feedback, despite all participants recognising working in-person as a *"good way to learn"* (P15). Furthermore, the potential benefits of diversity of contribution and thought are not optimised. The lack of incidental conversations constrains opportunities for help seeking and can result in reduced self-efficacy: *"I doubt myself. I question whether I'm right"* (P2).

Whilst technology is a tool that enables employees to fulfil their commitments, it easily facilitates the ability to eschew colleagues in a manner employees would not do in-person: *"(by) blocking out time in calendars. It's basically, like 'you can't talk to me'. You can't do that in an office"* (P3). Avoiding the office is also a way to avoid difficult conversations or people that employees don't get along with: *"(they don't come in) if they don't have great personal relationships with some of the rest of the team"* (P6). Employees elect who to maintain contact with, choosing to continue relationships only with those of similar interests or values. Whilst this results in protecting themselves from disagreements or social conflict, some employees are neglecting necessary conversations.

Maintaining distance also leads to an inability to pick up on body language or emotional cues which can lead to misunderstandings and a limited bond. The impact of the reduction in human contact was felt profoundly by one participant:

I always think it's as if someone said to you now - you can't see your child ever again except over Teams. You can never see him physically again. You'd be a little bit disgruntled, wouldn't you? The same thing applies if you speak to anyone in real life. It's not the same experience as talking through Teams, is it? (P13)

Despite the ambition for hybrid work to create greater workforce inclusion, some participants questioned the impact on employees who are neurodiverse. They are considered at a possible disadvantage due to the requirement for increased virtual

communication: *“If you’re anywhere on the spectrum and you don’t pick up these things, then you’re going to pick up even less or you’re going to read a lot more into things that aren’t really there”* (P5).

The less time spent in-person with others, the less employees are inclined to *“make the effort”* to attend the office. One shared how this has led to a decline in *“social resilience”* (P12) and an increase in social anxiety whereby employees want to avoid crowded or noisy places: *“going into the office or going to social events, I’m very, very anxious. Unusually anxious”* (P2). This change also leads to a reduction in feelings of competence as experienced employees lose sharing their expertise or learning from other colleagues. However, proactively encouraging a greater balance of in-person contact can result in changes to teamwork and communication:

We had a conversation with our [x] team because we were struggling to get some of our [x] officers in and it wasn’t easy. They didn’t want to come in. It was just they didn’t want to make the effort because they’d been used to working from home. (P1)

In-person office days are now being spent discussing individual team progress, well-being and sharing knowledge.

4.6.1.4 Absence of Accountability. The absence of quality discussion regarding work boundaries, roles, responsibilities, performance objectives, outputs, expectations, or consequences hinders performance when hybrid working. Conversely, discussing work progress can be a motivating process: *“It just makes you feel involved and valued. Then you just feel more valued as a worker, yeah”* (P7). A failure to discuss expectations can lead to feelings of being ignored, which can result in some employees: *“ticking the box for the day”* (P10). Data revealed that the physical distance created through hybrid work dilutes the ease with which incidental

conversations about delivery often take place. This relates to both internal discussions as well as external stakeholder discussions that can impact wider public sector governance. A failure to “*build up a rapport*” and “*develop relationships in-person*” can lead to reduced levels of scrutiny and challenge. This is particularly the case in online meetings where lower levels of engagement are being observed: “*Councillors are less likely to challenge because they don't know the officers that well*” (P16). An absence of clarity and a failure to discuss outcomes regularly also creates a void that can be manipulated by employees: “*Setting expectations for performance is crucial, though still some people will do nothing*” (P5). Furthermore, in the absence of clearly defined outcomes, online visibility often serves as a default proxy for performance:

Some people will always pull the wool or try it on. Now they've just got another way to do that. You know, ‘well you could see I was online cause my computer was on’. Yes, but that doesn't mean you're doing any work. (P5)

Avoiding work is facilitated by the lack of clear, agreed performance or output measures as there is a perception that “*nobody's monitoring*” (P3). Indeed, the obvious distractions whilst working at home were mentioned by several participants: “*I'm not naive to think that that wouldn't happen where people are watching daytime telly and doing the crossword*” (P4). Participant 9 shared “*I don't wanna give the impression that I sit at home getting distracted all day. But you know, it's easy to just go and put the washing out. Whereas in the office, I tend to work differently.*” Additionally, there were several instances where poorly managed hybrid work arrangements, lacking mandatory in-person attendance, enabled fraud or deception, resulting in dismissal:

She was always late for meetings or didn't turn up for meetings. So, what the heck's going on? And it transpired that she had another job, which is basically for

[another organisation] on the same thing, two full time jobs at the same time.

(P12)

Several participants described how shifting the physical location of work from the office to the home environment has created a permeable boundary, wherein work flows between the two settings. Managers are often hesitant to address performance concerns in these hybrid work arrangements, leading to environments of low accountability. The rules governing conduct and performance expectations remain unclear:

Performance management is a difficult topic to approach with people, especially when you're talking about people's home lives and personal lives. You don't want to be discriminating against people because they have childcare arrangements or other sort of things that are also going on. (P14)

Whilst participants openly shared how working at home facilitates their ability to fulfil family responsibilities, care for pets and manage their health and well-being, few could share discussions with a line manager regarding performance expectations. Despite this, some participants disclosed how the absence of conversations about expectations and accountabilities has contributed to poor performance, indiscipline, and misconduct across the organisation:

We said look, you know we can see you've got your child in the day and yet the kid is just running ragged around the back [of the chair] ... if you've got a Teams call, we expect you to be on the Teams call, not running around after your child.

(P12)

If performance outcomes are not agreed, employees are more easily able to avoid work as illustrated by Participant 3:

At any given time, they'll be like three or four e-mail threads going around, where someone's trying to identify the right person to deal with this. But when you're behind a screen at home, it's quite easy to be like. No, no, that's not one for me.

External accountability was also commented upon by several participants. The movement of Council and public meetings online has led to a loss of external scrutiny through challenge or questions, which has the potential to reduce performance and can impact communities: *"a lot of people, Officers included, they just think 'I'm not going to ask what might be seen as a silly question on Teams'"* (P16).

Most participants acknowledged that hybrid working requires a high degree of trust, although this should be combined with clear performance expectations. Devoting time early on in an employee's tenure or performance period to setting expectations, agreeing outcome focused goals and reporting or monitoring arrangements is key to successful performance. A failure or delay in doing so can lead to confusion and the inference that performance is indeed optional:

Weirdly, I had a value-based appraisal after three and a half, four months of being in post, more to plan what are the performance indicators or my objectives for the following year, rather than what have I achieved already in three months. (P5)

However, accountability can be achieved through greater *"regularity"* of conversations and intentional *"scrutiny"* of performance when hybrid working: *"That broader audit of task, completion, performance, is needed more, rather than waiting until you get something at six months, and realising it's not where it should be"* (P5). In addition, *"purposeful reporting"*, where teams report on and regularly celebrate,

measurable progress against meaningful outcome measures is important for hybrid work performance. Taking opportunities to reflect on performance and evaluate progress regularly can support a team to progress towards better performance: *“they’ll actually think these are the good things that we’ve done, and this is what we need to do to grow and build. So, it’s done with purpose”* (P8). Accountability is also enabled through *“uncomfortable”* and *“tricky”* conversations with team members about the impact of employee autonomy and availability to perform:

They were quite distant cause they quite liked working from home and doing their own thing. But then the cracks started to show about what support they required. We had lots of conversations about the difference between work from home and managing your childcare, or managing your parent care, or whoever you’re caring for. And they were quite tricky conversations because, just because you’re at home, doesn’t mean that you’re available. (P5)

The absence of routine discussions about performance, makes addressing these issues increasingly challenging. Managers highlighted that remote work, with limited in-person contact, has exacerbated the problem. One manager described how employees have become adept at deflecting accountability: *“often quite good at deflecting, and you know it’s all smoke and mirrors, isn’t it? And you’re like, hang on a minute. Did I say that? They’ll have you convinced you know, black is white”* (P8).

In environments where conversations about performance expectations are rare and individual autonomy is prioritised over team contributions, participants reported an increase in adverse organisational outcomes, such as higher rates of sickness absence: *“quite often people get quite defensive. People might go off sick even as a result. You know, they like cite work related stress or anxiety and things like that ‘cause it’s [performance] a sensitive topic”* (P14). Managers expressed a preference for addressing performance concerns in person, believing it allowed for better

observations of employee reactions: *“There is something about some of those conversations needing to be in the room. Occasionally, so that I can see them. I can see whether they're squirming”* (P5). The pervasive lack of meaningful discussions about performance was captured succinctly by another participant: *“I just don't think there's any real focus or time or thought given to what are we all about anymore”* (P16).

4.6.1.4.1 Decline in professionalism, standards and quality. The avoidance of conversations about performance expectations has contributed to a decline in work quality and professional standards. The data suggest that prioritising employee autonomy, often framed as concern for employee well-being, may have inadvertently come at the expense of sustained performance. This trade-off has led to shifts in perceptions of professionalism and acceptable behaviour, which several participants found concerning. They observed instances of colleagues exhibiting *“laziness”*, *“munching food through a meeting”*, *“not really getting dressed properly”* and being *“selfish”*. Whilst the standard office dress code has relaxed since the pandemic restriction period, and following the adoption of hybrid work, participants suggested that these changes reflect a broader decline in standards, including attention to detail, competence, and work quality. One participant expressed frustration, stating: *“what I'm hearing and seeing, is the quality of the work is not coming through”* (P12). The lack of organisational enforcement of basic standards and protocols, such as requiring cameras to be on during virtual meetings, further exacerbates these issues. Participants highlighted how prolonged periods without seeing colleagues' faces had negative impacts on communication and collaboration. For many, the increased tendency to leave cameras off during Microsoft Teams meetings was seen as *“rude”* and *“frustrating”*, directly hindering performance. One participant explained: *“you can't see the facial expressions. You don't know whether a ‘no’ is, no, I don't understand. Or no, I haven't heard you properly or no, I've just answered the door”* (P15). The failure to address these behaviours has fuelled perceptions that colleagues are disengaged or even avoiding work entirely. One participant remarked: *“They're probably laying in bed*

... *they're doing something they shouldn't be doing. Yeah, it's too easy to say, sorry, I've got connection problems*" (P15). This combination of declining professionalism, unclear expectations, and inadequate organisational responses illustrates a cyclical issue: the erosion of standards contributes to lower performance, which in turn makes addressing these challenges even more difficult.

Some participants shared how greater control over managing family responsibilities and feeling "*comfortable*" at home positively influenced their motivation:

At home, you're a lot more comfortable as well, so that's a bit of a motivator in itself because, I might be in my dressing gown and my pyjama bottoms. And like I've got like, my cushions and stuff. So, this is a bit more of a comfortable environment. I might even have music going on. (P14)

However, the blurred boundaries between home and work have also led to challenges. Several participants highlighted instances where employees prioritised childcare over work obligations, with employers seemingly unwilling to address these issues due to it being a "*sensitive topic*":

Childcare arrangements might also come into it, because then people might, you know, have their kids around and other things more likely because they're at home, you know, and it's just easy for them. It's less on childcare costs. But then that means that you could be on a meeting, and they've got kids running in the background and things like that. (P14)

Whilst the comfort of working from home can boost motivation, it may also lead to social loafing, where team members reduce their effort and contributions in team settings, leading to diminished team efficacy (Latané et al., 1979). Participants described difficulties in holding colleagues accountable, citing instances of missed

deadlines and unresponsiveness: *“just incredibly difficult to get hold of someone”* (P16). *“It’s in Team’s chat that I definitely said to you ‘get this done by this date’. And you said yes. And you haven’t done it”* (P8). In addition, participants noted a decline in discretionary effort and increasing employee inflexibility, further straining team dynamics. Addressing these concerns requires difficult conversations but participants reported a widespread reluctance to engage in constructive debate. This avoidance is compounded by employees resisting in-person contact and feeling unskilled or unwilling to engage in virtual discussions. The result has been a noticeable rise in workplace *“hostility”* (P10) and diminished respect among colleagues: *“I’ve definitely seen an increase in aggression in the workplace, in meetings, on (MS) Teams”* (P10). This tension reflects the broader challenge of balancing the benefits of comfort and flexibility with the need for accountability, team cohesion, and respectful communication.

4.6.2 Losing

Whilst participants acknowledged the many benefits of hybrid working, they also shared their experiences of loss. Viewing loss through the lens of broad social and cultural change highlights the risk factors that can hinder performance when hybrid working. Although regular office attendance was often associated with a negative corporate narrative, participants mourned the erosion of team cohesion, the weakening of personal bonds and the diminishing of *“friendships”*, *“social interaction”*, and *“stories”*. These losses contribute to a decline in self-efficacy. Additionally, participants described a loss of *“organisational culture”* marked by reduced access to shared knowledge, resources, *“learning opportunities”*, *“innovation”*, shared *“problem solving”*, and corporate memory. The sense of disconnection was particularly pronounced when employees worked more than three days working a week from home, amplifying feelings of isolation, lost focus and reduced concentration.

The profound emotional impact of this loss was vividly illustrated by one participant who had recently experienced the unexpected deaths of both a colleague

and a close family member. In the absence of meaningful support from work colleagues or their manager, they felt isolated and uncared for. They shared how the lack of in-person connection deepened their grief and affected their performance:

Hybrid working? No, if things are not going right, you know if things go wrong like that. [Being in the office] I think that would have helped. It would have made a difference. But I mean on the other hand, you know with hybrid working I can be at home and if I want to just cry, I can just cry. Personally, I think it would have helped me to be able to just be with the team. (P11)

This participant's powerful reflection reveals a dual sense of grief, grieving both personal losses and the diminished team relationships they had previously relied on for support. Their story resonates with the experiences of many participants, who described similar shifts in their work lives. While hybrid working offered personal benefits for some, feelings of loss, whether tied to people, community, processes, locations, or ways of working, remain prevalent. One participant poignantly captured this sentiment: *"it's just about being on good terms with a lot of people. And you know you have a bit of a catch up or you get to know them a bit. That's diminished. You know, and I miss that as well"* (P11).

4.6.2.1 Absence of Job Redesign. Job design is a process of creating or redesigning a job role that aligns with the organisation's goals (Daniels et al., 2017). Job design optimises work processes to deliver effective performance and involves establishing roles, responsibilities and activities that employees should perform to ensure organisational success. A failure to optimise a job role can lead to an imbalance in job demands, control or support, reducing performance through loss of role clarity. Without exception, all participants shared that prior to 2020, their roles were undertaken wholly within the office environment and in-person. Post the restriction period, the temporary work arrangement enabled to deliver performance during a

global crisis was normalised, with several participants sharing that their organisation “*drifted*” (P16) into the arrangement. The data revealed that roles were allowed to be undertaken partially from home without any job redesign. Failing to pause and redesign work to ensure home is a suitable location for remote work impacts employee performance and may not lead to the inclusive workforce aspired to.

Whilst two participants indicated how working from home enabled them to better manage their physical health, such as diabetic injections in privacy, other participants commented on the reverse. A “*lack of physicality*” due to “*meeting after meeting after meeting on Teams*” (P16) was felt to increase adverse health impacts. A level of “*discipline*” is required to ensure regularly standing up and walking around, when working from home and online. This is not an issue when working in-person due to the frequency with which employees are likely to engage with others by moving about. Rarely have home environments been assessed or adapted for safe work performance: “*You don't particularly want an office chair in your kitchen. That's not right physically*” (P5). The work environment matters for the performance of most participants, several of whom commented that for some colleagues: “*the home environment isn't ideal*” (P7). It was recognised that attending an office location offers a helpful “*routine*” (P13), generating feelings of accomplishment, especially if home office equipment is of a lower standard:

I have to work in the kitchen where I am now because I'm working on one screen today or I work in the spare room, so there's not as much space and I don't feel like I concentrate as much at home. (P13)

Importantly, the ability to observe employee’s well-being has also been affected by an increase in remoteness:

Their well-being might be affected. That could impact on the performance.

Because if you might be having personal issues, if you're in the office you might confide in someone, you might confide in your manager, or they'll just pick up on your body language. All of that's lost if you're constantly working from home.

(P16)

The shift to hybrid work requires a significant level of digital technology to facilitate virtual communication. Organisations prioritised implementation of Microsoft Teams as the public sector tool of choice. Neither the optimisation of work processes nor employees home environments were considered, leading to lost opportunities. The tools are often considered suboptimal, such as the inability to see colleagues when presenting online. The failure to introduce protocols for virtual work tools has led to a substantial increase in employees' perception of workload. This is largely due to an increase in the volume of emails, Microsoft chat channels and WhatsApp groups taking the place of in-person conversation.

Most participants confirmed that their feelings of productivity relate directly to online visibility, responding to meeting invites and emails. This leads to a pseudo measure of performance, where online activity equates to productivity, yet individual activity fails to translate into outcome delivery: *"I think we've got learning to do at how we communicate via e-mail and Teams"*. (P5)

The absence of job redesign has also led to perceptions of lost concentration through technological overload. Adverse effects on cognition and focus were noted by most participants because of excessive hours online without breaks: *"unless it's incredibly interesting, I just find myself drifting"* (P16). The relative ease with which email requests can be sent, means that they have increased significantly in volume. When combined with the autonomous behaviour of employees who are inaccessible, this results in slow progress of work. Remote connections lead to *"losing understanding"* (P13), a reduction in learning competence and learning speed:

But if you were, say, working on a spreadsheet where you want to ask someone a question, that type of thing, there's no substitute for having two screens, pointing to things on it. It's not as fast as that, and you can't sort of get your point across as well. (P13)

Different outcomes require different communication tools and approaches. Without revised protocols for hybrid work, employees' default to overusing existing tools and both communication clarity and relationships suffer. A failure to consider the communication requirements of each role, both synchronous and asynchronous as part of a job redesign hinders performance. Indeed, the increase in the volume of communication has not led to participants feeling more informed: *"Feeling out of the loop, people have left, and we don't know. We have lost ideas, we're not sharing ideas, there's no shortcuts"* (P6). However, actively considering the role and its suitability for hybrid work whilst incorporating the digitisation of services, can lead to improvements in performance, as shared by one participant: *"(we are) a third down on our hours but actually doing twice as much work"* (P4).

4.6.2.1.1 Asynchronous working. Asynchronous working, a system whereby employees work at different times, without real-time communication or collaboration, is prevalent within the Welsh public sector. While this approach offers employee flexibility, it often results in delays and inefficiencies that hinder performance. Almost all participants highlighted how the pace and progress of work is slow, creating frustration and lost momentum. One participant described the experience: *"You've got to phone them [colleagues] up and you've got to arrange a call and that's the thing. It drags things out"* (P13). The autonomy inherent in asynchronous working further compounds these frustrations, as misaligned schedules disrupt team progress. Another participant explained: *"There are instances when we don't all work the same work patterns, so that can like stall some of our progress"* (P15). This recurring challenge was encapsulated

by one participant who described the routine of a colleague, illuminating the inefficiencies of asynchronous work:

She'll log on maybe half seven in the morning, do a couple of hours, take the kids to school, do an hour, then maybe do some housework or some tasks, log on again for a couple of hours in the afternoon and maybe an hour in the evening.
(P4)

The lack of protocols to mitigate the risks associated with asynchronous working leads to diminished timely and effective activity between colleagues, ultimately hindering performance. One participant summarised the issue succinctly: *"communication is a downside of this way of working"* (P6). The contrast between synchronous and asynchronous working was a point of discussion for most participants, with many emphasising the challenges of remote communication:

You've got to drop someone a Team's message, or you've got to give them a call, and you don't know if you're interrupting them. In the office, obviously people are just right there. So, if you've got like a question you need to talk about something, it's a lot easier because you can tell if the person's busy or if they've got a lot on. It's kind of hard to tell a bit more remotely. (P14)

In contrast, the advantages of synchronous, in-person activity were highlighted as enabling faster, more efficient interactions. As one participant noted:

[In the office] I could probably bump into half a dozen people and just say I'll see you at 11. You want to? Have you seen my e-mail? You OK? and you can tick off half a dozen things as you're walking down the room. (P15)

In addition to delays caused by asynchronous working, participants associated home-working days with longer working hours and the erosion of work / home boundaries: *"I found it really difficult to switch off, so I end up doing longer and longer and longer hours"* (P5). The *"pressure"* to work longer hours when working from home was also clearly felt and the loss of a separate home life was highlighted: *"You've got a laptop; you can be anywhere. It takes over your life until you feel that you can't switch it off"* (P3). This blending of home and work life often led to participants remaining mentally engaged with work outside of traditional hours. One participant admitted: *"I had composed an e-mail whilst in bed and I thought I'm just gonna send it"* (P7). Participants also referred to a loss of concentration and feeling *"exhausted"* (P12). Participants also expressed concerns about the cognitive toll of remote working. Many reported feeling mentally drained and unable to concentrate after prolonged periods of online engagement: *"After a full day online, I notice I can't recognise faces or remember what I've said to whom. Everyone looks the same"* (P8). By comparison, in-person office days were seen as less cognitively demanding, offering natural breaks through casual conversations. These interactions allowed participants to reset through informal conversation: *"refreshed my mind, having talked to somebody about something"* (P11).

Asynchronous working, which assumes no formal core work hours, has also introduced a range of distractions that negatively impact performance. Home environments brought competing priorities: *"I'm also distracted because I'm sitting at home, and I can see all the things that need doing at home"* (P11). Participants also admitted to juggling family caring responsibilities, animal care and household chores throughout their workday. Such interruptions further disrupted concentration and workflow: *"I have a dog behind me. If the post comes or anyone opens the gate, she will go mad. Then I have to re-set"* (P5). These insights highlight the complexity of asynchronous working. While it offers flexibility, the absence of clear boundaries,

coupled with environmental distractions and cognitive strain, poses significant challenges to performance and well-being.

4.6.2.2 Absence of Social Learning. As outlined within this chapter, public sector hybrid working arrangements are generally informal rather than contractual, resulting in employees gradually shifting from hybrid work toward predominantly remote working. This approach paradoxically risks undermining employee performance by diminishing opportunities for social learning. Participants highlighted that insufficient time spent together as a team leads to a breakdown in the ability to “*share knowledge*” (P16) and contributes to the erosion of both individual and corporate expertise. This, in turn, affects performance: “*there’s just the lack of opportunistic ideas and interaction you will never get now*” (P5).

The study data consistently revealed the absence of social learning as a critical issue. Social learning, defined as the process of acquiring knowledge and skills through observation and modelling others' behaviour, is influenced by motivation, focus, and emotional engagement (Bandura & Walters, 1977). In hybrid working environments, reduced in-person interaction limits these opportunities, weakening the informal yet essential mechanisms that foster skill development, innovation, and collaboration. The failure to prioritise regular, in-person knowledge sharing creates vulnerabilities for both employees and organisations. New employees may struggle to integrate into teams or absorb organisational practices, while organisations risk losing tacit knowledge and critical insights often exchanged through spontaneous interactions. As such, the absence of social learning emerges as a significant barrier to sustained performance and organisational resilience.

Working independently reduces the opportunity for asking advice from more experienced colleagues and gaining knowledge that may lead to lost time and effort: “*They’re not working opposite me every day. So, you don’t really hear what’s going on other than what you’re doing*” (P13). Conversely, working in-person can be beneficial for performance: “*I think it’s just learning from what other people are saying, what*

people are doing. Otherwise, you miss out on those key conversations potentially” (P14). Almost all participants commented on lost opportunities from working at home and the benefits of working in-person: *“I think in the hybrid model, people are not learning the job and not as effective as they were as when they were working in the office”* (P12). Furthermore, online interactions are seen as incomplete connections: *“You can arrange a coffee morning online, but it’s not the same, that opportunistic support, ideas, growth”* (P5). In addition, online meetings make it *“more difficult to be friendly”* (P9) and build relationships, whilst in-person contact supports the building of social capital considered crucial for learning and performance: *“it’s good to overhear those conversations. Now those are conversations with people that I wouldn’t normally see”* (P15). Additionally, the delay in transferring learning, practically implementing new knowledge is impacting performance:

What I find is the transfer of learning. So, where normally when you would be in the office, you would pick up and hear what’s going on and pick up a job that is taking a lot longer. So, if we’re talking about performance, I’m finding it’s taking a significant period of time for people to understand their role and more importantly, understand the culture of the organisation. (P12)

Furthermore, in organisations where both turnover and sickness absence are increasing amongst hybrid workers, this perpetuates the loss of networks and knowledge: *“It’s not organic. You don’t know people anymore. You have to work at it”* (P5). However, the direct impact on performance is largely unknown, as it is not measured. When asked about the impact of such loss on customer service delivery, a key measure within public sector organisations, one response, representative of most participants was: *“We don’t know”* (P1) whilst one participant reported: *“I’m sure the public would say that their engagement with them has got a lot worse”* (P13).

4.6.2.2.1 Remote induction. Most participants experienced that the onboarding and induction of new employees (the introduction of new employees into their role and the organisation) was problematic for performance when undertaken remotely: *“It's not as effective as actually being in the office, so yeah, it certainly impacts on their performance. It takes them longer to actually get up to speed”* (P15). As perspective is often a function of experience, when employees lack the experience to position their role and contribution into context, they fail to perform.

The inability or delay in proactively building relationships when new to a team or organisation also impacts teams: *“You could join a team, and it could take a couple of years to really get to know them because there's going to be limited interaction. And I just think it's something that's gonna get worse year on year”* (P16). Several participants had experienced remote onboarding with one expressing concern at the time taken to *“grow my network”* (P9). New or junior employees are losing out on *“knowledge”* and *“discussion”* (P12). Furthermore, remote induction can lead to disengagement as expressed by one participant: *“My line manager just sends me pages and pages and pages of stuff to read, which I don't. I can just ignore her though”* (P3). Another participant expressed how poor induction practice through a remote approach can leave an employee feeling *“nervous”* and *“lost”*:

It would be slightly more difficult if you're not in the same room as someone at least initially to start off on a good footing with them because they're gonna be nervous, they're starting a new job and, in all likelihood, they're gonna be thinking, is my boss ok? If he doesn't communicate, if they think I don't know how they work at home and how we monitor and how we can see the volume of calls coming in, if they're not yet aware of that for the first few weeks, they're gonna be quite nervous thinking I might be being spied on. (P4)

In addition to lost knowledge, learning and a lack of connection, remote induction processes can have a detrimental impact on personal motivation as shared by a participant only three months in role:

I'm supposed to be writing my objectives, and I've got other people's objectives to like base that off. But it seems just very much like a tick box exercise ... So, I'm not really that motivated to write them. Every day, I come in, look at my emails, write a To Do List, do it, sign off. (P3)

In addition, *"learning is slower ... [because of] the lack of interaction with people"* (P12). One participant disclosed: *"I wouldn't say I'm as good on the software here and now, as I would have been had I worked in the office permanently"* (P13). This can lead to perceptions of unfairness as experienced colleagues undertake work that cannot be completed by less experienced colleagues: *"people who are more established, are picking up more work trying to get the quality right"* (P12). To address the risks and issues highlighted regarding induction, some organisations have returned to undertaking on-site in-person induction only. This has limited recruitment to a geographically closer area, but ensures consistent training and availability of support, enabling employees to feel more comfortable asking questions in order to accelerate performance:

So, we are training people in an operational environment, in a face-to-face environment where they can just lift their head up and ask questions, where they've got, you know, easy access to people, they're not feeling isolated. (P8)

Thoughtful in-person induction also reduces organisational risks:

What you don't want to lose, is people that feel like they've been dropped in the deep end and then maybe they decide this isn't for me. And then they leave very soon after. I think, like the initial period is very important just to make people feel like they haven't just been dropped in it and abandoned. (P14)

Introducing in-person mentoring can also address both induction and learning risks:

"Mentoring, as I'm saying about the new person, that takes a lot of conversations. That is a lot of talking, sitting down, talking, explaining things, showing her stuff" (P11).

4.7 A Theoretical Model of Work Performance and Hybrid Working

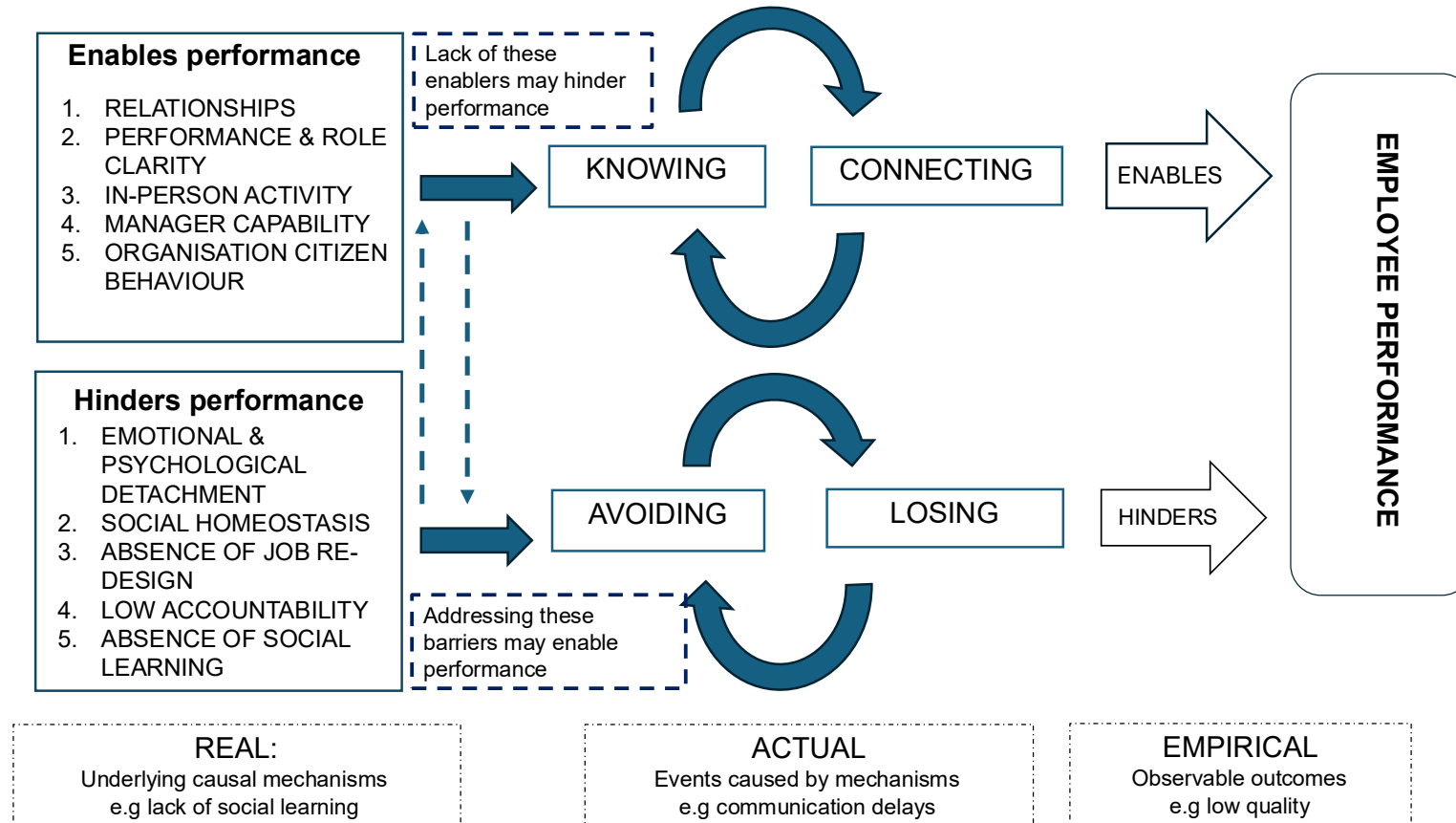
Using the insights from the data and analysis above, a new theoretical model has been developed. The theory integrates factors that have been identified as influencing employees' job performance, along with the mechanisms through which these factors affect performance. This theoretical model illustrates the dynamic interplay between enabling and hindering mechanisms of performance in hybrid work environments. Enabling mechanisms, such as strong relationships, clear performance expectations, in-person opportunities, managerial capability, and organisational citizenship behaviour help employees gain critical knowledge and foster meaningful connections. These elements enhance employee performance by building competence, confidence, and collaboration. Conversely, the absence of these mechanisms contributes to avoidance behaviours, where employees detach from people, places, tasks, and communication. This detachment results in a loss of competence, confidence, and capability, while organisations experience declines in knowledge sharing, work quality, and overall performance. The model emphasises that addressing hindering mechanisms, such as emotional detachment, lack of job redesign, and insufficient accountability can mitigate negative outcomes and enable performance. The model is illustrated in Figure 3.

The factors of *Knowing* and *Connecting* and *Avoiding* and *Losing* are dynamic and responsive to the presence or absence of these mechanisms. Rooted in Bhaskar's (2014) framework of critical realism, the model distinguishes three layers of reality: the empirical level, representing observable performance outcomes; the actual level, encompassing events caused by mechanisms, such as changes in relationships, delayed communication, or poor knowledge sharing; and the real level, which refers to the underlying causal mechanisms, such as emotional detachment, social learning, or managerial capability, that drive observable outcomes but often remain unobserved.

The model integrates these layers of reality, providing a comprehensive understanding of how hybrid work impacts employee performance. It demonstrates that employee performance is not solely the result of surface-level behaviours but is deeply influenced by unobservable mechanisms operating in organisational and social contexts. Enabling performance occurs when factors like *Knowing* and *Connecting* are present, allowing employees to gain clarity, competence, and the opportunity for social learning, which boosts performance and engagement. Poor performance arises when factors like *Avoiding* and *Losing* dominate, caused by detachment, low social contact, low accountability, and reduced social learning.

Figure 3

A Grounded Theory Model of Hybrid Working and Employee Performance



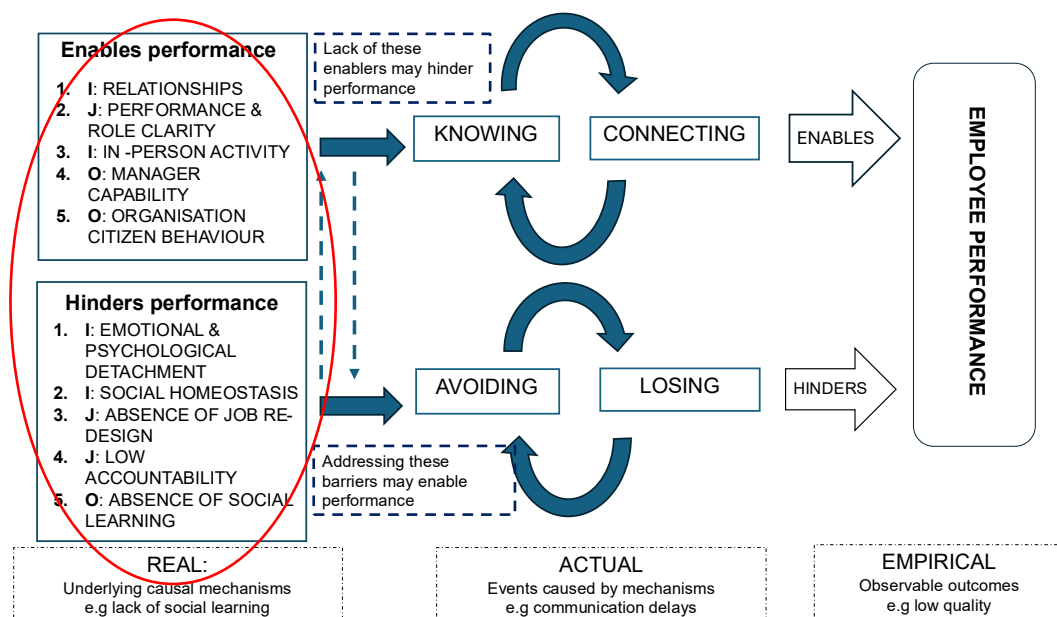
The model highlights the fluidity of these factors, showing how hindering mechanisms can shift performance from negative (Avoiding/Losing) to positive (Knowing/Connecting). By linking these factors to causal mechanisms within Bhaskar's framework, the model provides a nuanced and actionable understanding of hybrid work's impact on performance. For organisations, the model offers clear insights into improving employee performance in hybrid environments. It underscores the importance of fostering enabling mechanisms, such as relationship-building, in-person learning, and managerial capability, while addressing barriers like emotional detachment and lack of accountability. This approach can help sustain employee performance in hybrid work contexts and potentially improve organisational effectiveness through improved work quality and standards.

The conceptual model developed through this study identifies causal mechanisms that also operate at three interrelated levels: individual, job-level, and organisational. This multi-level framing reflects the complex nature of performance in hybrid work contexts, where personal experience, role design, and organisational systems interact. At the individual level (I in Figure 4), mechanisms such as *emotional and psychological detachment* and *social homeostasis* (the need for balanced social interaction) reflect the internal, cognitive and emotional impacts of hybrid work. These relate to confidence, focus, and motivation. At the job level (J in Figure 4), mechanisms such as *performance and role clarity*, *lack of job redesign*, and *low accountability* capture how work is structured and managed, including how expectations are communicated, measured, and experienced. At the organisational level (O in Figure 4), mechanisms such as *manager capability*, *absence of social learning*, and *organisational citizenship behaviour* reflect the structural and cultural conditions that shape hybrid working environments, including leadership practices, team dynamics, and norms around collaboration.

While each mechanism is anchored at one of these levels, they are not discrete: performance is shaped by the interplay between individual experience, job demands, and organisational context. For example, poor job design (job level) may exacerbate psychological detachment (individual level), while weak managerial capability (organisational level) may fail to address either. This interdependency aligns with a critical realist understanding of layered causality and reflects Kozlowski and Klein's (2000) multilevel framework, which emphasises that organisational outcomes emerge from dynamic interactions across individual, job, and systemic levels.

Figure 4

Multilevel Framework of Interacting Mechanisms



4.8 Summary

This chapter presents employees' perceptions of hybrid working in the Welsh public sector, addressing the first research objective by identifying how employees experience hybrid work. The findings reveal that hybrid working impacts performance through key factors such as 'Knowing' and 'Connecting,' aligning with the second objective of exploring the influence of hybrid work on employee performance. The

grounded theory model developed in this chapter outlines the factors that enable or hinder performance, fulfilling the third and fourth objectives by examining employees' perceptions and uncovering the conditions, mechanisms, and experiences that affect individual performance in a hybrid work setting. The mechanisms of 'Avoiding' and 'Losing' highlight the barriers to performance, underscoring the importance of adequate support for effective hybrid work. These insights contribute to the development of a grounded theory model that identifies the factors influencing performance in hybrid work environments, fulfilling the fifth research objective. The next chapter will discuss the alignment of these findings with existing literature and their broader implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings from this research are discussed in this chapter, focusing on the factors influencing employee performance in hybrid working environments within the Welsh public sector. The discussion begins with a review of the most recent post-pandemic restriction period literature on hybrid work and performance (section 5.1), contrasting it with the pre- and mid COVID restriction period literature considered in chapter 2. This second review was conducted following the development of the grounded theory and was guided by the emerging causal mechanisms. A transparent and systematic approach (as detailed in section 3.3.5.2 and Appendix L) was adopted to identify literature that could support, extend, or challenge the findings. This process ensured rigour and transparency in integrating literature into the discussion (Hoddy, 2019). The literature is used to deepen interpretation and to situate the theoretical framework within existing scholarship.

Each causal mechanism underlying performance in hybrid work is explored using relevant sources, drawn from broad evidence due to the limited research in the public sector. Chapter 6 presents the theoretical and practical implications of the research, along with the strengths and limitations of the study, directions for future research, and the concluding contributions of this research.

5.1 Evolving context: Post the Pandemic Restriction Period

This study builds on the evolving research surrounding hybrid work, which has shifted from pre- and COVID restriction period perspectives, as outlined in chapter two. Pre-COVID literature focused on the effects of flexible working arrangements on employee outcomes, such as well-being, job satisfaction and performance (Bloom et al., 2015; De Menezes & Kelliher, 2011; De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017; Felstead, 2022, March 25). Pre-COVID, hybrid work was met with management resistance due to concerns about managing remote teams and employee autonomy (Hackney et al., 2022). Earlier research had focused on the physical and temporal aspects of work,

such as where and when employees work, with little emphasis on broader systemic or psychosocial factors (Vartiainen & Vanharanta, 2024). However, during the COVID restriction period, attention shifted to sustaining employee well-being and engagement, with hybrid work acknowledged as balancing individual focus and collaboration (Toscano et al., 2024). Increased autonomy and reduced commuting time emerged as facilitators of performance (Bloom, 2021), with flexibility and agility highlighted as “potent enablers” of hybrid work (Vartiainen & Vanharanta, 2024, p. 4).

Post-COVID restriction period, hybrid work has evolved significantly into widespread practice, reflecting profound shifts in both employee and organisational expectations (CIPD, 2022; Rupcic, 2024). However, research conducted during this time highlights several key challenges, particularly regarding the loss of collective learning experiences. This loss is especially pronounced among younger and newer employees who often lack the guidance and support they need in a hybrid setting (Rupcic, 2024). Employees may also face unsuitable home environments that longer term, hinder their ability to engage fully in work (Suravi, 2024). According to Barnes et al’s qualitative study of senior leaders from across the globe (N=13), managers are now required to be proactive in creating communities of practice and learning opportunities to mitigate these gaps.

Furthermore, in their mixed methods study of Indian hybrid workers (N=552), Banerjee and Gupta (2024) found that the volume of communication, driven by digital technologies, is contributing to heightened levels of stress and burnout among employees. This aligns with the growing importance of social support, as it helps address work uncertainty, unclear expectations, and stress as found in a study by Mishar and Bharti (2024) of Indian IT employees (N=531). Moreover, a study of 360 Indian IT employees by Yadav et al. (2024) emphasised the need for managers to foster affective commitment, meaning connection to the organisation, to enhance employee learning and motivation in hybrid work environments. Such studies show that the post-restriction period shift has often occurred without fully addressing the

complexities of hybrid work systemically, particularly considering the psychosocial factors that underpin performance (Vartiainen & Vanharanta, 2024). This leads to diminished group cohesion, poor knowledge exchange, and problematic asynchronous working, exacerbated by the absence of in-person interactions, as found in a mixed methods study of Ghanaian professionals (N=421) by Oppong Peprah (2024).

This present study builds upon these findings, challenging perspectives that hybrid work benefits both organisations and employees (Bloom, 2021). Findings reveal that whilst autonomy and flexibility are valued, hybrid work introduces significant challenges. For example, this current study supports the findings of Tarafdar et al (2007) and Beño's (2021) studies. Tarafdar et al's (2007) cross-sectional study of U.S public sector employees (N=233) found asynchronous working slows collaboration, fosters feelings of unfairness, and exacerbates social isolation, anxiety, and technostress. Beño's (2021) mixed methods study of Austrian employees (n=60) and managers (n=5) found that the erosion of in-person interactions, also identified in pre-COVID contexts (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Golden et al, 2008), diminishes shared learning, competence, and work quality, posing risks to long-term organisational performance and employee well-being.

In contrast to earlier research focused on individual flexibility (Bloom et al, 2015; De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017), this study emphasises the importance of team-level factors, including cohesion, knowledge sharing, and organisational citizenship, as critical to hybrid work performance. This finding aligns with a study by Bloom et al. (2022) and review by Vartiainen & Vanharanta (2024), who also highlight tensions between managerial expectations and employee perceptions. For example, Bloom et al.'s (2022) evaluation of a hybrid working RCT involving software engineers and office staff (N=1612) reported no change in performance but found managers' concerns about reduced social interaction contrasted with employees' appreciation of increased flexibility. These "striking differences" in interpretation emphasise the enduring tension

between pre-COVID period managerial concerns and post-COVID employee priorities which were highlighted as a paradigm shift in chapter 2 (Bloom et al., 2022, p. 3).

Research further illustrates gaps in organisational strategies for hybrid work. In a study of how hybrid work is researched across 27 European countries, Vartiainen and Vanharanta (2024), found that work environment, work quality and organisational culture were rarely addressed. They concluded that the long-term effects on well-being and performance remain largely unknown and called for more systemic research approaches. Existing research also lacks a nuanced exploration of how distance and autonomy operate within hybrid work settings. Distance manifests in several forms: psychological, temporal, technological, and structural, not merely in the autonomous ability to choose where to work (Leonardi et al, 2024). This present study's findings therefore contribute to the growing post-COVID literature by refining existing theories to account for the psychosocial complexities of hybrid work. Key insights include the shift in power dynamics from employers to employees. The increasing employee demand for flexibility, while initially benefiting individual well-being, now generates concerns of professional isolation and organisational responsibility in hybrid work environments (Toscano et al, 2024). New managerial capabilities such as emotional intelligence, coaching, and facilitation are increasingly essential to support team cohesion and navigate the psychological dynamics of hybrid work. The findings reveal that hybrid work requires specific strategies to foster connection, accountability, and shared purpose. Without this balance, hybrid work risks eroding the benefits it offers to employees and employers. The remainder of this chapter explores the literature on causal mechanisms identified as key to hybrid work performance, situating these insights within the grounded theory developed in this study.

5.2 Knowing: Relationships

The theme of establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships is foundational to this study's grounded theory and serves as a key mechanism for facilitating performance. As outlined in chapter four, pre-existing relationships are

crucial for knowledge sharing and employee support, creating networks that connect an employee to the wider organisational purpose. This finding aligns with research on social capital at work (Dubos & Cook, 2017), which emphasises shared values and resources for achieving common goals (Portes, 2009). Social capital is the ability to obtain resources or information through a “durable network” of personal connections and relationships (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119).

However, this study contradicts the assumption that social capital is inherently sustained in work environments (Halpern, 2005). Theories like Bourdieu’s habitus suggest that individuals’ behaviours are shaped by social processes and transferable across contexts (Bourdieu, 2004). However, the findings of this study reveal that hybrid work impedes spontaneous interaction, trust-building, and informal networking - key elements that traditionally sustain social capital in work settings. The lack of regular in-person interactions in hybrid environments diminishes these elements, leading to a gradual weakening of employee social capital over time (Deal & Levenson, 2021).

This present study found that when relationships fail to be nurtured, knowledge sharing declines. This reduces self-efficacy and competence, impacting performance negatively. These findings are consistent with Yang et al. (2022) who also found that Taiwanese employees (N=20) working from home, limited communication to pre-existing contacts, leading to siloed networks and weaker ties. Similarly, Teevan et al. (2021) undertook a synthesis of findings of over 50 studies on hybrid working at Microsoft Corporation, and reported that the lack of spontaneous, in-person interaction weakens relationships, reducing knowledge sharing and collaboration.

In terms of existing theoretical literature on employee job performance, the findings of this study both align with and extend the job demands-resources model (JD-R) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The model conceptualises job performance as a balance between demands (such as workload, role ambiguity) and resources (such as support, feedback). It recognises colleagues as critical resources for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and help-seeking. This study supports that view but adds further

depth by showing that the availability and quality of these social resources in hybrid environments is contingent on physical presence and intentional connection. Existing relationships function as performance-enabling resources, but when these connections are absent or eroded, as is common in more remote hybrid settings, performance suffers.

Demerouti and Bakker (2023) revisited their JD-R model after the COVID restriction period, acknowledging that hybrid work increases demands, and the absence of certain resources results in a failure to initiate action to achieve work goals. While they highlight the buffering role of personal resources like self-esteem (as demonstrated in Barbier et al.'s 2013 longitudinal study of 473 Belgian public sector employees), this study provides a contrasting post-restriction insight: that hybrid work may actively deplete personal resources over time. Employees working predominantly from home reported declines in perceived competence, increased anxiety, and growing emotional detachment, all of which constrain their ability to meet demands. This assertion highlights how pre-COVID perspectives on how resources contribute to performance can no longer be generalised to the post-restriction period hybrid working environment. These findings suggest that JD-R theory, while still relevant, requires adaptation to account for the cumulative depletion of both job and personal resources in hybrid settings, especially when social connection is fragmented. The model should more explicitly incorporate relational erosion and resource inaccessibility as central features of hybrid work, rather than treating resources as stable or individually held. This extends JD-R theory by positioning social mechanisms and connection quality as dynamic and potentially fragile components of the resource-performance equation in modern work contexts.

The findings within this study extend and refine aspects of the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which posits that employees are motivated to to acquire, retain, and protect valued resources, such as time, energy, social support, and knowledge, to cope with demands and avoid stress. While COR acknowledges the

impact of resource loss on performance, this study demonstrates how hybrid work creates new patterns of resource erosion that are not fully accounted for in the original theory.

While COR acknowledges the impact of resource loss on performance, this study demonstrates how hybrid work creates new patterns of resource erosion that are not fully accounted for in the original theory. Specifically, the physical and temporal separation inherent in hybrid work diminishes access to relational resources, including informal interactions, peer support, and organisational knowledge, thereby limiting opportunities for spontaneous learning and emotional reassurance. These findings support COR's emphasis on resource loss but suggest that in hybrid contexts, resource depletion is often socially and structurally induced, rather than stemming solely from individual circumstances or overload. Moreover, the study highlights how hybrid work environments impede resource replenishment, as employees lack routine access to in-person connections, mentorship, and shared team experiences. This leads not only to disengagement and psychological detachment but also to a gradual erosion of collective performance. These insights extend COR Theory by suggesting that in hybrid settings, resource loss is not simply an individual stressor but can become systemic, cascading across teams and organisations through mechanisms such as social avoidance and knowledge fragmentation.

Thus, the conceptual model developed in this study expands COR Theory by identifying new forms of resource loss specific to hybrid work and by emphasising the role of relational and contextual factors in shaping how resources are lost, replenished, or protected over time.

The JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) both highlight the importance of accessing resources for performance. This study demonstrates that relationships act as both a causal mechanism for performance, and are a critical resource for facilitating knowledge sharing, competence and collaboration. However, the challenge for COR theory in hybrid work, lies in the difficulty of sustaining

relational resources when employees are physically and temporally distanced. Whilst COR theory remains applicable to work research, it does not account for the unique demands of hybrid work environments.

The social support derived from accessing workplace relationships is also linked to extra-role performance, defined as discretionary behaviours that go beyond formal job descriptions and contribute to organisational effectiveness (Bakker et al., 2004). Chiaburu and Harrison's (2008, p. 1087) meta-analysis ($k=161$, $N=77954$), investigating the effect of colleague support, reinforces this. Their results show that exchanging process knowledge (such as work shortcuts or informal norms) via "horizontal" means, helps employees achieve work goals. This study's findings corroborate these conclusions, revealing that the absence of informal exchanges in hybrid settings adversely affects individual performance. Similarly, Ten Brummelhuis et al's (2010) study of Dutch employees ($N=1114$) from various sectors, found that increased hybrid working decreased collegiality and knowledge sharing, highlighting how geographic and physical distance disrupts resource exchange. This study extends those findings by showing that physical separation not only limits resource exchange but also creates a sense of loss among employees. Participants reported feeling disconnected from colleagues and lacking informal social support, which is consistent with recent research linking professional isolation to reduced performance in hybrid work (Bloom et al., 2022; Toscano et al., 2024).

These findings collectively demonstrate the importance of actively fostering relationships, both in-person and online, to mitigate the challenges of hybrid work. While hybrid work offers flexibility, the findings highlight that without deliberate effort to maintain connections, employees risk losing valuable relational resources, which are essential for performance. The findings also emphasise the need for organisations to prioritise regular in-person interactions, particularly for new colleagues, to mitigate the negative effects of physical and social distance on employee performance.

5.3 Knowing: Performance and Role Clarity

This research found that when employees understood their role and what was required, this enhanced their performance. When employees were not clear on their role, it hindered their performance. This occurred frequently through an absence of conversations, leading to a lack of clarity for both new and existing employees. This finding endorses an early integrative review of person - organisation fit by Kristof (1996), that found that employees knowing their role, where they fit within an organisation and how they contribute, matters for performance. Compatibility with the role also leads to higher commitment and performance (Kristof, 1996).

All participants in this study worked within a public sector organisation advocating for hybrid working, suggesting an implicit agreement on work arrangements (CIPD, 2021). However, in practice, Welsh public sector hybrid work prioritises employee autonomy, allowing individuals significant control over their schedules and work locations. Participants described diverse and highly personalised arrangements, with many opting for home working over hybrid arrangements to meet personal needs.

Deci and Ryan's (2008) self-determination theory (SDT) argue that increased autonomy enhances both motivation and performance. Similarly, prior research highlights how the benefits of control over workplace decisions such as location and hours of work contributes to performance (Choudhury et al., 2022; Gajendran et al., 2015; Karasek, 1979). However, this study challenges this theory by aligning with more recent findings from Bloom et al. (2022), who argue that unstructured autonomy creates tensions around fairness, equality, and team coordination. This study highlights how differences in colleagues' work arrangements hinder effective communication and contribute to role ambiguity. Whilst autonomy may enhance individual motivation, this study found it can simultaneously disrupt team cohesion and impede collaborative efforts, raising questions about the uncritical application of autonomy as an assumed performance enabler in hybrid work settings.

Most participants in this study emphasised the absence of agreed performance goals or clear responsibilities, resulting in feelings of uncertainty, duplication of effort and impacting confidence. Critical realist research acknowledges that whilst a mechanism can cause an event, the absence of a mechanism can be equally impactful (Oliver, 2011). In this case, the absence of mechanisms such as setting professional boundaries, establishing clear responsibilities and ensuring role clarity increases personal agency that can lead to altered behaviour. These changes negatively impact the performance of colleagues, weakening employee commitment and sense of belonging to the organisation. In some cases, this absence leads to higher turnover intention.

These findings challenge established research on the importance of self-efficacy for performance. Self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviours necessary to achieve specific outcomes (Bandura, 2006), has traditionally been seen as essential for effective performance. In both pre-COVID and mid-COVID restriction period studies, self-efficacy was associated with increased motivation, resilience, and job satisfaction, particularly when employees were given autonomy (Bandura, 1982, 2006; Gajendran et al., 2015).

However, this study reveals a paradox in hybrid work settings. When heightened personal agency is coupled with the absence of role clarity, self-efficacy is undermined rather than enhanced. Without clear guidance or boundaries, employees struggle to understand what is expected of them, leading to uncertainty and diminished confidence in their ability to perform effectively. This misalignment challenges previous assumptions that autonomy and self-efficacy are universally beneficial. Instead, it suggests that the absence of role clarity reduces self-efficacy and hinders performance. These findings reflect a critical shift in understanding. While self-efficacy has traditionally been seen as a key driver of performance, this study shows that self-efficacy is derived from clear roles, responsibilities, and performance.

Participants in this study also emphasised the importance of performance objectives that outline expected targets, goals, or outputs. These objectives, when agreed upon between manager and employee, were described as providing much-needed clarity. From the literature, setting clear and challenging goals is consistently identified as an influential factor in supporting performance (Locke et al., 1981; Madlock, 2012; Sparrow & Cooper, 2014). According to Locke et al. (1981), performance goals define “what an individual is trying to accomplish; it is the object or aim of an action” (Locke et al., 1981, p. 126). Goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2013; Locke et al., 1981) argues that well-defined objectives not only provide clarity but also enhance self-belief and motivation, as employees feel a greater sense of control over their tasks (Bandura, 1982). Furthermore, when such goals are paired with appropriate feedback, they lead to even better performance outcomes (Locke & Latham, 2013). This study endorses goal-setting theory by reinforcing that clearly defined and challenging goals positively influence behaviour and improve task performance in hybrid work settings.

Participants noted that until recently, Welsh public sector employees documented goals in formal performance agreements with clear objectives. The debate over documenting performance objectives and subjective measurement has long been discussed in relation to employee motivation (Prowse & Prowse, 2009). Participants confirmed that while performance objective discussions were expected, they often did not occur. Instead of the formal annual or quarterly reviews, there was an expectation of more frequent informal conversations, which also did not take place, leaving employees unclear about expectations.

Whilst much of the leadership and performance literature has been situated in traditional office-based organisations, the role of physical proximity in facilitating role clarity has not featured explicitly. However, research has emphasised the importance of the nature, frequency, and quality of conversations in providing the clarity required for role expectations. Hippeli (2022, p. 40), emphasises the value of using “pertinent

metrics to measure progress and maintain(ing) clear and consistent lines of communication” to reduce distractions and establish high performance and accountability for workplaces engaging in hybrid work practices. In the context of hybrid working, where physical proximity is limited, the need for clarity around role performance requirements becomes even more pronounced. Gratton (2021, p. 5) highlights the importance of being “goal oriented” as a prerequisite for hybrid work performance, arguing that such clarity should be strengthened in response to the challenges posed by this new way of working.

5.4 Connecting: In-Person Activity

Despite growing reluctance among employees to increase office attendance, this research consistently highlights the significance of in-person activity for effectively connecting learning to roles, building relationships and fostering knowledge sharing. From a critical realist perspective, the significance of context is central to understanding how causal mechanisms operate. In this study, the public sector context offers insights into how extended periods without in-person interaction has led to a shift from hybrid work to predominantly home-based working.

Bailey and Kurland's (2002) early literature review (N=80) identified the necessity of scheduling in-person team meetings to counterbalance the loss of spontaneous discussions inherent in telework. Their findings highlighted the challenges posed by boundaryless hybrid work in maintaining dynamic team communication and was observed within this current study. Similarly, Gajendran and Harrison's (2007) meta-analysis (N=47) reinforced the productivity benefits of informal interactions, concluding that working from home for more than two and a half days per week negatively impacted colleague relationships. Although published pre-COVID, this study is further supported by the recent work of Wöhrmann & Ebner (2021), Bloom et al (2024) and Van der Lippe & Lippényi (2020).

Furthermore, in a hermeneutic study of hybrid work definitions across Europe (N=27), Vartiainen and Vanharanta (2023) noted a lack of reference to work location as

a social space where relationships are nurtured. Hopkins and Figaro (2021) also argue an enduring need for social interaction among hybrid workers, acknowledging the growing resistance of employees to in-person activities after prolonged periods of remote work. Such resistance was a notable feature of this research and resonates with broader debates, including public disputes between trade unions and the Office for National Statistics over mandatory office attendance (BBC, 2024, April 5). Critically, while the literature emphasises the value of in-person engagement for sustaining relationships and productivity, it tends to adopt a prescriptive stance focused on physical location and time, that overlooks the nuanced and context-dependent nature of hybrid work dynamics (Vartiainen & Vanharanta, 2023). The findings in this study suggest that simply scheduling in-person activities may not address underlying tensions related to autonomy, trust, and perceived fairness. Instead, organisations may need to rethink how they balance flexibility with the strategic integration of face-to-face interactions, ensuring that such measures are purpose-driven and responsive to employee needs.

Participants in this study acknowledged the isolating effects of working from home, whilst appreciating the flexibility it allows. This dual perspective aligns with pre- and COVID restriction period research, which illustrates the tension between autonomy benefits and the challenges of social disconnection in remote work (Leka, 2021). Increased isolation, both professional and personal, is well documented (Golden et al., 2008; Toscano & Zappalà, 2020), with isolation undermining social connection and hindering cooperation (Gratton, 2021; Rebolledo et al., 2021). Given that cooperation is essential for performance, understanding how to maintain it is critical (Hackney et al., 2022). Gratton (2021, p. 7) argues that innovation through cooperation requires face-to-face, “synchronous” interaction. This is supported by a mixed methods study of Norwegian hybrid insurance workers (N=558). Using repeated measures (MANOVA) over four months, researchers found that work motivation, digital competence and performance declined due to reduced in-person interaction (Innstrand et al., 2022).

Though limited by the pandemic's temporal context and short period studied, this study supports the notion that diminished in-person interaction negatively impacts hybrid workers performance.

This current study reinforces existing research, highlighting that while technology supports virtual collaboration, it cannot replace the benefits of in-person connection and activity. In the Welsh context, the shift to more home-based work has exacerbated challenges in knowledge sharing, relationship-building, and colleague connectedness. While technology facilitates communication, it cannot replicate the organic dynamics fostered through in-person interactions. These findings emphasise the need to balance flexibility with intentional in-person connection and to clearly define work locations and the role of in-person activities in enhancing performance for a more integrated hybrid work approach.

5.5 Connecting: Manager Capability

This study reinforces established perspectives on the manager's role in hybrid environments but challenges some traditional views, highlighting critical gaps. For example, in a study of professionals in the U.S (N=375) by Golden and Veiga (2008), they identified the need for proactive manager support and Nakrošiene et al's (2019) study of 128 Lithuanian I.T employees highlighted the importance of trust in dispersed teams. However, this study shifts the focus from support and trust to managers acting as intentional facilitators, actively connecting people, processes and information. As employee's schedules increasingly align with personal and family demands, this study highlights the adverse impact of colleague discontent and detachment on team dynamics and agility. These findings emphasise the importance of proactive management to sustain cohesion, coordination and collaboration, as highlighted in recent research by Vartiainen & Vanharanta (2024).

Hill (2023, p. 4) calls for a new management framework, focusing on relationship building and enabling equity across colleagues, promoting "collective confidence that the hybrid work structure can work well for everyone". Similarly, in an

earlier five-round Delphi Study of 43 experts, Figaro (2021) challenges existing leadership theories, advocating for new competencies for leading dispersed teams. The findings here align with the argument that the “moral character” of managers matters in the current hybrid environment and that leadership that enables connections is required (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021, p. 399). However, Barnes et al. (2024) further argue, in a qualitative study of marketing professionals (N=13) that resilience and adaptability are also key for hybrid leadership, concluding that a “soft skills leadership renaissance” (p.10) is required. Hopkins and Figaro (2021) propose managers must acquire a unique ability to bring the two environments of office and remote work locations into a cohesive whole. Furthermore, Barnes et al. (2024) caution that the ambiguity of supporting employee independence leaves managers in a “temporal quandary” (p.10). This study reflects the complexity of balancing employee demands with the risks of poor performance and prolonged virtual meetings replacing dynamic, spontaneous interaction. Barnes et al.'s (2024) conclusion that leaders are ill-prepared for the impact of hybrid work aligns with the findings of this study.

5.5.1 Emotional Intelligence

Participants within this study highlighted two attributes for managing hybrid teams: emotional intelligence and coaching. Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognise and adapt one's emotions, using this information to guide one's own thinking and action in relation to others (Mayer et al., 2000). Displaying emotional intelligence enables managers to notice behaviour changes and address potential conflict in dispersed teams (Mayer et al, 2000). Figaro's (2021) Delphi study emphasised the importance of relational leadership, with managers needing to build trust remotely. Cognitive abilities, such as reasoning and problem-solving, also mediate these skills, making emotional intelligence even more critical (Figaro, 2021). Recent research reinforced the negative impact of perceived unfairness in hybrid environments, leading to reduced productivity, low collaboration and retention and increased burnout (Becker & Lanzl, 2023; Gratton, 2021). Becker and Lanzl's (2023) longitudinal study of German

professionals (N=637) found mismatches in boundary management preferences cause stress, highlighting the need for proactive management relationships in hybrid work settings. Barnes et al (2024) further stressed the importance of compassion and emotional sensitivity, highlighting the need for more “humanistic” behaviours (p.4) in hybrid teams. Their qualitative study of leaders (N=13) identified leadership traits such as introspection and adaptability as fundamental to a more sensitive and emotionally intelligent approach to leadership (Barnes et al., 2024).

This study contributes to current literature on the need for evolving managerial capabilities by supporting the need for a refined set of competencies, focusing on emotional intelligence, empathy, adaptability, and the ability to foster connection and collaboration across both virtual and in-person contexts. These attributes position managers as key enablers of team cohesion and performance in a flexible work landscape.

5.5.2 Coaching

An important finding from this research is that physical distance in hybrid work environments hinders the use of interpersonal communication to support performance. Several participants suggested that a coaching communication style can build confidence in independent problem solving and enable remote performance. A growing body of research shows that management coaching enhances employee performance (Gabriel et al., 2014; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007), fostering goal attainment and personal well-being (Grant et al., 2013).

Studies during the pandemic highlight how coaching supports remote and hybrid work. In a UK qualitative study of remote working professionals (N=15), Burroughes & Grant (2023) found that managerial coaching helps establish and maintain trust which can build self-efficacy remotely. Similarly, in a study of Chinese employees (N=290), Hui et al. (2024) found that in-person coaching improves knowledge creation due to the “rich information cues delivered” (p.261), further supporting this study’s finding that regular face-to-face interaction is crucial for

performance. Jarosz (2021) conducted a mixed methods study of global professionals (N=20) over five weeks and found that coaching improved remote employees' performance and confidence, though the study's small sample size limits its generalisability. A paper by Williams and Palmer (2020) further highlighted how coaching relationships help employees navigate challenges, build resilience and support performance in autonomous work settings. These studies align with the findings of this research, reinforcing that coaching can help overcome hybrid work challenges. They also highlight the ongoing value of in-person interactions for relationship-building and knowledge sharing in hybrid work environments.

5.6 Connecting: Organisational Citizen Behaviour

An important finding from this study is that participants felt more connected to colleagues who demonstrated interest, caring and proactivity. These behaviours contributed to their performance by fostering relationships and a sense of belonging. Despite the value placed on autonomy in choosing work hours and location, some participants noted that it also introduced challenges with relationships, such as feelings of unfairness and delayed workflow, which could hinder performance. However, earlier research suggests that when organisations acknowledge employees' self-interests, autonomy can also foster extra, "unselfish contributions" which enhance collaboration and overall performance (Organ & Moorman, 1993, p. 6). This indicates that while autonomy may present challenges, it can also drive positive behaviours when managed effectively.

Prosocial or voluntary behaviour that extends beyond the transactional are referred to as organisational citizenship behaviour (Organ & Paine, 1999). Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) supports the social and psychological environment for performance, but is "non-task" (Organ, 2014, p. 90). This study's finding that supportive, attentive colleagues facilitate performance aligns with OCB research, emphasising the importance of relational and prosocial behaviours in hybrid settings. A meta-analysis by Podsakoff et al (2009), of 168 independent samples

(N=51235) of global public and private organisation studies, found that OCBs are linked to better individual and organisational outcomes, including task performance (Podsakoff et al., 2009). Participants in this present study also noted behaviours that mitigated the challenges of independent work, such as planning in-person collaboration, offering emotional support, and proactively sharing knowledge. These behaviours demonstrate commitment to colleagues and enhance performance (Organ & Paine, 1999). Whilst a recent study of Indian employees (N=150) found no significant difference in OCBs between office based and hybrid employees, the self-selected sample limits its generalisability (Patel & Behrani, 2023). However, despite these findings, recent reviews suggest the need for increased OCBs in hybrid work settings (Gujar et al., 2024; Shah & Shinde, 2024).

This study contributes to the understanding of OCBs in hybrid work contexts by aligning with traditional conceptualisations of voluntary or prosocial acts as built upon existing relationships (Podsakoff et al., 2009). However, the findings suggest that distance matters as employees' observable behaviours are shaped by underlying mechanisms that differ between physical and remote work environments. This prompts a reconsideration of these behaviours to better reflect the dynamics of hybrid work arrangements (Gujar et al., 2024).

5.7 Avoiding: Emotional and Psychological Detachment

This study revealed that many participants had extended the practical implementation of hybrid work to almost fully remote, home-based working. The increased distance created through an extended form of hybrid working, whether physical or temporal, often led to ambivalence, avoidance and detachment, influencing performance outcomes. Participants described how colleagues increasingly detached from teams, avoiding or ignoring work tasks and interactions, resulting in a sense of unease due to the absence of support or effort from colleagues. Contrary to existing research linking increased autonomy to motivation and performance (Deci & Ryan, 2008), this study found that hybrid work enables detachment from the organisation,

leading to concerns of declining quality standards in both team and individual performance.

Toscano et al's (2023) study of 203 Italian public sector employees, supports the findings on detachment in hybrid work. Their diary study approach measured social isolation, concentration, engagement, and performance, and found that when working from home, a decrease in daily job performance occurred. This was due to increased social isolation and reduced work engagement. The study highlighted that days working at home create both physical and psychological distance from colleagues. Intensified perceptions of social isolation (Toscano et al, 2023), in turn hinders the development of relatedness to an organisation; a key component of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012). The mechanism of detachment, characterised by reduced work engagement, ultimately contributes to a decrease in performance, further supporting the idea that detachment in hybrid work negatively affects both motivation and job performance.

Pre-COVID, detachment from work was generally seen as a positive mechanism for reducing work related stress and promoting recovery (Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2017). Research shows positive correlations between detachment and task performance with job demands like stress, negatively impacting detachment (Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2017). In a meta-analysis of global studies by Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah (2017) examining the antecedents and outcomes of detachment from work, positive correlations were found between detachment and task performance ($k=91$, $N=38124$). Their results suggest detachment has positive outcomes for both the employee and employer. However, during the pandemic, detachment was difficult to achieve. A scoping review ($N=132$) by Vacchiano et al. (2024) found that hybrid work blurred work boundaries, making detachment more challenging. Kossek et al's (2021) qualitative study ($N=763$) of U.S academics, also found that when working from home, blurred boundaries, constant work-related stimuli,

and the physical separation from the work environment, all contributed to heightened stress and a lack of detachment.

However, the post-restriction period continuation of hybrid work has meant personal boundaries remain difficult to maintain. Recent mixed methods research of 552 Indian I.T professionals by Banerjee and Gupta (2024) found that extensive use of digital technologies increases stress and communication overload, frustrating the ability to detach from work. Furthermore, a recent 8-month longitudinal study of 637 German employees by Becker and Lanzl (2023) highlighted that both segmenters (employees who prefer separation) and integrators (who blend work and life) both experience increased stress in hybrid work environments. Digital technologies exacerbate the challenge of managing boundaries (Becker & Lanzl, 2023). Boundary Theory has traditionally explained how employees manage their work environments by segmenting or integrating work and home life through the construction of “mental fences” separating domains of their life (Kreiner et al., 2006, p. 1319). Overall, recent literature suggests that hybrid working employees find it increasingly difficult to detach from work, with their environments contributing to heightened stress and blurred boundaries, rather than fostering a clearer separation between work and home life.

However, this study reveals the opposite effect. When factors like blurred boundaries and a diminished sense of belonging due to prolonged hybrid working coexist, employees may detach more frequently. In these circumstances, detachment is a mechanism used to avoid colleagues and work, which raises concerns about the detrimental impact on workplace relationships, collaboration, and diversity of thought. In his book on belonging and performance, Waller (2021) argues that the absence of a sense of belonging undermines performance (Waller, 2021). This study supports this, and earlier studies, that illustrate when colleagues work remotely, performance issues are less likely to be noticed and support is more difficult to provide (Deci et al., 2017; Golden et al., 2008). Additionally, a lack of shared experiences and knowledge

increases the likelihood of conflict amongst teams, and reduces positive colleague exchanges (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008).

Vacchiano et al's (2024) scoping review also found that hybrid work allows colleagues to create a distance from difficult colleague relationships. Detachment, especially from colleagues viewed as less valuable, can erode communication quality, which is crucial for collaboration and knowledge sharing (Vacchiano et al, 2024). Decades of research has consistently highlighted how strong social relationships at work positively influence work performance (Karasek, 1979). Emotional connections, particularly the "dyadic relationship" between employee and managers, improves performance in various ways (Breevaart et al., 2015, p. 754). While detachment has been found to reduce stress and improve well-being, this study found that it can lead to feelings of social and professional isolation. This finding aligns fully with the results of a systematic literature review of remote work ($k=63$, $N=37553$) by Charalampous et al (2019) which highlighted that more remote work impacts well-being. Some participants within this study, grieved for lost relationships. This "longing for colleagues", explained by Vartiainen and Vanharanta (2024, p. 17) highlights that detachment is not just a passive consequence of the distance caused through hybrid work, but a mechanism with unintended effects, potentially undermining both individual and organisational outcomes.

5.8 Avoiding: Social Homeostasis

The observation in this study that a reduction in social contact leads to employees actively seeking fewer opportunities for interaction is significant, though it seems counterintuitive. This finding aligns with the emerging framework of social homeostasis, which explains how social equilibrium is maintained and disrupted in response to changes in social contact (Matthews & Tye, 2019). Social homeostasis integrates neuro-biological mechanisms that aid individuals to notice, regulate, and respond to their need for social interaction (Bales et al., 2023). Recent consideration of rodent studies has shown that a deficit in social contact triggers a stress response

(Matthews & Tye, 2019). As social environments change, such as in hybrid and remote settings, social contact reduces, and stress responses increase. This leads individuals to seek even less social interaction, despite a rising emotional need (Matthews & Tye, 2019). However, previous human studies have also linked long-term remote work with heightened feelings of loneliness (Bloom et al., 2015; Golden et al., 2008). Supportive work relationships are known to buffer the negative effects of social disconnection (Theorell, 2020). However, recent academic articles now highlight how social isolation can elevate feelings of social threat, prompting maladaptive behaviours such as social withdrawal (Bales et al., 2023). This study contributes to the existing literature by exploring how these dynamics manifest in hybrid work environments, where digital communication overload and reduced physical presence amplify the stress response hindering employees' ability to engage with colleagues, share knowledge, and offer support.

Social homeostasis refers to an individual's ability to regulate the quantity and quality of social contact (Matthews & Tye, 2019), a concept central to this study. Participants reported difficulties in maintaining a balance in their social well-being with disruptions in social homeostasis leading to negative outcomes such as increased loneliness, anxiety and reduced work performance. Social interaction is fundamental for psychological well-being (Holt-Lunstad, 2017) yet hybrid work can undermine such essential connections. In two meta-analyses of 218 studies (N=4 million) by Holt-Lunstad (2017, p. 127), authors investigated the effects of loneliness, concluding that social relationships were a "biological need" for health. Further research found that loneliness, linked to weakened social ties, poses health risks comparable to smoking or obesity (Holt-Lunstad, 2021; Morina et al., 2021).

Similarly, this study also found that hybrid workers experience loneliness and anxiety due to reduced social interaction (Leka, 2021; Papandrea et al., 2020). Participants reported diminished competence, avoidance of in-office interactions and heightened social anxiety, particularly when working four or more days per week from

home with minimal in-person contact. These factors negatively impacted confidence and capability. These findings are consistent with a Turkish study of finance professionals (N=202) by Taser et al. (2022), who found that loneliness mediated the relationship between remote work and flow, adversely affecting performance.

Participants also noted how different personality traits, such as extroversion or introversion, influenced their experiences of hybrid work. This aligns with mixed method research by Davis et al (2022), who found that personality affects employee decision-making and network expansion. Davis et al (2022, p. 28) used social network analysis and diary studies with UK professionals (N=471) and found that personality traits lead to “challenges in encouraging employees to broaden their networks”. However, social dynamics are also shaped by factors such as genetics, gender, and life experiences, which influence an individual's "set point" for social interaction (Bales et al., 2023, p. 1).

Despite this complexity, the concept of social homeostasis remains critical for understanding social needs and well-being (Matthews & Tye, 2019). While established social networks provide some remote support, participants highlighted that physical distance weakened relationships, particularly for newer colleagues who struggled with isolation and a lack of belonging. Although hybrid work offers benefits like increased focus, human connection remains essential. This highlights the need for intentional job design that facilitates social interaction or acknowledges the potential "trade-offs" in performance (Gratton, 2021, p. 7). Neglecting social dynamics in hybrid arrangements risks undermining their effectiveness, highlighting the value of structured hybrid work arrangements that balance autonomy with opportunities for social engagement (Gratton, 2021).

5.9 Losing: Absence of Accountability

Setting clear performance expectations emerged as a consistent theme throughout this research. Accountability, defined as accepting responsibility and meeting established standards, is a critical component of public service and is enshrined in UK law ("Civil Service Code of Conduct," 2010). In their systematic

literature review (N=277), Pérez-Durán (2024) defined accountability as a key mechanism in public sector governance. Overman et al. (2021, p. 1748) found that the effectiveness of formal accountability mechanisms in the Dutch public sector (N=2702) is “largely predicated on the individual perception of accountability”. Whilst the anticipation of accountability has strong behavioural effects, their study also revealed that public sector accountability often appears symbolic. They argue that accountability is a “relational concept” and that “felt” accountability, where employees believe that they will be held accountable positively impacts organisational performance (Overman et al., 2021, p. 1749).

However, hybrid work environments present challenges in establishing clear accountabilities. The ease of discussing requirements and resolving misunderstandings is often diminished (Barnes et al., 2024). Recent articles on the challenges of hybrid working have shown a lack of clarity regarding employee outcomes can negatively impact performance (Iqbal et al., 2021), while ambiguous or absent expectations can foster perceptions of unfairness and hinder accountability (Hippeli, 2022). This study emphasises the importance of regular, consistent dialogue to establish expectations and measure progress. However, participants frequently equated productivity with answering emails or attending meetings. Without clear accountability measures or documented outputs, online visibility was often mistaken for genuine productivity, resulting in pseudo-performance, defined as activities that appear valuable but contribute little value to organisation goals (Newport, 2024). This phenomenon highlights the risk of online visibility being mistaken for genuine productivity (Newport, 2024). Furthermore, the failure to establish clear role accountabilities not only impacts individual performance but also creates organisational vulnerabilities, such as higher turnover intentions and increased absenteeism (Iqbal et al., 2021). Participants in this study similarly reported frustrations related to unclear accountability structures, which contributed to reduced output and quality.

The lack of clear accountability also fosters behaviours such as cyberslacking, where employees engage in non-business activities during work hours, particularly when personal time is encroached upon by technology (Güğerçin, 2020). Güğerçin's (2020) study of Turkish office employees (N=252), found that setting clear output expectations for hybrid workers helps reduce incidences of cyberslacking, clarify tasks and enhance performance, a finding supported by this study. Participants also observed that the absence of accountability measures, combined with avoidant behaviours, led to frustration and perceptions of unfairness. Such considerations align with Latané et al.'s (1979) theory of social impact that explains how people's behaviour is influenced by the presence and actions of others in social situations. In traditional office settings, accountability forces are immediate and tangible, such as the presence of a manager (Iqbal et al., 2021). In hybrid environments, these structures are weakened, contributing to social loafing, defined as reduced individual effort in team settings (Latané et al, 1979). This finding was further supported in an as yet unpublished study by Oliver (2021). In a study of 129 U.S Finance professionals, Oliver (2021) identified poor team cohesion was positively associated with social loafing in hybrid settings. This current study also builds on Latané's (1979) theory by highlighting how the lack of intentional management practices, such as accountability measures, fosters avoidant behaviours that diminish performance in hybrid settings.

Similarly, the theory of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2008) provides a framework for understanding motivation in work, positing autonomy is a key motivator for performance. However, this study suggests that without accountability structures, autonomy can undermine competence and relatedness, leading to detachment and reduced performance. This study therefore challenges the empirical view that workplace autonomy enhances motivation and performance. Offering autonomy without corresponding accountability contributes to a shift in power away from the employer, controlling where, when and how work occurs, towards the employee. Exploring such observations through a critical realist lens, this study reveals that whilst

employees may appear to perform under hybrid work arrangements, the underlying mechanisms that shape their performance may not be fully understood (Hartwig, 2015). This study highlights the need for organisations to balance autonomy with accountability to ensure sustained performance in hybrid environments.

5.10 Losing: Absence of Job Redesign

The transition to hybrid work presents challenges for organisations that fail to redesign roles for the new model. Job redesign involves changing tasks, responsibilities, and job structures to enhance employee performance (Knight & Parker, 2021). It is a key factor in performance, especially when hybrid working (Allen, 2015; Choudhury et al., 2021). The rushed adaptation to pandemic demands and the “hurried adoption” of digital technologies by organisations globally posed performance risks (Grzegorzczuk et al., 2021, p.13), leading to overlooked factors such as the need for digital protocols and communication guidelines. These oversights resulted in work avoidance, low interaction, and poor communication, exacerbated by asynchronous working and a lack of accountability.

This study found that the autonomy granted to employees to decide how, where and when to work creates tensions within teams, with inadequate boundary setting leading to work / home conflict and declining work standards and quality. Grzegorzczuk et al. (2021, p. 15) describe these freedoms as a “chaotic assembly of individual choices” and argue for a structured approach to role design. The importance of clear boundaries is emphasised by the findings of Bloom et al’s (2024) study, conducted in a Chinese IT call centre with employees (n=1217) and managers (n=395). They concluded that an agreed two days per week hybrid work maintains performance, but beyond that may have negative consequences. Davis et al. (2022, p. 15) also emphasise the need for intentional job redesign in their study of 759 UK office workers, advocating for a more systemic approach to making roles “hybrid-ready.” A study of Northern Irish public sector employees (N=50) by Ballantine et al. (2022) also found

that the absence of deliberate job redesign when hybrid working contributed to feelings of overwork.

The clarity of purpose behind decisions to embrace hybrid work is crucial (Felstead & Henseke, 2017), yet this study reveals that many public sector organisations failed to reassess decisions made in response to the pandemic. Grzegorzczuk et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of defining work timeframes and role expectations for hybrid work effectiveness. Their concern about a “moral hazard”- employees reducing their performance when working remotely (Grzegorzczuk et al, 2021, p. 8) - was a concern before the pandemic (Felstead, 2022) and aligns with this study’s findings. Participants in this study reported declining professional standards and performance due to unclear expectations and excessive autonomy. This study adds nuance to the discussion, revealing that unstructured autonomy also fosters tensions within teams and conflict over work expectations, supporting findings by Nastjuk et al., 2024 and Tarafdar et al., 2007. Grzegorzczuk et al. (2021, p. 12) caution that hybrid work must be carefully designed, considering the “bricks, bytes and behaviour, i.e. the space, tools and culture”. Similarly, Iqbal et al. (2021, p. 30) argue organisations should first ask “why?” hybrid working is needed, before redesigning roles.

In a study of over 9000 German hybrid workers, Wöhrmann and Ebner (2021) reported that hybrid work is associated with lower quality relationships with colleagues. Those roles where employees rely on one another and are required to exchange knowledge and ideas to effectively perform are considered less appropriate for hybrid work (Wöhrmann & Ebner, 2021). Similarly to Bloom et al’s (2024) finding, their study identified that the quality of social relations at work “suffers in proportion with the number of days spent teleworking” (p.365). Their suggestion to limit remote work during each week is pertinent as “boundaryless working hours” are associated with an adverse impact on performance (Wöhrmann & Ebner, 2021, p. 364). According to a study of over 11,000 European employees conducted by Van der Lippe and Lippényi (2020), pre-COVID, they also concluded that the higher the percentage of time an

employee worked from home, the worse the performance of their colleagues. Their assertion that “digital presence cannot really compensate for corporeal presence” in terms of effective collaboration, aligns with this study's findings that increased remote working leads to reduced work quality and competence (p.73). This present study extends this research, highlighting how unstructured remote work, without clear boundaries or accountability, may lead to the fragmentation of teams and a breakdown in collective performance. Hybrid working is not a homogeneous construct and will vary in pattern, ratio of home to in-person work, and contextual demands (Vartiainen & Vanharanta, 2023). Based on their study of 690 U.S professionals across multiple sectors, Xie et al (2019) argued that considering each job by the role, outcomes expected and the extent to which colleagues work from home is consequential for the performance of their colleagues when hybrid working.

A further finding of the European Van der Lippe and Lippényi study (2020) (N=11000), is the potential for work stress, caused by poorly managed asynchronous working compounded by increased virtual (such as online meetings) and digital (such as chat channels and social media) communication. Remote work risks have emerged following the increase in virtual and digital communication and leads to technostress, the cognitive and social pressure to manage technological communication effectively (Tarafdar et al., 2007). Whilst virtual technology connects people, information and processes, as noted by Nastjuk et al. (2024), the inability to switch off from work due to constant digital connectivity has created a form of “techno-invasion” (Nastjuk et al., 2024, p. 371) which has been positively associated with burnout and decreased performance. Several studies confirm the adverse consequences of technology-based stress (Banerjee & Gupta, 2024; Becker & Lanzi, 2023; Nastjuk et al., 2024). Indeed, technostress, the “dark side” of technology use is considered a source of decline in the psychology of employees (Güngerçin, 2020, p. 824). Technostress is also negatively associated with performance (Tarafdar et al., 2015), detachment (Pfaffinger et al., 2022) and turnover intention (Califf et al., 2020). These outcomes are all supported by

the experiences shared within this study and deepen our understanding of hybrid work. They emphasise how poorly designed roles and a lack of guiding protocols for managing technology and virtual communication may lead to unintended consequences, such as adverse psychological effects. Examining the influence of these on performance is a prerequisite for hybrid work moving forward (Güğerçin, 2020).

The ability to focus deeply on cognitively demanding tasks is essential for individual performance (Newport, 2016). However, this study found that employees experienced increased virtual and digital demands, with the growing volume of emails and instant messages, alongside back-to-back online meetings, being perceived as indicators of productivity. The ability to manage the growing volume of digital communications requires new digital competencies (Schaffers et al., 2022; Tarafdar et al., 2015). However, the lack of clear performance measures in remote work settings can lead to pseudo-performance (Newport, 2024), where employees focus on tasks like responding to emails, which may seem productive but do not contribute meaningfully to value creation. This reliance on virtual communication tools without appropriate performance indicators can encourage counterproductive behaviours and distort the true nature of work outcomes (Nastjuk et al, 2024).

This study supports recent research by Bloom et al (2024), Van der Lippe and Lippényi (2020) and Wöhrmann & Ebner (2021), that illustrates the impact of boundaryless work and ill-defined roles. This study highlights that without job redesign or consideration of employees' circumstances, hybrid work may foster stress, isolation, and disconnection. Associated risks, such as asynchronous work and reliance on digital technologies may undermine employee performance and well-being (McPhail et al., 2024). These findings strengthen our current understanding of performance and align with recent research (Grzegorzczak et al., 2021; Teevan et al., 2021; Tejero et al., 2021) by highlighting new vulnerabilities created by hybrid work. This study

demonstrates that these risks are not merely theoretical but have tangible, real-world consequences for performance, team cohesion, and organisational stability.

5.10.1 Asynchronous Working

Asynchronous working means allowing employees to complete tasks and communicate at their convenience, using tools such as email or Microsoft Teams chat to communicate (Tahsiri, 2023). Although hybrid work in the public sector often incorporates asynchronous work, few studies link it directly to performance. Time autonomy, where employees have the freedom to choose their work schedules, has been shown to foster employee work engagement, leading to enhanced performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Naqshbandi et al., 2024). However, this study highlights a contradictory perspective, that asynchronous work can adversely impact performance. This juxtaposition aligns with broader research indicating that asynchronous work increases meeting loads and email volumes, while the stacking of virtual meetings reduces opportunities for spontaneous, meaningful interaction and distracts from core tasks (Barnes et al., 2024; Grzegorzczak et al., 2021; Teevan et al., 2021).

Whilst Grzegorzczak et al. (2021) argue that setting clear expectations for the frequency, timing, and purpose of digital tools can mitigate these risks, this study identifies a greater risk: the increased cognitive load required to generate and interpret non-verbal cues when working remotely, which reduces performance capacity (Pullan, 2022). Teevan et al. (2021) synthesised over 50 U.S studies of technology teams and found that remote communication fatigue stems from reduced body language cues, prolonged attention and focus, low media quality, and cognitive multitasking. Similarly, in a meta-analysis by Nastjuk et al. (2024) ($k=113$, $N=49955$), they demonstrated that digital stressors harm employees' psychological and behavioural outcomes, highlighting the need for organisations to address the cumulative strain of constant technological communication.

This study also highlights how the absence of body language cues for understanding, impact both communication and performance. These results support

earlier findings in a study undertaken by Burgoon et al (2002) with U.S students (N=80), that physical proximity and non-verbal cues enhance interpersonal communication and task performance. Furthermore, in a study of over 10,000 participants from a convenience sample by Fauville et al. (2021), they concluded that physical distance and an increase in use of virtual technology causes fatigue, noting that more women than men reported exhaustion following virtual meetings. This study also concluded that prolonged (i.e daily) use of virtual communication resulted in fatigue, tiredness and loss of concentration. However, this current study found no gender differences in experiences of asynchronous working, with all genders experiencing fatigue and loss of focus because of prolonged technology use.

5.10.2 Remote Induction

A consistent finding in this study is the impact of hybrid work on new or recently promoted employees, particularly during the induction process. Induction involves introducing and orienting new and promoted employees to an organisation or role. From the literature, induction is frequently identified as a challenge in hybrid work performance (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021; Tahsiri, 2023). Hybrid work limits learning opportunities and interpersonal connections, hindering relationship building with new colleagues (Golden et al., 2008). This lack of connection contributes to professional isolation, negatively affecting performance, as seen in a study of U.S professionals (N=268) (Golden et al., 2008). These findings align with both Hopkins and Figaro's (2021) study and Teevan et al.'s (2021) review, which observed that new employees often struggle to integrate into organisations when hybrid working. Hopkins and Figaro (2021) found in their study of a cross-industry sample of hybrid employees (N=304) that deeper, social interactions are a predictor for fostering job embeddedness and reducing employee turnover. This aligns closely with the findings of this current study, that trust, empathy, and authentic social connections are essential for building the relationships that retain new employees.

This study also found that new employees in hybrid roles experience heightened uncertainty and face greater challenges collaborating than established employees, hindering their ability to learn and perform quickly. Likewise, established employees reported a reduced capacity to build relationships with newer colleagues, struggling to identify or interact with newer colleagues, leading to feelings of professional isolation. Bloom et al (2022) suggest that coordinated office days can facilitate networking and foster weaker ties, leading to greater connection. However, several participants in this study noted a lack of coordinated office days and observed higher turnover among new employees. This aligns with Golden et al's (2008) study which found a lack of embeddedness and connection is positively associated with increased turnover intention and employee dissatisfaction. Furthermore, in a study of 371 Indian IT professionals, Singh & Sant (2023) found that new employees, who typically have fewer established ties within an organisation, may be more likely to leave due to weaker organisational connections. However, strong networks within an organisation can reduce turnover intentions (Jiang et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2001). In a study of 441 U.S professionals by Spilker (2014), employee - manager relationships and social connections were found to reduce turnover intention, whilst professional isolation increases it.

According to Hopkins and Figaro (2021), informal and impromptu conversations nurture the personal relationships required to build trust. Drawing on 65 independent samples ($N = 42,907$), a meta-analytic study by Jiang et al (2012) concluded that the construct of job embeddedness emphasises the value of connections made by employees on and off the job. They found that the connections employees have with their job (on-the-job embeddedness) influence their decision to leave an organisation. Furthermore, a study of U.S employees ($N=304$) across a diverse group of organisations found that social interaction was a significant predictor of job embeddedness in hybrid contexts (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021). Hybrid work, especially when predominantly home working, limits such essential connections. This

study contributes to the construct of job embeddedness by highlighting how hybrid work hinders the development of organisational ties, particularly for new employees who may feel disconnected. Practitioners should consider in-person learning and peer support during induction periods to foster relationships and promote a sense of embeddedness.

5.11 Losing: Social Learning

A consistent finding in this study is the critical role of in-person social learning in maintaining competence and performance in hybrid work environments. Social learning refers to the process of acquiring knowledge, behaviours, and skills through observing and interactions with others (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Participants noted the absence of in-person learning opportunities resulted in diminished competence and self-efficacy, hindering performance. The lack of proximity to colleagues, limits participants' ability to share problems and challenges, seek advice and build day to day knowledge.

Recent research acknowledges that hybrid and remote work environments present unique challenges for employee learning and development, distinct from traditional office settings (Suravi, 2024). Social learning theory, rooted in the work of Bandura and Walters (1977), emphasises that people learn by observing and modelling others' behaviour. From the literature, there is consensus that learning is heavily influenced by the presence of a supportive environment where employees can observe and learn cognitively from others (Heyes, 2012; Reed et al., 2010). This social mechanism has been shown to significantly enhance performance (Alves & Thiebaut, 2024).

For social learning to be effective, Bandura and Walters (1977) identify key conditions that are required involving attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. These cognitive processes shape employee behaviour and development, which in turn contribute to work performance (Bandura, 1999). When employees engage in “collective agency”, working together with shared beliefs and coordinated learning and effort, they experience greater cohesion and improved team performance (Bandura,

2001, p. 33). However, this study found that hybrid arrangements often undermine the essential elements of attention and motivation, which reduces learning and inhibits knowledge transfer and learning among colleagues. This finding aligns with pre-COVID research by Van der Meulen (2016), which showed that spatial separation harms performance due to a lack of knowledge sharing. A mixed methods study of hybrid teams in Ghanaian professional services organisations (N=409) found similar challenges with effective team learning (Oppong Peprah, 2024). Furthermore, a qualitative study of French HR Managers (n=7) and a Delphi panel (n=4) in 2021, also found that hybrid work led to a loss of collective learning (Alves & Thiebaut, 2024). Their finding, which highlighted how junior colleagues fail to access a transfer of learning from more experienced colleagues, is consistent with findings from this study. Alves and Thiebaut (2024, p. 111) highlight the importance of “collective reflection” and affective commitment to the organisation for meaningful learning to occur.

The grounded theory model developed in this study reinforces the importance of in-person social learning for enhancing performance, validating Bandura's (1977) foundational work on the value of social learning in today's increasingly virtual work environment. The implications for organisations include the need for structured in-person interactions to facilitate learning and knowledge transfer, particularly for newer employees who may lack access to experienced mentors and essential social networks. This study extends our understanding of hybrid work by highlighting the challenges public sector organisations face in fostering environments conducive to knowledge sharing and proactive professional learning. Whilst these challenges are also present in the private sector and globally, they are exacerbated by hybrid work arrangements (Rupcic, 2024).

5.12 Summary

By addressing the central research question “*What factors and/or mechanisms influence the performance of employees when they undertake hybrid work, post-COVID 19 restriction period?*”, this study has explored the multifaceted nature of hybrid

work and its impact on performance. In line with the first objective, this research has identified how Welsh public sector employees experience hybrid working, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges they face. Employees reported that flexibility, autonomy, and the ability to work remotely are highly valued. However, the absence of critical mechanisms such as social learning, relationships, job design and accountability has hindered performance. This is a key finding that aligns with the second objective, which explored whether and how hybrid working impacts performance. The study reveals that while hybrid work provides autonomy, it also presents challenges that can lead to reduced performance, particularly due to factors such as psychological detachment and reduced face-to-face interactions.

Regarding the third and fourth objectives, *“to explore employees’ perceptions of the issues that enable or hinder their performance”* and *“to explore and understand the factors, conditions, mechanisms, experiences, or events that affect individual performance”*, this research uncovered five enabling and five hindering mechanisms that shape performance. This study identifies several enabling mechanisms, such as strong relationships, clear performance expectations, in-person opportunities, managerial capability, and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), all of which influence positive performance outcomes in hybrid work environments. Notably, the role of colleagues’ OCBs has not been explored in the context of hybrid work to date, making this a novel contribution that expands our understanding of how social behaviours influence performance in hybrid settings. Conversely, the study identifies hindering mechanisms such as psychological detachment, low social homeostasis, low accountability, lack of job redesign, and absence of social learning, which act as substantial barriers to effective performance. These findings partially align with existing theories but also go further by providing new and novel insights into the underlying causal mechanisms that impact performance in hybrid work settings.

The identification of psychological detachment and social homeostasis as critical mechanisms that cause imbalances affecting employee confidence and

competence is also a novel finding, contributing new knowledge to the literature on performance and hybrid work. Furthermore, the study's emphasis on the need for increased accountability and proactive social learning in hybrid settings builds upon and extends existing research, highlighting key factors that organisations could address to enhance performance. This research not only refines our understanding of hybrid work but also offers a theoretical model that fills significant knowledge gaps.

The grounded theory model developed in this study, which is central to the fifth objective, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors and mechanisms that enable or hinder performance in hybrid work contexts. This model refines existing theories on hybrid work by highlighting how factors such as autonomy and technology use interact to negatively influence performance outcomes. This research also challenges a popular belief that lacks substantial empirical evidence, that hybrid work benefits both employees and employers. Instead, the research reveals a more nuanced position, uncovering hidden vulnerabilities such as cognitive overload. By comparing the grounded theory model to existing literature, this study illustrates how hybrid work introduces new complexities that were not adequately explored in previous theoretical frameworks. The implications for theory are discussed further in section 6.1, where the model's contributions to existing theory are outlined.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The final chapter of the thesis provides a summary of the key findings and discusses their implications. Section 6.1 contains a research summary and outlines the contribution this study makes to knowledge. Section 6.2 presents the theoretical implications of the research, highlighting how the findings contribute to and refine existing theories on hybrid work. Section 6.3 addresses the implications for policymakers and practitioners, providing recommendations for improving hybrid work policies and offering guidance for organisations to optimise hybrid work arrangements. The strengths and limitations of the research are outlined in section 6.4, considering factors that may influence the transferability of the findings. Directions for future research are outlined in section 6.5. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study's contributions in section 6.6.

6.1 Contribution to knowledge

The pandemic triggered widespread social, cultural and technological disruption, compelling employees everywhere to shift rapidly to remote work, overturning many existing work assumptions about the structure and organisation of work and performance (CIPD, 2021). The subsequent adoption of hybrid work arrangements, especially in the Welsh public sector, holds significant implications for the future of work performance (Felstead, 2022). As outlined in section 5.12, this study has addressed the central research question “*What factors and/or mechanisms influence the performance of employees when they undertake hybrid work, post-covid 19 restriction period?*”. By achieving the five research objectives, this study, makes a novel contribution to the literature on hybrid work by developing a grounded theory model that explains the factors and mechanisms influencing employee performance.

Findings reveal that performance is shaped by factors such as *knowing* and *connecting*, with mechanisms such as social relationships, in-person activity and clear accountability enabling performance. Conversely, factors such as *avoiding* and *losing*

create conditions where mechanisms such as detachment, lack of social learning, and poor job design hinder performance. These findings highlight how hybrid work environments can limit opportunities for informal learning, weaken accountability, and reduce professional networks, leading to avoidance of people and tasks and loss of employee and corporate knowledge.

This research makes several significant contributions to understanding the impact of hybrid work on employee performance. It identifies key factors and mechanisms that either enable or hinder performance, offering insights into how hybrid work environments, if poorly managed, can increase isolation and detachment, thereby reducing employees' competence, confidence, and performance. Furthermore, it contributes to conceptual debates by emphasising that hybrid work, in its boundaryless form, can have detrimental effects on both well-being and performance. The grounded theory model developed in this study provides new theoretical insights into the mechanisms driving performance in hybrid environments and underscores their importance for maintaining performance.

Furthermore, the study provides practical recommendations for organisations such as the importance of intentional job design and structured in-person interactions to foster collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and professional development. By focusing on these factors, organisations can mitigate the risks of isolation and detachment, improving both employee performance and well-being. Additionally, the study's use of a heterogeneous, theoretically directed sample from the Welsh public sector offers a fresh perspective on how hybrid work affects this overlooked population. The findings extend beyond the Welsh context, providing actionable insights for policymakers and organisations in similar public sector environments.

While the findings are specific to the Welsh public sector, they offer rich, contextual and timely insights that can inform similar public sector environments adopting hybrid work practices. The detailed exploration of mechanisms affecting performance, such as relationships, accountability, OCBs and social learning suggests

that they may be relevant to other public sector organisations with comparable characteristics and countries. Further research would be necessary to test this. This enhances the transferability of the findings, offering actionable strategies that can be adapted to support employee performance in different governmental or hybrid work settings. Furthermore, the CRGT approach used in this research revealed underlying causal mechanisms that, while context-dependent, provide valuable explanatory depth and can be applied to similar contexts, offering a robust framework for understanding hybrid work performance. By focusing on the causal mechanisms behind hybrid work performance, the research provides a solid foundation for testing and adapting the findings in other sectors or regions with comparable organisational structures or conditions (Kempster & Parry, 2011).

6.2 Theoretical Implications

This research provides novel theoretical insights and practical implications for understanding hybrid work in the post-restriction period Welsh public sector context. The developed theory offers unique perspectives into causal mechanisms, responding to calls for further research by Becker and Lanzl (2023) and Vartiainen and Vanharanta (2024). According to the job demands, support and control (JD-SC) model, employee performance is impacted when there is an imbalance between support and work demands (Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Karasek, 1979). The grounded theory extends the JD-SC model by offering further specificity and deeper understanding of how increased autonomy and control can influence performance in the hybrid work context. In contrast to the JD-SC model, the current model suggests that, paradoxically, increased employee control observed in this context may reduce performance. Mechanisms like psychological detachment, reduced social support, and limited social learning opportunities, due to physical and temporal distance, are key contributors to this reduction. Furthermore, even in low-demand situations, the absence of critical resources like social interaction and managerial support can impair performance,

highlighting the need to balance control with adequate support structures in hybrid work.

This study contributes to extending established theories of performance by illustrating how resource loss, motivational clarity, and relational dynamics manifest uniquely in hybrid work environments. While conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) recognise the importance of resource protection and balancing demands, they often assume relatively stable access to resources such as peer support, knowledge sharing, and in-person collaboration. The findings of this study highlight how hybrid work disrupts this stability, creating uneven access to performance-critical resources. The conceptual model developed here introduces new psychosocial risks, such as prolonged emotional detachment, resource inaccessibility, and social avoidance, not fully addressed in earlier theory.

Additionally, this study adds new depth to goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2013) by revealing how hybrid work challenges the foundations of effective goal pursuit. GST assumes that employees are motivated by specific, challenging goals when feedback and clarity are present. Yet in hybrid contexts, reduced visibility and weakened daily structure can erode the conditions needed for goal commitment. Participants described how the lack of in-person contact, reduced accountability, and inconsistent feedback disrupted their sense of direction and progress. This suggests that traditional goal setting mechanisms must be adapted to account for the dispersed, asynchronous, and socially diluted reality of hybrid work. The new model developed in this study therefore complements and extends goal setting theory by integrating mechanisms such as emotional detachment and role ambiguity, showing how hybrid contexts demand more intentional and relationally aware goal processes. In contrast to past research, this study reveals the unique implications of hybrid work for employee performance. Theories such as COR, JD-R and goal-setting theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Locke & Latham, 2013; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) which emphasise

a supportive work environment and clear goals, were developed in more stable, traditional work settings. Collectively, the findings reinforce the relevance of COR, JD-R, and GST, while also demonstrating that hybrid work introduces new conditions that these theories were not originally designed to address. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in developing a model that situates performance within the fragile ecosystem of social connection, managerial intent, and structural clarity, elements that hybrid work can either support or erode.

6.3 Implications for Policymakers and Practitioners

This study offers valuable insights for organisations and governments including Welsh Government, on implementing hybrid work policies. It highlights how distance, whether temporal or spatial, significantly impacts performance, collaboration and well-being. Without regular, high-quality contact with colleagues, these areas may be adversely affected, with implications for both employee performance and public service outcomes. The Welsh Government's proactive hybrid work strategy stands in contrast to the UK Government's mandate for civil servants to spend at least 60% of their week in the office from April 2024 (CSW, 2023), emphasising the need for adaptable strategies to support hybrid work while mitigating performance risks. Policymakers should prioritise the development of resources and training to ensure that managers can effectively navigate hybrid work environments and maintain performance standards. Inadequate support for managers may result in disengagement, reduced collaboration, and diminished public service delivery.

For practitioners, the findings suggest that discussing and agreeing performance expectations, building relationships, and facilitating shared learning experiences can improve self-efficacy and capability. Skilled facilitation of in-person interactions, expanding employee networks, and promoting knowledge sharing are also critical for enhancing performance. Creating a performance-oriented and psychologically safe culture in hybrid environments requires intentional effort from managers. Revisiting job design, adjusting descriptions, setting clear objectives, and

reviewing workloads can help employees better understand their roles. Additionally, the importance of work locations as spaces for connection, learning, and support should not be overlooked. Addressing these areas with increased in-person coordination will enhance communication, improve team relationships, and support employee performance.

6.4 Research Strengths and Limitations

This study's key strengths lie in its rigorous application of grounded theory methodology, enabling the development of an original theory grounded in rich, nuanced data. Throughout the data collection and retroductive analysis process, the researcher maintained a balance between openness and a focus on theoretical significance, ensuring depth and relevance in findings. Comprehensive memos were maintained at each stage, documenting decisions related to sampling, coding, and theory development, which enhanced transparency and traceability of coding decisions.

A further strength is the alignment between the research question and methodological choices (Birks & Mills, 2015). Retroductive analysis, central to critical realist research, was used to uncover causal mechanisms and conditions shaping hybrid work performance in the public sector (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017; Mukumbang, 2023). Regular supervisory discussions ensured reflexivity and minimised bias, enhancing the research's credibility (Timonen et al., 2018). Furthermore, the theoretical sampling approach captured diverse perspectives, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of hybrid work experiences across different age groups, levels of seniority, work experience, gender, and geographical locations. This approach enriched the study's depth and relevance by ensuring it reflected a broad spectrum of employee experiences (Conlon et al., 2020). The focus on the Welsh public sector adds to the strength of the research by addressing a specific context that has been underexplored in the literature. This context-specific approach allowed for a detailed understanding of how hybrid work functions within a unique political, cultural, and organisational setting, providing actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners.

However, several limitations warrant consideration. Acknowledging the critical realist stance of fallibility, where no belief can be conclusively justified, Elder-Vass (2021) states that sociological insights often represent incomplete accounts, unlike in the natural sciences. Consequently, the mechanisms identified in this study should be viewed as transient and context dependent (Baines, 2020). What is known about hybrid work in the Welsh public sector reflects the best understanding available currently, acknowledging the transitory nature of such knowledge (Sayer, 2004). Furthermore, participant recruitment presents a further limitation, as those with strong opinions on hybrid work may have been more inclined to participate. Whilst not seeking to represent the population, the use of theoretical sampling ensured that the sample evolved to capture emerging categories, which contributed to the development of theoretical insights (Conlon et al., 2020; Foley et al., 2021).

Additionally, the study relied upon employee's self-perception of their performance, which may introduce a limitation. Using the public sector employee's description of how their performance is perceived and measured relies heavily on their consciousness and self-awareness. However, the study was not designed to measure employee performance directly and the limited information available on what constitutes effective performance in hybrid settings emerged as a notable finding.

6.5 Future Research

Future research could build on this study by using longitudinal data to further investigate the causal relationships identified, providing deeper insights into the long-term effects of hybrid work on employee performance. Existing research suggests that hybrid employees may often neglect regular performance reflection (Teevan et al., 2021) highlighting a key area for further exploration. Future studies could explore managerial relationships in hybrid environments, examining outcomes such as job satisfaction, cognitive effects, social anxiety, and turnover intention to better understand the broader impacts of hybrid work. This study also highlighted the importance of employee's perceptions of their work environment (for example, noisy, quiet, genial,

social) and how its function (for learning, individual tasks, digital, collaborative) can influence performance. Understanding how cultural and political contexts shape these perceptions and influence performance could provide crucial insights into optimising hybrid workspaces for enhanced performance and well-being.

Additionally, this research provides a foundation for further realist studies, such as realist evaluations of specific organisations (Manzano & Williams, 2024). These studies could offer more in-depth exploration of how organisational contexts and unique challenges shape hybrid work outcomes. Existing management research has predominantly focused on conventional office settings, where employees can be observed and engage in spontaneous, face to face interactions. This study, however, emphasises the role of the workplace as a vital source of social connection and psychological health, factors that have been largely overlooked in hybrid work research. Vartiainen and Vanharanta (2024) recently concurred, advocating for research that examines organisational culture and context as influential factors in hybrid work environments.

The assumption that traditional management theories can apply to hybrid settings may lead to ineffective strategies in some organisations (Hopkins & Figaro, 2021; Vartiainen & Vanharanta, 2023). This study suggests that managers in hybrid environments face unique challenges, indicating a need for future research focused on the specific skills and competencies essential for effective hybrid management. Exploring how managers can foster collaboration, accountability, and engagement in dispersed teams will be essential for developing strategies that better support employee performance in hybrid contexts.

6.6 Conclusion

This research provides an in-depth understanding of the experiences of Welsh public sector employees, offering significant insights into the mechanisms that influence performance in hybrid work environments. By addressing the core research question, this study challenges oversimplified narratives, such as Bloom et al's (2021)

assertion that hybrid work simply “works out” and instead presents a more nuanced perspective. This study demonstrates that environmental context, organisational culture and individual behaviour and preferences critically influence the success or failure of hybrid work.

By expanding the understanding of hybrid work’s multilayered impact on performance, this research contributes to existing theory by challenging assumptions that hybrid work automatically supports performance. It calls for the development of frameworks that reflect the complexities of organisational culture and relational dynamics in hybrid settings. This emerging grounded theory, underpinned by critical realism, provides actionable insights for practitioners and policymakers, not just in Wales but across the broader UK and European public sector. It offers a framework for organisations seeking to refine or implement hybrid work models in ways that balance flexibility with performance.

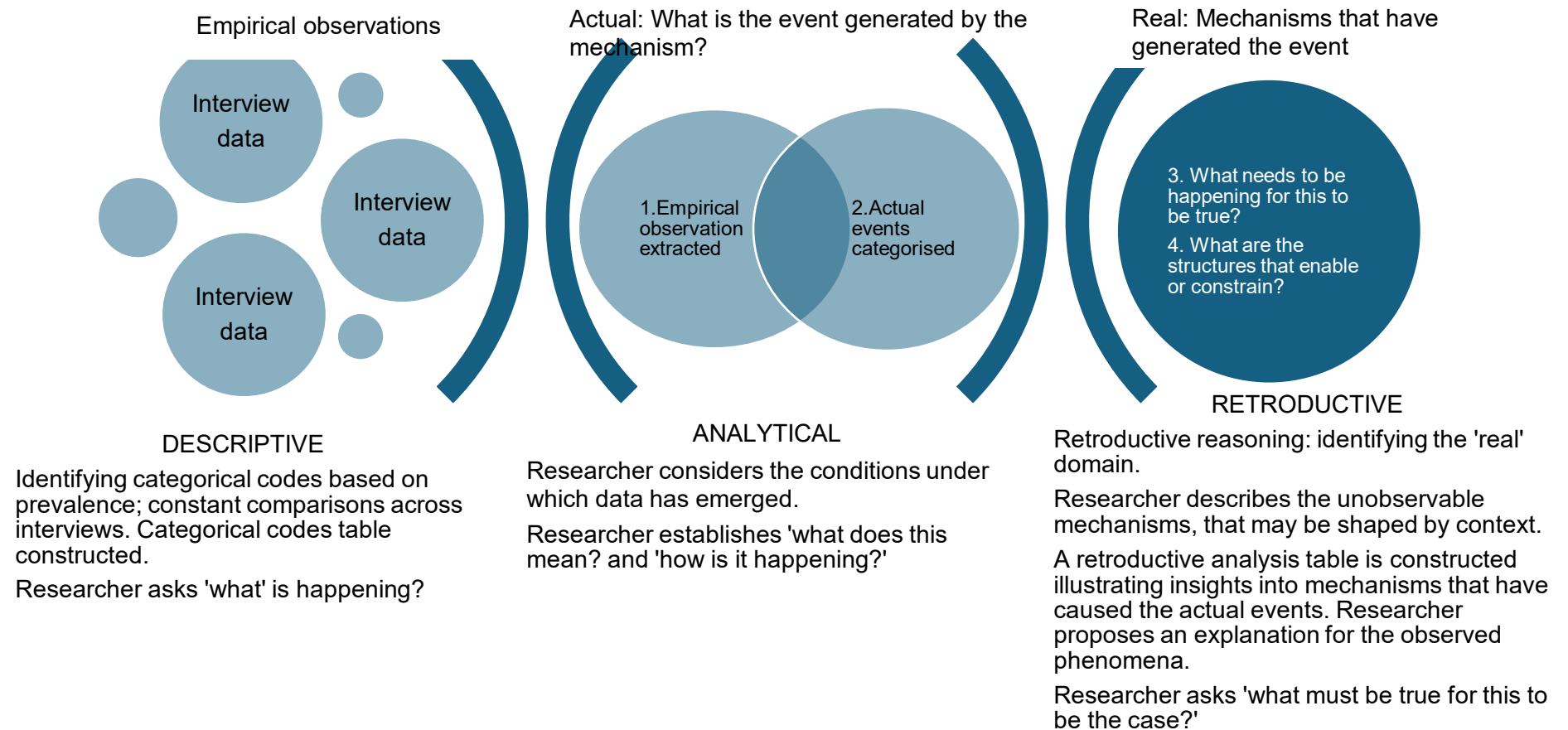
This study calls into question the statement “work is what you do, not a place you go” adopted by the UK Civil Service (OGC, 2008) to encourage remote work. However, it does not advocate for a return to office-based work or a uniform approach to hybrid working. Instead, this study contributes to the discourse by providing a more comprehensive perspective on the factors that drive performance in hybrid settings. Managers are encouraged to guide employees through the inherent complexities of hybrid work by fostering a balance between remote and in-person collaboration, thereby minimising resistance and optimising performance.

Furthermore, this research promotes the need to reconsider the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1998) between employers and employees considering hybrid work realities. A redefinition of this contract should include the establishment of clear role expectations and a shared understanding of what constitutes effective performance in hybrid environments. This study critiques Deci and Ryan’s (2008) self-determination theory, which traditionally assumes co-located work settings, by revealing the distinct demands and complexities of hybrid work. A failure to balance employee autonomy

with deliberate facilitation of in-person connections risks eroding collaborative innovation, institutional knowledge, and overall learning. Furthermore, it poses long-term threats to employees' cognitive, mental, and physical well-being, especially in relation to social isolation and the fragmentation of professional relationships. This grounded theory research highlights the importance of adopting a systemic and holistic approach to hybrid work, harmonising flexibility with connection. By prioritising a healthy psychosocial work environment, organisations can sustain both employee and organisational performance in an increasingly dispersed workforce.

Appendices

Appendix A: The Analytical Process



Note. This figure illustrates the analysis process through a critical realist lens. The figure shows the analytical steps taken by the researcher to move from a descriptive coding process of interview data, through to considering the conditions under which data has emerged. The analytical process moves from left to right (steps 1 through to 4) and finally to retroductive inference when the researcher considers what may be causing these events. Lighter blue circles represent actual data recorded, whilst the darker blue circle represents interpretation and inference.

Appendix B: Table of Literature

Literature Overview: What research has been conducted exploring hybrid working¹ and employee performance since 2000?²

1. Pre-COVID period research 2000- 2019

Authors Terminology	Title and author	Research Aim	Sample, location, context
Hybrid	Hybrid workspace: re-spatialisations of work, organisation and management. Halford. S, 2005	Evaluating the impact of a hybrid work arrangement on organisational practice	N=48 UK volunteers Insurance employees 2001
Hybrid	Seating preference analysis for hybrid workplaces. Saiedur Rahaman, et al, 2020.	An analysis to understand the seating preferences of employees in the context of hybrid workplace settings and impact on performance.	N=37 Engineers Australia 2019
Flexible Work	The Distance Dilemma; The effect of flexible working practices on performance in the digital workplace D, Van der Meulen, 2016	To measure the impact of telework ³ on job performance	N= 206 Utilities employees, Holland (pre-selected) N= 251 Tech employees, Holland N= 64 Public sector knowledge workers, Holland N= 63 University employees (U.S & Holland) 2011-2012
Flexible Work	Flexible working and performance: A systematic review of the evidence for a business case Menezes, L. M. de and Kelliher, C. 2011	Examines the link between flexible working arrangements and individual performance asking, 'What is the relationship between flexible working arrangements ⁴ and performance or related outcomes?' [flexibility <i>for</i> employees not <i>of</i> employees ⁵]	N=148 articles Global, all types of literature including meta-analyses and reviews.

¹ Hybrid working is defined as working from home some days and from an office other days in the same week.

² Excludes non peer reviewed or unpublished papers / studies.

³ The phrase 'telework' in this context is defined by the employee determining their number of days working remotely each week ie hybrid work.

⁴ Flexible working arrangements were defined as working arrangements which allow employees to vary the amount, timing or location of their work

⁵ The phrase 'remote work' and 'flexible work' used in this SR refers to employee driven work arrangements including work from home part of the week.

Flexible Work	Flexible working, individual performance, and employee attitudes: Comparing formal and informal arrangements. Menezes, L. M. de and Kelliher, C, 2016	A study which examines potential indirect effects on employee performance via job satisfaction and organisational commitment when flexible working.	N = 2617 UK, Multinational organisations [3 work style arrangements including informal remote work ⁶]
Work From Home / WFH	Work from home and its impact on personal and organisational performance and productivity. Hackney, Yung, Somasundrum 2022	A systematic review of literature on the impact of work-from-home arrangements on personal and organizational performance and productivity.	Global All methods Pre and during pandemic N=37
Work From Home / WFH	Does Working from Home, Work? Evidence from a Chinese Experiment Bloom, N., Han, R., & Liang, J 2015	Evaluating a randomized control trial of working from home	N = 250 China Call Centre employees, 2010
Telework	Are Telecommuters Remotely Good Citizens? Unpacking Telecommuting's Effects on Performance Via I-Deals and Job Resources Gajendran, Harrison and Delaney-Klinger, 2014	Testing a theoretical framework linking telecommuting ⁷ to task and contextual performance job resources	N=323 143 matched pairs (61% male) USA Variety knowledge work, pre pandemic
Telecommuting	Unpacking the role of the telecommuter's job in their performance Golden and Gajendran, 2019	Examines whether telecommuting ⁸ impacts job performance and investigates characteristics of the telecommuter's work that might help or hinder their ability to perform their job.	N= 273 matched pairs (71% male) US, variety knowledge work Pre pandemic
Telework	Between-person and within-person effects of telework: a quasi-field experiment. Verbruggen and Delanoeij, 2020	Measuring the impact of telework ⁹ on employees' stress, work-to-home conflict, work engagement and job performance	N=39/39 Experiment with 39 in control group Belgium, Construction and property company. 2019
Telework	A review of telework ¹⁰ research: findings, new directions, and lessons for the study of modern work	Who partakes in telework, why and what happens when they do?	N=80

⁶ The phrase 'informal remote work' refers to voluntarily working from both home and office across a week.

⁷ 'Telecommuting' is defined as employees working a mixture of hours between 1 and 44 either at home or office.

⁸ 'Telecommuting' is defined as employees spending 2 days per week away from the office, working at home.

⁹ 'Telework' is defined as employees working from home 2 days per week, thereby inferring a hybrid arrangement.

¹⁰ 'Telework' is defined as employees who work remotely from the office 'according to days at home' and communicate using technology.

Telework	Bailey and Kurland, 2002		
	The Impact of Professional Isolation on Teleworker Job Performance and Turnover Intentions: Does Time Spent Teleworking, Interacting Face-to-Face, or Having Access to Communication-Enhancing Technology Matter?	A study examining professional isolation's direct impact on job performance. [teleworkers ¹¹]	N= 783 U.S, high tech employees
Telework	Golden, Viega, and Dino, 2008		
	The possibilities and limits of telework ¹² in a bureaucratic environment: lessons from the public sector Taskin and Edwards, 2007	The study investigates how a new form of work organisation may affect working relationships and practices and lead to a re-regulation of work in the public sector.	N = 28 (2006) N= 42 (2004) Case study evaluation Belgium, public sector

2. During COVID 19 restriction period research 2020 - 2022

Terminology	Title and Author	Research Aim	Sample, location, context
Hybrid	On-site and hybrid workplace culture of positivity and effectiveness: Case study from Austria Beno. M, 2021	Test the positivity and effectiveness of an on-site and hybrid working model from Austria.	n=60 employees n=5 managers Austria, Insurance employees Research commenced pre pandemic (1/2020) and continued during pandemic confounding results.
Hybrid	An empirical analysis of facilitators and barriers to the hybrid work model: a cross-cultural and multi-theoretical approach Sampat, Raj, Behl, 2022	Examines the influence of facilitators and barriers on employees' preference to work in a hybrid model.	N= 281 India, Sri Lanka, Germany During pandemic (2021/2)

¹¹ 'Teleworkers' refers to employees undertaking a variety of days working remotely and in the office during the week.

¹² 'Telework' in this study is defined as paid work performed at home for at least one day per week

Hybrid	How hybrid working from home, works out. Bloom, N., Han, R., & Liang, J. 2022	Evaluating a randomized control trial of hybrid working.	N =1612 China, IT tech / sales employees. Mid pandemic (2021/22)
Hybrid	Is Hybrid Work the Best of Both Worlds? Evidence from a Choudhury et al (2022)	Evaluating a randomized control trial of hybrid working	N =103 Bangladesh, NGO HR, field experiment During pandemic (2020)
Work from Home / WFH	Work from home and its impact on personal and organisational performance and productivity. Hackney, Yung, Somasundrum 2022	A systematic review of literature on the impact of work-from-home arrangements on personal and organizational performance and productivity.	N=37 articles Systematic Review Global All methods, pre and mid pandemic
Work from Home / WFH	Homeworking in the UK: before and during the 2020 lockdown Felstead and Reuschke 2020	Examination of productivity and well-being when working from home ¹³	N=20000 households x 38% response Mid pandemic
Work from Home	The Influence of Working from Home vs. Working at the Office on Job Performance in a Hybrid Work Arrangement: A Diary Study Toscano et al, 2024	Applying the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) theory and developing a mediation model that identifies two processes responsible for the positive and negative relationships of WFH (compared to working at the office or WATO) with job performance	N=203 Italian Civil Servants, varying Occupations, COVID restriction period

¹³ 'Homeworking' is defined within the survey question as number of days per week, thereby inferring a 'hybrid' work arrangement.

Appendix C: Examples of Terminology Used in Hybrid Work Literature

Terminology	Definition	Author
Pre-COVID period		
Teleworking	Employees who work remotely from the office 'according to days at home' and communicate using technology.	Bailey & Kurland, 2002
Telecommuting	Substituting a portion of typical work hours to work away from a central workplace, principally from home, using technology to interact with others as needed to conduct work tasks.	Golden et al., 2008
Telework / Flexible work / New ways of working	Employee determines their number of days working remotely each week.	Van der Meulen, 2016
Telecommuting	Employees working a mixture of hours between 1 and 44 either at home or office.	Gajendran, Harrison and Delaney-Klinger, 2014
Telecommuting	Employees spending 2 days per week away from the office, working at home.	Golden and Gajendran, 2019
Telework	Employees working from home 2 days per week, thereby inferring a hybrid arrangement.	Verbruggen and Delanoeiji, 2020
Flexible work	Employee choice over hours and location. Working arrangements which allow employees to vary the amount, timing or location of their work. Employee driven work arrangements including work from home part of the week.	De Menezes & Kelliher, 2011
Informal remote work	Employees voluntarily work from both home and office across a week.	De Menezes & Kelliher, 2016
Hybrid work	Employee works both from home and from an organisational workplace, using virtual technologies to connect the two spaces.	Halford, 2005
Remote work	Employee works away from the office.	Felstead 2017
Telework	Employees undertaking a variety of days working remotely and in the office during the week.	Golden, Viega, and Dino, 2008
Telework	Paid work performed at home for at least one day per week.	Taskin & Edwards, 2007
Telework	Where workers work remotely, away from an employer's premises or fixed location, using digital technologies such as networks, laptops, mobile phones and the internet.	Eurofound 2017
Working at home	Working from home (WFH) and working at the office (WATO). A mix of days at home and at work each week.	Bloom, 2014 Bloom et al, 2015

COVID restriction period

Agile working	Employee combines work in-office and from remote location, such as home.	CIPD, 2021; Welsh Government, 2022
Work from home	Employees perform their job duties from their residence, either full-time or part-time.	Hackney, Yung, Somasundrum 2022
Home working	Number of days per week spent working at home.	Felstead and Reuschke, 2020

Post-restriction period

Smarter / Hybrid working	A mixture of working in the central workplace, at home, or at a local workspace in the community.	Welsh Government, 2022
Hybrid work	Employee combines work in-office and from remote location, such as home.	Felstead, 2022
Hybrid work	A form of flexible work: a mix of working at home and in their place of work.	Mutebi & Hobbs, 2022
Hybrid work	Flexible work, as opposed to fixed arrangements. An interplay of different elements.	Eurofound 2022
Hybrid work	Employees combining remote and in-person work.	Sampat, Raj, Behl, 2022
Hybrid work	A mix of days at home and at work each week.	Bloom, N., Han, R., & Liang, J. 2022
Hybrid work	Any work arrangement where a worker operates in a sustainable manner alone or with others, as agreed upon between the worker and the employer.	Vartiainen and Vanharanta (2023)
Working from home	A work arrangement that combines traditional office work with remote work, utilising technology.	Toscano et al, 2024

Note. These definitions highlight the flexibility inherent in hybrid work arrangements, encompassing various combinations of remote and in-person work tailored to organisational needs and employee preferences.

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer



CALL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS!

DO YOU WORK IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN WALES?

ARE YOU HYBRID WORKING (HOME AND OFFICE)?

- Interviews start Aug 2023
- Full Ethics Approval from Lancaster University
- All information provided will be treated with strict confidentiality & anonymity
- Participants must be 18+ and speak English

We are conducting a PhD research study on Hybrid Working and Employee Performance in the Welsh Public Sector.

Please get in touch to share your experiences - we'd love to hear from you.

Contact Sally Evans
s.evans12@lancaster.ac.uk

Lancaster University 

Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

PhD Research: Exploring Welsh public sector employee's experiences of hybrid working and its impact on employee performance

For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage:
www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection

My name is Sally Evans, and I am conducting this research as a postgraduate Doctoral student at Lancaster University, Lancaster, United Kingdom.

What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of hybrid working on individual employee performance in the Welsh public sector.

The study will explore what has impacted your performance, how and why, in the context of hybrid working. Hybrid working is where you work part of your week based at home, and part of your week located in the office.

Why have I been approached?

You have been approached because the study requires information, views, perspectives and experiences from people who have experienced working in a hybrid arrangement, where you spend two days or more working from home and two days or less, working in the office.

We are interested in views from all employees including team leaders, managers and senior leaders.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. If you do, your information will be completely anonymised, and it will not be possible to determine what you have said by anyone reading the study report.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decide you would like to take part, you would be asked to meet with the researcher and be interviewed for between 30 minutes and an hour. This will take place via MS Teams at a time agreed.

Will my data be identifiable?

If you choose to take part, your identity will be anonymised, and you will be allocated a code that is used throughout the research study. Direct quotes may be used within the study, but your identity will be protected by the use of a code. If you require a copy of the summary of the research results, you can provide an email address for the results to be sent to you.

The data collected for this study will be stored securely on university approved secure cloud storage. Only the researcher conducting this study will have access to this data. The Microsoft Teams recording will be destroyed and/or deleted following transcription which is within one week of the interview.

Any files on the computer will be encrypted (that is no-one other than the researcher will be able to access them) and the computer itself password protected. The typed version of your interview will be made anonymous by removing any identifying information including your name. Personal contact details will be deleted from the system once interview data has been transcribed and checked. This is usually within one week of the interview.

Anonymised direct quotations from your interview may be used in the reports or publications from the study, so your name will not be attached to them. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.

All your personal data will be confidential and will be kept separately from your interview responses.

There are some limits to confidentiality: if what is said in the interview makes me think that you, or someone else, is at significant risk of harm, I may raise this with you and encourage you to seek support.

If you change your mind and wish to withdraw your data, you must notify me in writing via email within two weeks of the interview. After this time, it may not be possible to withdraw the data as it may have been analysed and incorporated into the study.

What will happen to the results?

The results will be summarised and reported in a Doctoral thesis and may be submitted for publication in an academic or professional journal.

Are there any risks?

There are no risks anticipated with participating in this study. However, if you experience any distress following participation you are encouraged to inform the researcher and contact the resources provided at the end of this sheet.

Are there any benefits to taking part?

Although you may find participating interesting, there are no direct benefits in taking part.

Who has reviewed the project?

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee at Lancaster University.

Where can I obtain further information about the study if I need it?

If you have any questions about the study, please contact the main researcher:

Researcher: Sally Evans:
s.evans12@lancaster.ac.uk
Supervisor: Dr.Claire Harding:
c.hardy1@lancaster.ac.uk

Complaints

If you wish to make a complaint or raise concerns about any aspect of this study and do not want to speak to the researcher, you can contact:

Name of Research Director for your Division Tel: -
Title: Prof. Jane Simpson
Email: j.simpson2@lancaster.ac.uk
Division of Health Research
Lancaster University
Lancaster
LA1

If you wish to speak to someone outside of the Occupational Health and Well-being
Doctorate Programme, you may also contact:

Dr Laura Machin Tel: +44 (0)1524 594973
Chair of FHM REC Email: l.machin@lancaster.ac.uk
Faculty of Health and Medicine
(Lancaster Medical School)
Lancaster University
Lancaster
LA1 4YG

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Resources in the event of distress

Should you feel distressed either as a result of taking part, or in the future, you may wish to speak to your HR Team or other support teams (such as Occupational Health) within your organisation. Support can also be sought from the following resources which may be of assistance.

[Using this tool - Mind](#) WWW.MIND.ORG.UK Infoline: 0300 123 3393

Appendix F: Participant Consent Form



Participant Consent Form

PhD Research: Exploring Welsh public sector employee's experiences of hybrid working and its impact on employee performance.

We are asking if you would like to take part in a research project about hybrid working (HW) across the public sector in Wales. We are interested in understanding about your perspectives and views of how hybrid working affects your performance.

Before you consent to participating in the study, we ask that you read the participant information sheet and mark each box below with your initials if you agree. If you have any questions or queries before signing the consent form please speak to the principal researcher, Sally Evans.

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet and fully understand what is expected of me within this study ☐
2. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask any questions and to have them answered. ☐
3. I understand that my interview will be recorded via MS Teams and then made into an anonymised written transcript ☐
4. I understand that transcripts of recordings will be kept until the research project has been examined ☐
5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time within two weeks of the interview being completed, without giving any reason. ☐
6. I understand that once my data have been anonymised and incorporated into themes it might not be possible for it to be withdrawn, though every attempt will be made to extract my data, up to the point of publication. ☐
7. I understand that the information from my interview will be pooled with other participants' responses, anonymised and may be published; all reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project. ☐
8. I consent to information and quotations from my interview being used in reports, conferences and training events. ☐
9. I understand that the researcher will discuss data with their supervisor as needed. ☐
10. I understand that any information I give will remain confidential and anonymous unless it is thought that there is a risk of harm to me or others, in which case the principal investigator will/may need to share this information with their research supervisor. ☐
11. I consent to Lancaster University keeping written transcriptions of the interview for 10 years after the study has finished. ☐
12. I consent to take part in the above study ☐

Name of Participant _____ Signature _____ Date _____
 Name of Researcher _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix G: Interview Guide

Welcome and Introduction

- Opening context and explanation of the study and purpose
- Reiterate the confidentiality and anonymity information, including supervisor access to data and right to withdraw within two weeks.

- Describe the researcher role
- Are you happy to proceed? I will now press record on MS Teams.

Opening

- Please describe your job role to me
- Where do you undertake your role now? How is your week divided?
- When did this commence / change?
- How do you and others measure your performance?

Explore experience of hybrid working and impact on performance

- Can you describe how you came to undertake hybrid working?
- What are your perceptions or views about hybrid work?
- Has hybrid work had any impact on your performance?
- How does hybrid work impact your performance?
- What facilitates / helps your performance when hybrid working?
- Tell me a story of when hybrid work has helped enhance your performance?
- What hinders / is a barrier to your performance when hybrid working?
- Tell me a story of when hybrid work has adversely impacted your performance?
- Has your performance changed since commencing hybrid work?
- Anything I haven't asked about hybrid work and performance you thought I'd ask?

The topic guide and questions may have been slightly adapted and driven by the concepts that emerge from earlier interviews in line with grounded theory theoretical sampling and interviewing.

Closing remarks

- May I summarise back some of the key aspects of what you have said so that you can confirm my accurate understanding?
- Thank you for your time and attention and for agreeing to participate
- May I just collect some demographic data from you? [See Demographic questions sheet]
- Remind again of how personal details will be anonymised
- Describe what happens next

Issue Debrief Sheet with researcher contact details

Appendix H: Code Mapping Table

This table contains examples of codes, illustrating open coding, the initial stage of qualitative analysis where data is broken down into discrete parts and labelled to identify basic concepts; axial coding, where concepts are turned into categories by exploring relationships and patterns and selective coding, where a core category is identified and integrated with other categories to form a cohesive theory. See Note below table for citations.

a. Categories that enable performance when hybrid working

Examples of initial open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
<p>"Knowing people matters"</p> <p>Knowing who people are Knowing what people do Knowing who does what Knowing who needs support Offering support Asking for help / support Caring for others Trust Helping others Energy Bounce of each other Socialising In-person activity Sharing knowledge / information Manager relationships Shared values</p> <p>One to one meetings Regular check ins (daily / weekly) Generating ideas Problem solving</p>	<p>Knowing who to ask for help Feeling able to ask for help Sharing knowledge proactively Accessing networks Feelings from being with / talking to others In-person matters Knowing people enables an exchange Knowing people enables support Beyond the individual employee to what others can offer</p> <p>Knowing boundaries Knowing expectations Knowing processes Knowing roles</p>	<p>'Knowing who'</p> <p>People relationships matter Relationships with colleagues Relationship with manager How people are behaving with each other matters Relationships allow for an exchange of information, knowledge and sharing as well as seeking information and support</p> <p>'Knowing how'</p> <p>Understanding what my work is</p>

Working longer
 Accessing resources and
 information
 Knowing processes
 In-person learning
 Emotional intelligence
 Flexibility
 Negotiation
 Planning with colleagues

"I need to connect with others
 regularly"

One to one meetings
 Regular check ins with manager and
 colleagues
 Coaching helps
 Manager negotiating and facilitating
 with team
 Teamwork
 Connecting with others
 Maintaining connections
 Building new connections

Manager as coach and facilitator
 Being new in role is problematic
 Knowing what behaviours are required
 to contribute
 Existing employees relied upon more,
 but their knowledge is declining

Connecting individuals work with the
 wider team contribution motivates.

Connecting what is happening when
 working at home. Can become
 disconnected.

Knowing new people connects
 employees with changes in the team /
 wider organisation. Feel undervalued
 if no connections.

matters and having clarity on
 performance expectations

Good manager behaviour and skills in
 hybrid situations help performance.
 They support connections between
 people, processes, work.

Connecting

Manager role in connecting the team
 members matters and in
 communicating what is required by the
 wider organisation (connecting role to
 wider purpose).

Employees connection with each other
 and with the organisation matters to
 the effort and performance contributed
 (how they feel about the organisation
 and what they know).

b. Categories that hinder performance when hybrid working

Examples of initial open coding	Axial coding	Selective coding
"It's easy to avoid people. If you were face to face, you're not going to just turn the other way"	Distance enables employees to avoid other people, work, stakeholders, meetings.	Avoiding

<p>Avoiding work Ignoring email Avoiding meetings Avoiding people Avoiding conversations Too much effort Feeling less confident Team silos People they don't like Meetings they don't want to attend Work they don't want to do Emails ignored / avoided Lack of clarity Lack of accountability No challenge People don't reply Slow responses / waiting for response Understanding Conflict Conversations Prioritising home / family Asynchronous working Communication</p>	<p>Detachment seems to be happening making it easier to avoid conversations and people.</p> <p>Asynchronous work means it's easier to avoid others and work allocation.</p> <p>More planning and negotiation are required to communicate with colleagues.</p> <p>There are delays in work progress as participants are unclear where people are, what they are doing and what hours they are working.</p>	<p>The lack of guidance and loss of contact leads to avoiding colleagues and avoiding important or difficult conversations.</p>
<p>"Theres just that lack of opportunistic ideas and interaction"</p> <p>Lack of opportunity for ideas and interaction Losing information Losing competence Losing confidence Losing effort Lack of immediate support</p>	<p>Physical distance enables loss including loss to the organisation (knowledge, quality, performance) and loss to the individual (friendships, relationships, networks, colleagues, confidence, competence, resilience)</p>	<p>Losing</p> <p>The loss of contact with colleagues leads to a loss of knowledge about workload and responsibilities and a loss of feeling connected to others.</p>

Communication quality	Participants seem to have disconnected or detached from the organisation and colleagues including external networks.
Diversity of thought	
Lack of challenge	
Anxiety, isolation	
Lack of learning	There seems to be an awareness of a trade-off between working from their homes and losing out on key aspects that support their performance.
Losing knowledge	
Processes changing	
Duplication of effort	
Quality decreasing	
Work life balance – longer work hours	Loss of feeling connected and belonging seems to be connected to isolation and anxiety as well as new employees not relating to their teams.
Well-being (increase in stress and burnout)	
Losing people (turnover)	
Respect for others	Participants suggest that colleagues prioritise home life and own needs over work priorities – a change from pre-COVID period times.
Teamwork (increased conflict and detachment)	
Feeling under valued	
Exchange of information	
Lack of sharing	
Lost socialising and friendship	
Grief	
Regret about changes	
Lost home environment	
Low self-efficacy	
Don't know what's happening	

Note. Initial open coding involves creating codes from participants data (Charmaz, 2014; Hoddy, 2019); axial coding finds relationships between categories and subcategories (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Hoddy, 2019); selective coding aims to develop a theory that explains the topic of study by refining and organising data into a core category or central theme (Danermark et al, 2002).

Appendix I: Categorical Codes

Note. In critical realism, *factors* refer to conditions that may influence an outcome, but they do not by themselves explain how or why an outcome occurs. They are necessary but not sufficient causes. *Mechanisms* are the underlying processes or causal powers that bring about an action. They explain how and why an outcome occurs, revealing underlying processes at work in each context. The goal in critical realism is to identify both factors (conditions) such as *Knowing* and *Avoiding* and mechanisms (underlying processes) such as *relationship building* and *absence of social learning*. Together these factors and mechanisms shape the observed outcomes (Sayer, 1999).

1. Factors that enable performance

The following categories emerged as factors that enable and facilitate performance in a hybrid work environment:

Knowing

- **Knowing People:** Refers to having prior knowledge of and established relationships with individuals across the organisation. This includes understanding who does what and why, typically to access their expertise or network
- **Knowing Processes:** Involves having clarity about the processes and tasks required to perform one's role effectively.

Connecting

- Refers to in-person opportunities for strengthening and building relationships. This includes intentional activities designed to reinforce connections at a human level, such as being noticed, remembered, and feeling valued.

2. Factors that hinder performance

The following categories emerged as factors that hinder or impede performance in a hybrid work environment:

Avoiding [conditions arising when employees are physically separated from each other and / or isolated]

- **Avoiding Processes:** Involves using physical distance, location, or remote technology to impede work contribution or avoid performing tasks.
- **Avoiding People:** Involves using physical distance, location, or remote technology to evade interaction with other employees, colleagues or stakeholders.

Losing

- Refers to an absence or change where something is no longer undertaken or available. This could involve the loss of relationships, missed opportunities, or the lack of access to shared knowledge. It also includes the emotional or practical loss of important conversations and connections.

Appendix J: Example of Memos

These examples illustrate how memo'ing enabled the researcher to move beyond description to deeper analytical insights, ultimately strengthening the development of the grounded theory (Conlon et al., 2020) .

1. March 2024:

As I was undertaking the initial analysis, I identified several categorical codes (a grouping of codes): the importance of relationships, management capability, performance expectations, connection and feelings of agency seem important for helping performance. And emotional and psychological detachment (increase in psychosocial risks), loss of knowledge learning and skills, organisational job redesign, asynchronous working, remote induction practice and a decline in professionalism are factors that are hindering performance.

My first draft of the findings of my analysis included an extensive number of quotations and this helped me compare and consider again what I was seeing in the data - mechanisms or outcomes? I created a table with three columns to more clearly and transparently see the three stratified layers of critical realism in action. Were categorical codes the 'actual' event (from a critical realist perspective) or the real? They were my explanation of what was happening based on the observations of the participant and their empirical experience. I inserted the quotes into column 1 (empirical). I need to do further work to understand the mechanisms which are underpinning these events and commence my retroductive analysis. The table showing the empirical, actual and real was helpful as I could start to see what the outcomes were and what were mechanisms as of March 2024.

From this re-examination, I realised that the decline in professionalism and standards which was leading to displays of disrespect and poor-quality work was an outcome rather than a causal or generative mechanism. I wondered whether this was linked to the power shift away from an employer to the employee and possibly a way of the employee demonstrating their increased power. Participants had clearly used words such as 'avoiding' and 'loss' regarding knowledge and processes. What is the underlying mechanism? I wondered if the mechanism was disconnection / detachment? The opposite of what participants were saying helped them (belonging and connection). Is it a lack of being checked up on, management absence? A lack of clarity? What is the data saying? I also wondered whether this element should come under emotional and psychological detachment or whether it was a separate category in itself? I need to explore this at supervision.

2. Memo created immediately following six interviews:

Feeling productive vs performing better

All participants so far have stated how hybrid working enables them to feel more productive. However, none are able to provide proper measures of how their performance is measured or what this looks like. There is some evidence of an increase in volume of information offered to customers in certain areas, but this appears to be down to the digitisation of processes rather than hybrid working per se. Their feelings of productivity appear to be based on clearing through a high volume of email and attending meetings.

'Avoiding' is coming up frequently - avoiding having difficult conversations, avoiding work allocation, avoiding accountability, avoiding conversations about performance, avoiding people. These issues are seen to hinder performance.

What works for me vs what works for my organisation and performance

I am noticing a form of individualism (a focus on a working arrangement that works for me) and possibly opportunism versus any question of what are in the interests of the team/organisation?

Participants are exercising real choice - does this mean they have agency? Yet I wonder about the longer-term psychological impact. This is because there seems to be a theme emerging regarding the reduction of people's sense of connection to others. Comments about having concerns for 'other people's' loneliness (caring for others) and an increase in personal feelings of social anxiety and questioning about their own judgement when working at home / not liking noisy environments anymore. Some losing confidence and competence in the role as they don't have someone next to them to turn to, to ask.

I have noted that people are expected to work mixed office and at home, but that office attendance has almost completely declined and in some cases stopped altogether. The word 'effort' is coming up a lot. Not wanting to make the 'effort' to go to the office or to see people. This is being driven by the employee's decision. Has power shifted from the organisation to individual?

Is the interest now about what the employee wants and not the customer? Customer has not featured in any discussion about performance yet and references to team are minimal. The absence of any mention of customer in a public service discussion about performance is unexpected.

I am wondering if I am seeing an increase in individual agency and a decline in collective belonging / organisational focus.

Appendix K: Retroduction Inference Illustration

Example 1: The feeling of losing confidence and questioning self and competence experienced by an employee (empirical), may relate to the event of not speaking or seeing any colleagues regularly (actual), as a causal effect of psychological detachment / absence of social learning. The inference is that a series of real underlying mechanisms (e.g. absence of social learning) creates the feelings.

Example 2: Critical realists also consider absence (of things or events) as having causality (Hartwig, 2015; Mingers & Standing, 2017). For example, a lack (absence) of knowledge transfer or informal contacts can lead to lack of experience, knowledge, confidence, competence. The absence of social learning can cause disconnection, disengagement or increased turnover intention. The absence of accountability conversations can lead to lack of motivation, detachment and performance.


Example 3: *“Knowing people is really important so that you can ask for support when you need it, if you don't know anyone you can't ask” P2*

The table below illustrates how the researcher treated this data.

Table K4

An Actual Illustration of Retroductive Inference from this study using the Stratified Layers of Critical Realism (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017)

Real domain <i>What would be true for the events to be possible?</i> <i>What are the underlying, causal mechanisms?</i> <i>[They are not directly observable (like gravity)]</i>	Actual domain <i>What is the actual event taking place?</i>	Empirical domain <i>What is experienced, happening or being observed?</i>
<p>Employees need to already know someone to ask for help, gain knowledge and information – they act as resources. If you don't know who people are, you can't get help or access this resource. Knowing is important: do they mean knowing who people are? (i.e. their role) Or knowing them well? (i.e. having a relationship?) The relationship seems to be important. Could social exchange or social capital be at play, where effort is exchanged for information?</p>	<p>Knowing people (knowing colleagues' roles? having a relationship?) Asking for support (help, learning, knowledge?) Exchanging information / support</p>	<p><i>"Knowing people is really important so that you can ask for support when you need it, if you don't know anyone you can't ask"</i></p> <p>Where employees already know their colleagues and have established relationships, this facilitates accessing knowledge, support or help.</p>



Note. In critical realism, the empirical level relates to the experiences people talk about or can be observed (such as sharing learning, catch ups, training event); the actual level relates to the events occurring (such as a team discussion where the team share information) and the real level are the deeper structures and causal mechanisms which the researcher establishes via retroductive inference (such as social learning or OCB).

Appendix L: Post-Theory Development Literature Review Search

Original search string referred to in chapter 2 AND grounded theory mechanisms explored in chapter 4:

Hybrid work OR hybrid work* OR

"agile work*" OR "telework*" OR "telecommut*" OR "remote work*" OR "work from home" OR "work at home" OR "working from home" OR "working at home" OR "Home-Based Work*" OR "home-working" OR "home working" OR "homeworking" OR "virtual office" OR "virtual work" OR "flexible work" OR "home office" OR WFH OR "New Ways of Work*" NOT "telemetry" OR "teleoperation" OR "domestic worker*" OR "homecare worker" OR "residential care" OR "aged care" OR "residential facility" OR "hybrid organisation" AND performance OR employee performance OR employee productivity OR employee effectiveness AND mandatory OR obligatory OR compulsory OR enforced

Above search string AND individual mechanisms below

AND relationships OR "social capital"

AND "in-person" OR "office work*" OR "face-to-face"

AND "role clarity" OR "task" OR "role"

AND manager OR supervisor OR leader

AND "organisational citizen behaviour" OR OCB OR "organizational citizen behavior"

AND detachment OR "emotional detachment" OR "psychological detachment"

AND "sociability" OR anxiety OR loneliness OR "social homeostasis" OR isolation

AND accountability OR accountable OR "performance measures"

AND "job redesign" OR "job craft*" OR "work design"

AND "social learning"

Table L5*Scholarly Literature Search Summary*

Number of articles	Type of article
31	Empirical - quantitative
4	Empirical - qualitative
12	Empirical - mixed methods
16	Empirical - review
23	Theoretical - conceptual (journal articles)
4	Empirical - policy
20	Book - considered scholarly
Total 110	

Table L6*Grey Literature Search Summary*

Number of articles	Broad focus
3	Articles that describe, provide detail, summarise empirical research
3	Survey or original research, unpublished
1	Predictions, policy consideration
Total 7	

References

- Aksoy, C. G., Barrero, J. M., Bloom, N., Davis, S. J., Dolls, M., & Zarate, P. (2022). Working from home around the world. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 2022(2), 281-360.
- Allen, T. D., Golden, T.D and Shockley, K.M. (2015). How effective is telecommuting? Assessing the status of our scientific findings. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest Volume 16*(2), 40-68. <https://doi.org/https://doi-org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/10.1177/1529100615593273>
- Alves, S., & Thiebaut, E. (2024). Building and nurturing a learning culture: a cross-dynamic and interactional perspective. *The Learning Organization*, 31(1), 104-121.
- Archer, M. S. (2003). *Structure, agency and the internal conversation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Atatsi, E. A., Stoffers, J., & Kil, A. (2019). Factors affecting employee performance: a systematic literature review. *Journal of Advances in Management Research*, 16(3), 329-351.
- Bailey, D., & Kurland, N. (2002). A review of telework research: Findings, new directions, and lessons for the study of modern work. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, 23(4), 383-400. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.144>
- Baines, S. (2020). Grounded Theory methods and analysis: methodological revisions and practical application. In C. Walshe & S. Brearley (Eds.), *Handbook of theory and methods in applied health research: questions, methods and choices*. Edward Elgar Publishing <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/lancaster/detail.action?docID=6263911>
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). The job demands-resources model: State of the art. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*.
- Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Verbeke, W. (2004). Using the job demands-resources model to predict burnout and performance. *Human Resource Management: Published in Cooperation with the School of Business Administration, The University of Michigan and in alliance with the Society of Human Resources Management*, 43(1), 83-104.
- Bales, K. L., Hang, S., Paulus, J. P., Jahanfard, E., Manca, C., Jost, G., Boyer, C., Bern, R., Yerumyan, D., Rogers, S., & Mederos, S. L. (2023). Individual differences in social homeostasis. *Frontiers Behavioural Neuroscience*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2023.1068609>
- Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American Psychologist*, 37(2), 122.
- Bandura, A. (1999). *Social cognitive theory of personality* (Vol. 2). Routledge.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), 1-26.

- Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1(2), 164-180.
- Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1977). *Social learning theory* (Vol. 1). Englewood cliffs, Prentice Hall.
- Banerjee, P., & Gupta, R. (2024). A mixed-method exploration of effects of technostress on remote/hybrid working professionals. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 150, 107974.
- Barbier, M., Hansez, I., Chmiel, N., & Demerouti, E. (2013). Performance expectations, personal resources, and job resources: How do they predict work engagement? *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 22(6), 750-762.
- Barnes, K., Vione, K., & Kotera, Y. (2024). Effective leadership practice among senior leaders working from home and in the hybrid workplace across COVID-19. *SN Business & Economics*, 4(5), 55.
- BBC. (2024, April 5). *Office for National Statistics staff vote to strike over return to office*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-68744433>
- Becker, J., & Lanzl, J. (2023). Segmentation preference and technostress: Integrators' vs segmenters' experience of technology-induced demands and related spill-over effects. *Information & Management*, 60(5).
- Belfrage, C., & Hauf, F. (2017). The gentle art of retrodution: Critical realism, cultural political economy and critical grounded theory. *Organization Studies*, 38(2), 251-271.
- Beño, M. (2021). On-site and hybrid workplace culture of positivity and effectiveness: Case study from Austria. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*(5).
- Bhaskar, R. (1998). *The possibility of naturalism: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Bhaskar, R. (2014). *The possibility of naturalism: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Birks, M., & Mills, J. (2015). *Grounded theory: A practical guide*. Sage.
- Bloom, N. (2014). To raise productivity, let more employees work from home. *Harvard Business Review*.
- Bloom, N. (2021). Hybrid is the future of work. *Stanford Institute for economic policy research*. <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/hybrid-future-work>
- Bloom, N., Han, R., & Liang, J. (2022). How hybrid working from home works out. *National Bureau of Economic Research*.
- Bloom, N., Han, R., & Liang, J. (2024). Hybrid working from home improves retention without damaging performance. *Nature*, 1-6.

- Bloom, N., Liang, J., Roberts, J., & Ying, Z. J. (2015). Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 130(1), 165-218.
- Bourdieu, P. (2004). Structures and the habitus. *Material culture: Critical concepts in the social sciences*, 1(Part 1), 107-134.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. University of Chicago press.
- Breevaart, K., Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & van den Heuvel, M. (2015). Leader-member exchange, work engagement, and job performance. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*.
- Brönnimann, A. (2022). How to phrase critical realist interview questions in applied social science research. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 21(1), 1-24.
- Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (2019). *The SAGE handbook of current developments in grounded theory*. Sage.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford University Press.
<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=N2zQCgAAQBAJ>
- Burgoon, J. K., Bonito, J. A., Ramirez Jr, A., Dunbar, N. E., Kam, K., & Fischer, J. (2002). Testing the interactivity principle: Effects of mediation, propinquity, and verbal and nonverbal modalities in interpersonal interaction. *Journal of Communication*, 52(3), 657-677.
- Burroughes, L., & Grant, C. (2023). Managerial coaching as the foundation for building felt-trust and motivation among employees working remotely. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 18(1), 45-57.
- Califf, C. B., Sarker, S., & Sarker, S. (2020). The bright and dark sides of technostress: A mixed-methods study involving healthcare IT. *MIS Quarterly*, 44(2).
- Campbell, J. (1990). Modeling the performance prediction problem in industrial and organizational psychology. *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology/Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.*
- Cedefop. (2022). *Challenging digital myths – First findings from Cedefop's second European skills and jobs survey*. Publications Office of the European Union.
<https://doi.org/doi/10.2801/818285>
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage.
- Charmaz, K., & Thornberg, R. (2021). The pursuit of quality in grounded theory. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 305-327.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1780357>

- Chiaburu, D. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2008). Do peers make the place? Conceptual synthesis and meta-analysis of coworker effects on perceptions, attitudes, OCBs, and performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(5), 1082.
- Choudhury, P., Foroughi, C., & Larson, B. (2021). Work-from-anywhere: The productivity effects of geographic flexibility. *Strategic Management Journal*, 42(4), 655-683.
- Choudhury, P., Khanna, T., Makridis, C., & Schirmann, K. (2022). Is hybrid work the best of both worlds? Evidence from a field experiment. *Harvard Business School Technology & Operations Mgt. Unit Working Paper* (22).
- CIPD. (2021). *Planning for hybrid working*. CIPD.
- CIPD. (2022). *An update on flexible and hybrid working practices*. CIPD. https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/flexible-hybrid-working-practices-report_tcm18-108941.pdf
- Civil Service Code of Conduct, (2010). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-code/the-civil-service-code>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). Approaches to qualitative data analysis. In *Research methods in education* (pp. 643-656). Routledge.
- Conlon, C., Timonen, V., Elliott-O'Dare, C., O'Keeffe, S., & Foley, G. (2020). Confused About Theoretical Sampling? Engaging Theoretical Sampling in Diverse Grounded Theory Studies. *Qualitative Health Research*, 30(6), 947-959. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732319899139>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- Cruickshank, J. (2011). The positive and the negative: assessing critical realism and social constructionism as post-positivist approaches to empirical research in the social sciences. *International Migration Institute* (No.42). https://doi.org/https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:c7b57a3a-a063-4048-8f95-d15d932e4915/download_file?file_format=pdf&safe_filename=WP42%2BThe%2Bpositive%2Band%2Bthe%2Bnegative.pdf&type_of_work=Working+paper
- CSW. (2023). *Civil servants to be told to spend 60% of time in offices*. Civil Service World. <https://www.civilserviceworld.com/professions/article/civil-servants-home-remove-working-60-in-office>
- Danermark, B., Ekström, M., & Jacobsen, L. K. (2002). *Explaining society: critical realism in the social sciences*. Routledge.
- Danermark, B., Ekstrom, M., Jakobsen, L., & Karlsson, J. (2002). *Theory in the methodology of social science*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203996249-12>

- Danermark, B., Ekström, M., & Karlsson, J. C. (2019). *Explaining society: Critical realism in the social sciences*. Routledge.
- Daniels, K., Gedikli, C., Watson, D., Semkina, A., & Vaughn, O. (2017, 2017/09/02). Job design, employment practices and well-being: a systematic review of intervention studies. *Ergonomics*, 60(9), 1177-1196.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00140139.2017.1303085>
- Davenport, T. H.** (2005). *Thinking for a living: How to get better performances and results from knowledge workers*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Davis, M., Collis, H., Hughes, H., Wu, C., Gritt, E., Fang, L., Iqbal, A., & Rees, S. (2022). *Where is your office today? New insights on employee behaviour and social networks*. Report, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/192349/>
- Davis, M., Hughes, H., Rees, S., Wu, C., Gritt, E., Collis, H., & Fang, L. (2022). *Where is your office today? A research-led guide to effective hybrid working*. Report, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK. <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/187889/>
- Deal, J. J., & Levenson, A. (2021). Figuring out social capital is critical for the future of hybrid work. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 62(4), 1-4.
- De Menezes, L. M., & Kelliher, C. (2011). Flexible working and performance: a systematic review of the evidence for a business case. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13(4), 452-474.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00301.x>
- De Menezes, L. M., & Kelliher, C. (2017). Flexible working, individual performance, and employee attitudes: Comparing formal and informal arrangements. *Human Resource Management*, 56(6), 1051-1070.
- Deci, E. L., Olafsen, A. H., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-determination theory in work organizations: The state of a science. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 4(1), 19-43.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Self-determination theory: A macrotheory of human motivation, development, and health. *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie Canadienne*, 49(3), 182.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2012). Self-determination theory. In *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 416-436).
- Delanoeije, J., & Verbruggen, M. (2020). Between-person and within-person effects of telework: a quasi-field experiment. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 29(6), 795-808.
- Delbosc, A., & Kent, J. (2024). Employee intentions and employer expectations: a mixed-methods systematic review of “post-COVID” intentions to work from home. *Transport Reviews*, 44(2), 248-271.
- Demerouti, E., & Bakker, A. B. (2023). Job demands-resources theory in times of crises: New propositions. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 13(3), 209-236.

- Drucker, P. F.** (1959). *The landmarks of tomorrow*. Harper & Row.
- Dubos, R., & Cook, K. (2017). *Social capital: Theory and research*. Routledge.
- Dunne, C. (2011). The place of the literature review in grounded theory research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 14(2), 111-124.
- Edwards, P. K., O'Mahoney, J., & Vincent, S. (2014). *Studying organizations using critical realism: A practical guide*. Open University Press.
- Elder-Vass, D. (2021). Critical realism. In *Routledge international handbook of contemporary social and political theory* (pp. 241-249). Routledge.
- Etheridge, B., Wang, Y., & Tang, L. (2020). *Worker productivity during lockdown and working from home: Evidence from self-reports*. (2020-12). University of Essex.
- Etherington, K. (2004). *Becoming a reflexive researcher: Using our selves in research*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Eurofound. (2019). *Working conditions in a global perspective*. Publications Office of the European Union.
- Eurofound. (2022). *The future of telework and hybrid work*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/system/files/2023-04/ef22028en.pdf>
- Fauville, G., Luo, M., Muller Queiroz, A. C., Bailenson, J. N., & Hancock, J. (2021). Nonverbal mechanisms predict zoom fatigue and explain why women experience higher levels than men. *Social Science Research Network*.
- Felstead, A. (2022). *Remote Working: A Research Overview*. Taylor & Francis Group. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/lancaster/detail.action?docID=6855575>
- Felstead, A. (2022, March 25). *Remote Working: What does the research tell us?* [Video] YouTube. <https://youtu.be/dexS8iGa9uY?feature=shared>
- Felstead, A., & Henseke, G. (2017). Assessing the growth of remote working and its consequences for effort, well-being and work-life balance. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 32(3), 195-212.
- Figaro, K. A. (2021). Pandemic Mode: A New Virtual Team Leadership Skillset. *Technology, Mind and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tms0000093>
- Fletcher, A. (2016). Applying critical realism in qualitative research: Methodology meets method. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 19, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1144401>
- Fletcher, A. J. (2020). Critical realism: Philosophical and methodological considerations. In *Qualitative analysis: Eight approaches for the social sciences* (pp. 173-194). Sage Publications.
- Foley, G., Timonen, V., Conlon, C., & O'Dare, C. E. (2021). Interviewing as a vehicle for theoretical sampling in grounded theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20.

- Frederiksen, D. J., & Kringelum, L. B. (2021). Five potentials of critical realism in management and organization studies. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 20(1), 18-38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2020.1846153>
- Fryer, T. (2022). A critical realist approach to thematic analysis: producing causal explanations. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 1-20.
- Gabriel, A. S., Moran, C. M., & Gregory, J. B. (2014). How can humanistic coaching affect employee well-being and performance? An application of self-determination theory. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 7(1), 56-73.
- Gajendran, R. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2007, Nov). The good, the bad, and the unknown about telecommuting: Meta-analysis of psychological mediators and individual consequences [Review]. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(6), 1524-1541. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.6.1524>
- Gajendran, R. S., Harrison, D. A., & Delaney-Klinger, K. (2015, Sum 2015). Are telecommuters remotely good citizens? Unpacking telecommuting's effects on performance via i-deals and job resources. *Personnel Psychology*, 68(2), 353-393. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12082>
- Gajendran, R. S., Ponnappalli, A. R., Wang, C., & Javalagi, A. A. (2024). A dual pathway model of remote work intensity: A meta-analysis of its simultaneous positive and negative effects. *Personnel Psychology*, 77(4), 1351-1386.
- Gibbs, M., Mengel, F., & Siemroth, C. (2021). Work from home & productivity: Evidence from personnel & analytics data on IT professionals. *University of Chicago, Becker Friedman Institute for Economics Working Paper* (2021-56).
- Golden, T. D., & Gajendran, R. S. (2019, 2019/02/01). Unpacking the role of a telecommuter's job in their performance: Examining job complexity, problem solving, interdependence, and social support. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 34(1), 55-69. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-018-9530-4>
- Golden, T. D., Veiga, J. F., & Dino, R. N. (2008). The impact of professional isolation on teleworker job performance and turnover intentions: does time spent teleworking, interacting face-to-face, or having access to communication-enhancing technology matter? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(6), 1412.
- Grant, A. M., & Cavanagh, M. J. (2007). The goal-focused coaching skills questionnaire: Preliminary findings. *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal*, 35(6), 751-760.
- Grant, C. A., Wallace, L. M., & Spurgeon, P. C. (2013). An exploration of the psychological factors affecting remote e-worker's job effectiveness, well-being and work-life balance. *Employee Relations*, 35(5), 527-546.
- Gratton, L. (2021). How to do hybrid right. *Harvard Business Review*, 99(3), 66-74.
- Grzegorzczak, M., Mariniello, M., Nurski, L., & Schraepen, T. (2021). *Blending the physical and virtual: a hybrid model for the future of work* (Bruegel Policy Contribution, No. 14/2021, Bruegel, Brussels).

- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In S. Lincoln (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Sage.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 191–215). Sage
- Güngerçin, U. (2020, 2020/07/02). Does techno-stress justify cyberslacking? An empirical study based on the neutralisation theory. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 39(7), 824-836. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2019.1617350>
- Gujar, N., Patki, S. M., & Sethi, T. (2024). 'New Norms for the New Normal?'Evaluating and Enhancing Employee OCB Amidst Evolving Work Environments. In *Organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) in India: Emerging trends and future directions* (pp. 165-176). Springer.
- Hackney, A., Yung, M., Somasundram, K. G., Nowrouzi-Kia, B., Oakman, J., & Yazdani, A. (2022). Working in the digital economy: A systematic review of the impact of work from home arrangements on personal and organizational performance and productivity. *PLOS One*, 17(10).
- Halford, S. (2005). Hybrid workspace: re-spatialisations of work, organisation and management. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 20(1), 19-33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-005x.2005.00141.x>
- Halpern, D. (2005). *Social capital*. Polity.
- Hartwig, M. (2015). *Dictionary of critical realism*. Routledge.
- Heyes, C. (2012). What's social about social learning? *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 126(2), 193.
- Hill, N. S. (2023). Leadership Strategies for the Hybrid Workforce. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 64(3), 1-4.
- Hippeli, B. (2022). Creating a Culture of Accountability and Performance. In *Leadership strategies for the hybrid workforce: Best practices for fostering employee safety and significance* (pp. 40-49). IGI Global.
- Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American Psychologist*, 44(3), 513-524. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.3.513>
- Hoddy, E. T. (2019). Critical realism in empirical research: employing techniques from grounded theory methodology. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 22(1), 111-124.
- Holt-Lunstad, J. (2017). The potential public health relevance of social isolation and loneliness: Prevalence, epidemiology, and risk factors. *Public Policy & Aging Report*, 27(4), 127-130.
- Holt-Lunstad, J. (2021). The major health implications of social connection. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 30(3), 251-259.

- Hopkins, J. C., & Figaro, K. A. (2021). The great resignation: an argument for hybrid leadership. *International Journal of Business and Management Research*, 9(4), 393-400.
- Hui, R. T.-y., Wu, D., & Luo, J. (2024). *Coaching in a Hybrid Workplace: An Examination of Face-to-Face and Online Coaching to Enhance Self-Efficacy and Knowledge Creation*. 2024 12th International Conference on Information and Education Technology (ICIET)
- Innstrand, S. T., Christensen, M., Grødal, K., & Banks, C. (2022). Within-and between-person changes in work practice and experiences due to COVID-19: Lessons learned from employees working from home, hybrid working, and working at the office. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 948516.
- Institute for Government. (2017). *Grade Structures of the Civil Service*. <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/grade-structures-civil-service>
- Iqbal, K. M. J., Khalid, F., & Barykin, S. Y. (2021). Hybrid workplace: The future of work. In *Handbook of research on future opportunities for technology management education* (pp. 28-48). IGI Global.
- Jarosz, J. (2021). The impact of coaching on well-being and performance of managers and their teams during pandemic. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 19(1), 4-27.
- Jiang, K., Liu, D., McKay, P. F., Lee, T. W., & Mitchell, T. R. (2012). When and how is job embeddedness predictive of turnover? A meta-analytic investigation. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97(5), 1077.
- Karasek, R., & Theorell, T. (1990). *Healthy work: Stress, Productivity, and the Reconstruction of Working Life* (Vol. 990). Basic Books.
- Karasek, R. A. (1979). Job demands, job decision latitude, and mental strain: implications for job redesign. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(2), 285-308. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2392498>
- Kelliher, C., & De Menezes, L. M. (2019). *Flexible working in organisations: A research overview*. Routledge.
- Kelly, B., Cooper, C., Jones, M., Braithwaite, E., Powell, S., & McCann, A. (2019). *The effects of remote working on stress, wellbeing and productivity* N. Health. <https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/working-remotely-whitepaper>
- Kempster, S., & Parry, K. W. (2011). Grounded theory and leadership research: A critical realist perspective. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22(1), 106-120.
- Knight, C., & Parker, S. K. (2021). How work redesign interventions affect performance: An evidence-based model from a systematic review. *Human Relations*, 74(1), 69-104.
- Koopmans, L., Bernaards, C. M., Hildebrandt, V. H., Schaufeli, W. B., de Vet Henrica, C., & Van Der Beek, A. J. (2011). Conceptual frameworks of individual work performance: A systematic review. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 53(8), 856-866.

- Kossek, E. E., Dumas, T. L., Piszczek, M. M., & Allen, T. D. (2021). Pushing the boundaries: A qualitative study of how stem women adapted to disrupted work–nonwork boundaries during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 106*(11), 1615.
- Kozlowski, S. W. J., & Klein, K. J. (2000). A multilevel approach to theory and research in organizations: Contextual, temporal, and emergent processes. *Academy of Management Review, 24*(2), 248–267.
- Kreiner, G. E., Hollensbe, E. C., & Sheep, M. L. (2006). On the edge of identity: Boundary dynamics at the interface of individual and organizational identities. *Human Relations, 59*(10), 1315–1341.
- Kristof, A. L. (1996). Person-organization fit: An integrative review of its conceptualizations, measurement, and implications. *Personnel Psychology, 49*(1), 1–49.
- Latané, B., Williams, K., & Harkins, S. (1979). Many hands make light the work: The causes and consequences of social loafing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37*(6), 822.
- Leka, S. (2021). *The future of working in a virtual environment and occupational safety and health* European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/future-working-virtual-environment-and-occupational-safety-and-health>
- Leonardi, P. M., Parker, S. H., & Shen, R. (2024). How remote work changes the world of work. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 11*(1), 193–219.
- Li, J. J., Mitchell, T. R., Lee, T. W., Eberly, M. B., & Shi, L. (2022). Embeddedness and perceived oneness: Examining the effects of job embeddedness and its trajectory on employee proactivity via an identification perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 107*(6), 1020.
- Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2013). *New developments in goal setting and task performance* (Vol. 24). Routledge
- Locke, E. A., Shaw, K. N., Saari, L. M., & Latham, G. P. (1981). Goal setting and task performance: 1969–1980. *Psychological Bulletin, 90*(1), 125.
- Looker, B., Vickers, J., & Kington, A. (2021). The case for a critical realist grounded theory research design. In I. Psaroudakis, A. Salvini, & T. Muller (Eds.), *Dealing with Grounded Theory: Discussing, Learning, and Practice* (Vol. 1). Pisa University Press.
- Madlock, P. E. (2012). The influence of supervisors' leadership style on telecommuters. *Journal of Business Strategies, 29*(1), 1.
- Makri, C., & Neely, A. (2021). Grounded theory: A guide for exploratory studies in management research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 20*, 16094069211013654.

- Manzano, A., & Williams, E. (Eds.). (2024). *Realist evaluation: principles and practice*. Taylor & Francis.
- Matthews, G. A., & Tye, K. M. (2019). Neural mechanisms of social homeostasis. *Annals New York Academy of Sciences*, 1457(1), 5-25.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.14016>
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *A realist approach for qualitative research*. Sage.
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. (2000). Models of emotional intelligence. *Handbook of intelligence*, 2, 396-420.
- Mayo, E. (2004). *The human problems of an industrial civilization*. Routledge.
- McEvoy, P., & Richards, D. (2006, 2006/01/01). A critical realist rationale for using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 11(1), 66-78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987106060192>
- McGhee, G., Marland, G. R., & Atkinson, J. (2007). Grounded theory research: literature reviewing and reflexivity. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 60(3), 334-342.
- McPhail, R., Chan, X. W., May, R., & Wilkinson, A. (2024). Post-COVID remote working and its impact on people, productivity, and the planet: an exploratory scoping review. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 35(1), 154-182.
- Meyer, S. B., & Lunnay, B. (2013). The application of abductive and retroductive inference for the design and analysis of theory-driven sociological research. *Sociological Research Online*, 18(1), 86-96.
- Mingers, J., & Standing, C. (2017). Why things happen – Developing the critical realist view of causal mechanisms. *Information and Organization*, 27(3), 171-189.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2017.07.001>
- Mishra, N., & Bharti, T. (2024). Exploring the nexus of social support, work–life balance and life satisfaction in hybrid work scenario in learning organizations. *The Learning Organization*, 31(1), 27–47.
- Mitchell, T. R., Holtom, B. C., Lee, T. W., Sablinski, C. J., & Erez, M. (2001). Why people stay: Using job embeddedness to predict voluntary turnover. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(6), 1102-1121.
- Moglia, M., Hopkins, J., & Bardoel, A. (2021). Telework, hybrid work and the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals: towards policy coherence. *Sustainability*, 13(16), 9222.
- Morina, N., Kip, A., Hoppen, T. H., Priebe, S., & Meyer, T. (2021). Potential impact of physical distancing on physical and mental health: a rapid narrative umbrella review of meta-analyses on the link between social connection and health. *BMJ open*, 11(3).
- Morse, J. M. (1994). *Critical issues in qualitative research methods*. Sage Publications.

- Mukumbang, F. C. (2023). Retroductive theorizing: a contribution of critical realism to mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 17(1), 93-114.
- Nakrošiene, A., Buciuניene, I., & Goštautaitė, B. (2019). Working from home: characteristics and outcomes of telework. *International Journal of Manpower*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-07-2017-0172>
- Naqshbandi, M. M., Kabir, I., Ishak, N. A., & Islam, M. Z. (2024). The future of work: work engagement and job performance in the hybrid workplace. *The Learning Organization*, 31(1), 5-26.
- Nastjuk, I., Trang, S., Grummeck-Braamt, J.-V., Adam, M. T., & Tarafdar, M. (2024). Integrating and synthesising technostress research: a meta-analysis on technostress creators, outcomes, and IS usage contexts. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 33(3), 361-382.
- Nathaniel, A. K. (2022). When and how to use extant literature in classic grounded theory. *American Journal of Qualitative Research*, 6(2), 45-59.
- Neely, A., Gregory, M., & Platts, K. (1995). Performance measurement system design: A literature review and research agenda. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 15(4), 80-116.
- Newport, C. (2016). *Deep work: Rules for focused success in a distracted world*. Hachette UK.
- Newport, C. (2024). *Slow productivity: The lost art of accomplishment without burnout*. Penguin Business.
- Niks, I. M., de Jonge, J., Gevers, J. M., & Houtman, I. L. (2017). Divergent effects of detachment from work: A day-level study on employee creativity. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 26(2), 183-194.
- OECD. (2021). *Teleworking in the COVID-19 pandemic: Trends and prospects*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/72a416b6-en>
- OGC. (2008). *Working beyond walls; The government workplace as an agent of change* <https://www.placemaking.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/workingbeyondwalls.pdf>
- Oliver, C. (2011). Critical Realist Grounded Theory: A New Approach for Social Work Research. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 42(2), 371-387. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcr064>
- Oliver, J. L. (2021). *Workplace Self-Efficacy, Perceived Group Cohesiveness, and Social Loafing within Organizations: Does Modality Influence Team Member Effort?* (Doctoral dissertation, Grand Canyon University).
- ONS. (2016). *ONS Labour Force Survey*. <https://doi.org/https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/methodologies/labourforcesurveyuserguidance#2019-update>

- ONS. (2020). *Coronavirus and homeworking in the UK: April 2020*.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/coronavirusandhomeworkingintheuk/april2020>
- ONS. (2021). *Business and individual attitudes towards the future of homeworking, UK: April to May 2021*.
- ONS. (2022). *Is hybrid working here to stay?*
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/ishybridworkingheretostay/2022-05-23>
- ONS. (2023). *Characteristics of homeworkers, Great Britain: September 2022 to January 2023*
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/characteristicsofhomeworkersgreatbritain/september2022tojanuary2023>
- ONS. (2024). *Characteristics of hybrid workers, Great Britain*.
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/characteristicsofhybridworkersgreatbritain>
- Oppong Peprah, E. (2024). Hybrid workplace: current status, positives, negatives, challenges, and team learning. *The Learning Organization*, 31(1), 88-103.
- Organ, D. W. (2014). Organizational citizenship behavior: It's construct clean-up time. In *Organizational citizenship behavior and contextual performance* (pp. 85-97). Psychology Press.
- Organ, D. W., & Moorman, R. H. (1993). Fairness and organizational citizenship behavior: What are the connections? *Social Justice Research*, 6, 5-18.
- Organ, D. W., & Paine, J. B. (1999). A new kind of performance for industrial and organizational psychology: Recent contributions to the study of organizational citizenship behavior. In C. L. Cooper & I. T. Robertson (Eds.), *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 14, 337-368. John Wiley & Sons
- Overman, S., Schillemans, T., & Grimmelikhuijsen, S. (2021). A validated measurement for felt relational accountability in the public sector: gauging the account holder's legitimacy and expertise. *Public Management Review*, 23(12), 1748-1767.
- Papandrea, D., Azzi, M., & Alwani, D. (2020). Managing work-related psychosocial risks during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Labour Organization*, 6-35.
- Patel, N., & Behrani, P. (2023). A study on the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and work life balance in contemporary work environment. *OPJU Business Review* (2), 115-122.
- Pawson, R., Greenhalgh, T., Harvey, G., & Walshe, K. (2005). Realist review - a new method of systematic review designed for complex policy interventions. *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy*, 10(1_suppl), 21-34.
<https://doi.org/10.1258/1355819054308530>

- Pérez-Durán, I. (2024). Twenty-five years of accountability research in public administration: Authorship, themes, methods, and future trends. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 90(3), 546-562.
- Pfaffinger, K. F., Reif, J. A., & Spieß, E. (2022). When and why telepressure and technostress creators impair employee well-being. *International Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics*, 28(2), 958-973.
- Pierce, G. (2022). *Remote Working Strategy: Integrated Impact Assessment*. Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/remote-working-strategy-integrated-impact-assessment>
- Podsakoff, N. P., Whiting, S. W., Podsakoff, P. M., & Blume, B. D. (2009). Individual- and organizational-level consequences of organizational citizenship behaviors: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94(1), 122.
- Portes, A. (2009). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. In *New critical writings in political sociology* (pp. 53-76.). Routledge.
- Pullan, P. (2022). *Virtual leadership: Practical strategies for success with remote or hybrid work and teams*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Rahaman, M. S., Kudo, S., Rawling, T., Ren, Y., & Salim, F. D. (2020). Seating preference analysis for hybrid workplaces. *Association for Computing Machinery* (arXiv:2007.15807). <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2007.15807>
- Rebolledo, O. A., Vega, D. C., & Belmar, R. S. (2021). Learning to Work While Homebound—The Effects of Remote Work on Job Performance during the Covid-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Economics, Finance, and Management Studies*, 4(6), 772-793.
- Reed, M. S., Evely, A. C., Cundill, G., Fazey, I., Glass, J., Laing, A., Newig, J., Parrish, B., Prell, C., & Raymond, C. (2010). What is social learning? *Ecology and Society*, 15(4).
- Remote Working Policy*. (2021). Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/remote-working-policy>
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., & Ormston, R. (2013). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. Sage.
- Roethlisberger, F. J., & Dickson, W. J. (2003). *Management and the worker* (Vol. 5). Psychology press.
- Rousseau, D. M. (1998). The 'problem' of the psychological contract considered. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 19, 665-671.
- Rupcic, N. (2024). Working and learning in a hybrid workplace: challenges and opportunities. *The Learning Organization*, 31(2), 276-283.
- Sampat, B., Raj, S., Behl, A., & Schöbel, S. (2022). An empirical analysis of facilitators and barriers to the hybrid work model: a cross-cultural and multi-theoretical approach. *Personnel Review*, 51(8), 1990-2020. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-02-2022-0176>

- Sayer, A. (1999). *Realism and social science*. Sage.
- Sayer, A. (2004). Why critical realism? In *Critical realist applications in organisation and management studies* (Vol. 11).
- Schaffers, H., Vartiainen, M., & Bus, J. (2022). *Digital innovation and the future of work*. CRC Press.
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, 25(3), 293-315.
- Sethibe, T., & Steyn, R. (2015). The relationship between leadership styles, innovation and organisational performance: A systematic review. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, 18(3), 325-337.
- Shah, S. S., & Shinde, S. (2024). An overview of antecedents of OCB and recommendations for improving it in post-pandemic work. In *Organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) in India: emerging trends and future directions* (pp. 33-55).
- Sin, K.-H. P. (2010). *Social loafing in virtual collaborative decision making: Relationship among media richness, media synchronicity, group performance, and individual effort* (Publication Number 3412083) Walden University.
<https://www.proquest.com/openview/01a68a0758e0a7a86ffd11aee012254e/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>
- Singh, S., & Sant, S. (2023). The Moderating Role of Workplace (Hybrid/Remote) on Employee Engagement and Employee Turnover Intention. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 1-16.
- Smith, C., Organ, D. W., & Near, J. P. (1983). Organizational citizenship behavior: Its nature and antecedents. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 68(4), 653.
- Sokolic, D. (2022, 25-02). Remote work and hybrid work organizations. *Economic and social development: Book of proceedings*, 202-213. https://www.esd-conference.com/upload/book_of_proceedings/Book_of_Proceedings_esdAveiro2022_Online.pdf#page=208
- Solís, M. (2017). Moderators of telework effects on the work-family conflict and on worker performance. *European Journal of Management and Business Economics*, 26(1), 21-34. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/EJMBE-07-2017-002>
- Sparrow, P., & Cooper, C. (2014). Organizational effectiveness, people and performance: new challenges, new research agendas. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 2-13.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1108/JOEPP-01-2014-0004>
- Spilker, M. A. A. (2014). *Making telework work: The effect of telecommuting intensity on employee work outcomes* (Publication Number 3670411) [PhD. University of

Missouri], PsychInfo. U.S.

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psyh&AN=2015-99220-315&site=ehost-live&authtype=ip,shib&user=s1523151>

- StatsWales. (2024). *Employment in the public and private sectors by Welsh local authority and status*. StatsWales.
<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Business-Economy-and-Labour-Market/People-and-Work/Employment/Persons-Employed/publicprivatesectoremployment-by-welshlocalauthority-status>
- Stocker, V., Whalley, J., & Lehr, W. (2023). Beyond the pandemic: towards a digitally enabled society and economy. In *Beyond the pandemic? Exploring the impact of COVID-19 on telecommunications and the internet* (pp. 245-265). Emerald Publishing.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. (1997). *Grounded theory in practice*. Sage.
- Suravi, S. (2024). Training and development in the hybrid workplace. *The Learning Organization*, 31(1), 48-67.
- Tahsiri, M. (2023). Towards designing for the postdigital hybrid workplace: A systematic literature review. *Enquiry, The ARCC Journal for Architectural Research*, 20(1), 1-19.
- Tarafdar, M., Pullins, E. B., & Ragu-Nathan, T. (2015). Technostress: negative effect on performance and possible mitigations. *Information Systems Journal*, 25(2), 103-132.
- Tarafdar, M., Tu, Q., Ragu-Nathan, B. S., & Ragu-Nathan, T. (2007). The impact of technostress on role stress and productivity. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 24(1), 301-328.
- Taris, T. W., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2015). The job demands-resources model. In *The Wiley Blackwell handbook of the psychology of occupational safety and workplace health* (pp. 155-180). Wiley Blackwell.
- Taser, D., Aydin, E., Torgaloz, A. O., & Rofcanin, Y. (2022). An examination of remote e-working and flow experience: The role of technostress and loneliness. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 127, 107020.
- Taskin, L., & Edwards, P. (2007). The possibilities and limits of telework in a bureaucratic environment: lessons from the public sector. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 22(3), 195-207. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-005x.2007.00194.x>
- Teevan, J., Hecht, B., & Jaffe, S. (2021). *The new future of work: Research from Microsoft on the impact of the pandemic on work practices* (1). Microsoft.
<https://aka.ms/newfutureofwork>
- Tejero, L. M. S., Seva, R. R., & Fadrilan-Camacho, V. F. F. (2021). Factors associated with work-life balance and productivity before and during work from home. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 63(12), 1065.

- ten Brummelhuis, L. L., Haar, J. M., & van der Lippe, T. (2010). Collegiality under pressure: The effects of family demands and flexible work arrangements in the Netherlands. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21(15), 2831-2847.
- Theorell, T. (2020). The demand control support work stress model. *Handbook of socioeconomic determinants of occupational health: From macro-level to micro-level evidence*, 339-353. Springer.
- Thornberg, R., & Dunne, C. (2019). Literature review in grounded theory. In *The Sage handbook of current developments in grounded theory* (pp. 206-221).
- Timonen, V., Foley, G., & Conlon, C. (2018). Challenges when using grounded theory: A pragmatic introduction to doing GT research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918758086>
- Toscano, F., González-Romá, V., & Zappalà, S. (2024). The influence of working from home vs. working at the office on job performance in a hybrid work arrangement: A diary study. *Journal of Business and Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-024-09970-7>
- Toscano, F., & Zappalà, S. (2020). Social isolation and stress as predictors of productivity perception and remote work satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic: The role of concern about the virus in a moderated double mediation. *Sustainability*, 12(23), 9804.
- UKGovernment. (2020). *Staying at home and away from others (social distancing)*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others>
- Urquhart, C. (2013). *Grounded theory for qualitative research: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526402196>
- Vacchiano, M., Fernandez, G., & Schmutz, R. (2024). What's going on with teleworking? A scoping review of its effects on well-being. *Plos One*, 19(8), e0305567.
- Van der Lippe, T., & Lippényi, Z. (2020). Co-workers working from home and individual and team performance. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 35(1), 60-79.
- Van der Meulen, N. (2016). *The Distance Dilemma: the effect of flexible working practices on performance in the digital workplace* [PhD, Erasmus Research Institute of Management]. <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/94033?trk=article-ssr-frontend-pulse-x-social-details-comments-action-comment-text>
- Vartiainen, M., & Vanharanta, O. (2024). True nature of hybrid work. *Frontiers in Organizational Psychology*, 2. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3389/forgp.2024.1448894>
- Vartiainen, M. A., & Vanharanta, O. (2023). *Hybrid work: Definition, origins, debates and outlook* (WPEF23002). Eurofound.
- Vincent, S., & O'Mahoney, J. (2018). Critical realism and qualitative research: an introductory overview. In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and*

Management Research Methods: History and Traditions (pp. 201-216). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526430212>

- Vincent, S., & Wapshott, R. (2014). Critical realism and the organizational case study: A guide to discovering institutional mechanisms. In *Studying organizations using critical realism: A practical guide* (pp. 148-167). Oxford University Press.
- Waller, L. (2021). *A sense of belonging at work: A guide to improving well-being and performance*. Routledge.
- Welsh Government. (2022). *Smarter working: A remote working strategy for Wales*. (2022). <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/pdf-versions/2022/3/5/1648198107/smarter-working-remote-working-strategy-wales.pdf>
- Wendsche, J., & Lohmann-Haislah, A. (2017). A meta-analysis on antecedents and outcomes of detachment from work. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 223407.
- Wheatley, D. (2022). Work time, place and space in the 'New Normal'. In *The Emerald handbook of work, workplaces and disruptive issues in HRM* (pp. 457-476). Emerald Publishing.
- World Health Organization. (2023, May 5). Statement on the fifteenth meeting of the IHR Emergency Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic.** <https://www.who.int/news/item/05-05-2023-statement-on-the-fifteenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-%282005%29-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-%28covid-19%29-pandemic>
- Wiltshire, G., & Ronkainen, N. (2021). A realist approach to thematic analysis: making sense of qualitative data through experiential, inferential and dispositional themes. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 20(2), 159-180.
- Wöhrmann, A. M., & Ebner, C. (2021). Understanding the bright side and the dark side of telework: An empirical analysis of working conditions and psychosomatic health complaints. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 36(3), 348-370.
- WPC. (2022). *Agile and flexible working*. Workforce Partnership Council. <https://www.gov.wales/workforce-partnership-council-report-agile-and-flexible-working-html#:~:text=Agile%20working%20has%20continued%20where,pending%20further%20review%20and%20consultation.>
- Xie, J. L., Elangovan, A., Hu, J., & Hrabluik, C. (2019). Charting new terrain in work design: A study of hybrid work characteristics. *Applied Psychology*, 68(3), 479-512.
- Yadav, R., Yadav, M., & Vihari, N. S. (2024). High-performance work system and learning orientation in offline, online, and hybrid workplaces: the mediating role of affective commitment. *The Learning Organization*, 31(1), 122-136.
- Yang, C.-L., Yamashita, N., Kuzuoka, H., Wang, H.-C., & Foong, E. (2022). Distance matters to weak ties: Exploring how workers perceive their strongly-and weakly-connected collaborators in remote workplaces. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 6(GROUP), 1-26.

- Yardley, L. (2007). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology & Health*, 15(2), 215-228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870440008400302>
- Yardley, L. (2008). Demonstrating validity in qualitative psychology. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (2 ed., pp. 235-251). Sage.