

The Hidden Risks of Hybrid Working

Findings & Recommendations



Research by King's College London
Supported by The Female Lead

THE
FEMALE
LEAD

Foreword From Edwina Dunn Founder of The Female Lead

Data and research are fundamental to The Female Lead's DNA, with a long-established commitment to tackling under-researched issues affecting the lives of women and girls. At The Female Lead, we deliver our insight programme by forging long-term partnerships with academics, research organisations and data analysts to offer fresh perspectives in areas where women face barriers to progress and equality. The Female Lead focuses on using our platform to amplify research findings, to encourage engagement in priority issues and to provide solution-focussed toolkits and resources to move conversations and policy forward.

In 2022, I am delighted to have launched a new research collaboration with Dr Madeleine Wyatt, Reader in Diversity and Inclusion at King's Business School to learn more and dig deeper into the lived experience of hybrid work. Our ambition with this latest collaboration is to really accelerate the conversation around the opportunities and challenges of hybrid working for all segments of the workforce, in particular women. We wanted to identify best practice by drawing on evidence from multiple sectors of the economy and a diverse cohort of workers, and to offer a toolkit to assist companies in developing sustainable Hybrid Working practices that promote equality and benefit all.



We were also keen to dig deeper into the notion that hybrid working would automatically benefit and elevate female employees, and understand, without presumption, where hybrid working offers benefits and where it presents risks.

We are proud to unveil this report: What's Hiding In Hybrid Work? Our striking front cover visual is inspired by a 1970's feminist poster from the V&A collection depicting the isolation of women who stay home to raise children. The original poster was created by See Red Women's Workshop and entitled 'Alone we are powerless...Together we are strong'. It was designed to promote unity among women who were feeling frustrated or trapped in their domestic situations by demonstrating that they are not alone in their circumstances. In our 2022 tribute to this iconic image, we echo the risk of alienation in hybrid working where women with domestic and caring responsibilities are too far distanced from their career and working life and become 'invisible workers'. Over 40 years on, there is a different but equally troublesome battleground for women's visibility, freedom and fulfilment in society.

During the study, we revealed a condition we named 'the invisible worker', explored more fully in Dr Madeleine Wyatt's full 'Rewards and Risks for Women in Hybrid Work' report. It builds on what we discovered in our 'Women At Work' report published in 2021. This '21 report highlighted the role of the 'unentitled mindset' which has meant that even though the role of females in the workplace has changed in recent decades, it has not yet reached parity due to unconscious biases in many institutional policies and practices, and women's conditioning to expect less.



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We are seeing that this 'unentitled mindset' has again reared its head in hybrid work and there is a clear gender divide in emerging hybrid working norms. We hope that by sounding the alarm early, and by providing a toolkit to address the risks we have uncovered, we can embrace hybrid working models that operate productively and inclusively for individuals, for organisations and for society at large.

My hope is that this research will be a vital contribution towards our journey to gender equality.

'Rewards and Risks for Women in Hybrid Work'

An Overview

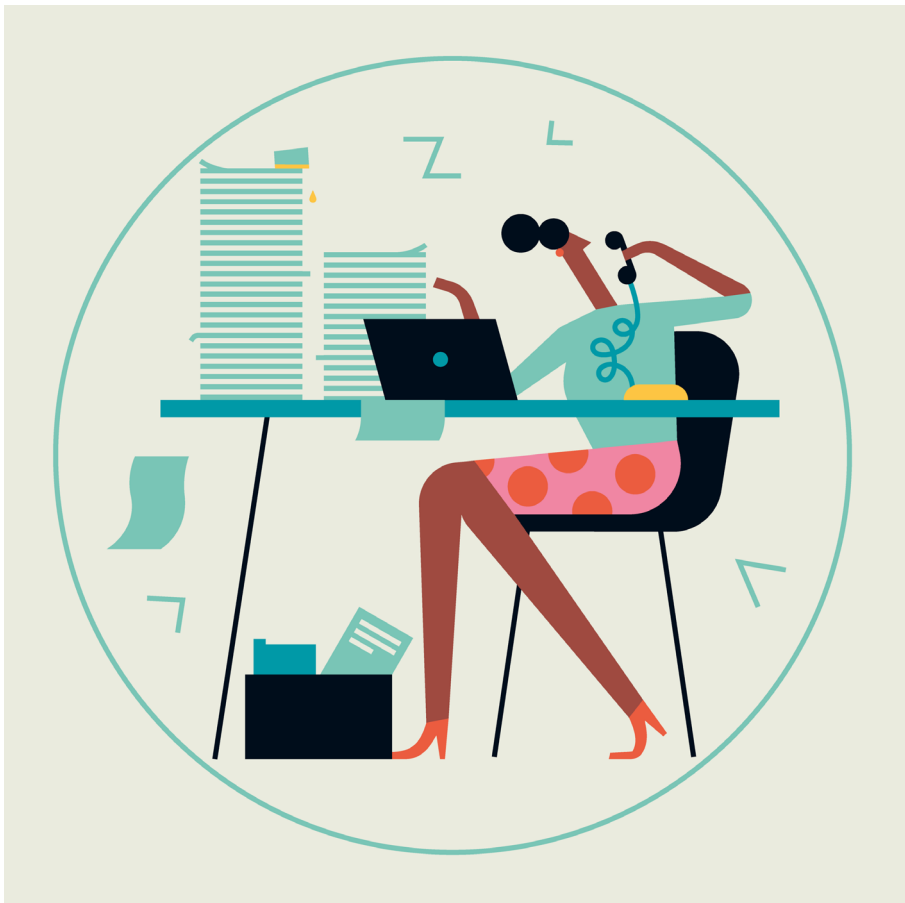
Introduction

Hybrid working has long been considered a potential game-changer for women and underrepresented groups in the workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant acceleration in the adoption of remote and hybrid working patterns for most office-based workers, transforming the availability of flexible working and changing the nature of day-to-day work for many people. But hybrid working at scale is still a relatively new concept for most organisations, and we have not yet reached a point of best practice. Business leaders and researchers

have already sounded the alarm about some of the potential challenges that hybrid working might surface for women. In 2022, educational charity The Female Lead and Dr Madeleine Wyatt, Reader in Diversity Inclusion and Leverhulme Research Fellow at King's Business School collaborated on a multi-sector research study to dig deeper into the lived experience of hybrid work, learn more about how men and women each experience hybrid work, and share knowledge on what men and women might need to consider when managing their careers in a hybrid workplace.

Methodology

We interviewed 80 hybrid workers (40 men and 40 women) across seven organisations both = UK based and with a global footprint including the US. Our participants came from public, private and voluntary sectors, and held varying levels of seniority and experience. We examined all 80 interviews for underlying themes and gender differences to identify key rewards and risks of hybrid working for women. We also looked for examples of best practice from organisations and individuals in the ways they managed their hybrid careers.








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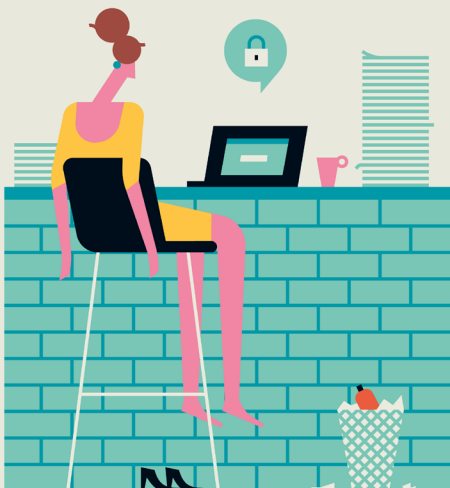
What We Found: Rewards and Risks




Ways that hybrid working rewards both men and women, and their organisations:



-  Hybrid workers feel trusted and respected as they have greater control over their schedules and work arrangements
-  Hybrid workers are able to adjust their working style and environment to improve personal productivity
-  Enhanced flexibility allows hybrid workers to focus on their health and wellbeing
-  Hybrid workers report reduced costs for travel and childcare and less time spent on their commute
-  The flexibility of hybrid working is a gamechanger for those with caring responsibilities

We also surfaced four key risks that are likely to negatively impact the workplace and in particular the career experiences of women in the world of hybrid work:



-  **Risk 1: Invisible Workers**
Women double down on tasks and engage in (virtual) presenteeism to counter stereotypes of hybrid workers. But working behind a digital wall risks women's work going unnoticed and unrecognised.
-  **Risk 2: Shielded from office politics**
Women are shielded from political interactions. This risks women feeling left out of the loop and lacking the networks they need to leverage for career support.
-  **Risk 3: Slowing progression**
The risks of hybrid working combined with a lack of learning opportunities and less flexibility in senior roles place women in danger of slower career progression.
-  **Risk 4: Loss of joy and purpose**
Women miss camaraderie with colleagues. Combined with increased isolation and video fatigue many found their roles joyless and struggled to find meaning from their work.

Hybrid working: The Way Forward

King's College London and The Female Lead have worked together not just to investigate the risks and rewards of Hybrid Working but also to inform how policy can be shaped to ensure the hybrid workplace works inclusively for all segments of the workforce.

We convened an expert Advisory Board to shape practical recommendations and solutions from the insights uncovered by our study and we created a toolkit to share the best practice we learnt about in our research interviews and identify ways in which the risks of hybrid work can be remedied.

We caution that the requirements of hybrid work are specific to each organisational and team context. There is no one-size-fits-all, but we hope our recommendations will inspire organisations to consider how they can mitigate the risks for women in hybrid work and improve the experiences for all members of the workforce.

Advisory Board



Rosie Campbell

Director of Global Institute For Women's Leadership and Professor of Politics at King's College London



Neil Carberry

Chief Executive, Recruitment & Employment Confederation



Heejung Chung

Professor of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Kent. Author of the Flexibility Paradox



Teresa Kotlicka

Talent & Organisational Development Director, Patrizia



Abby Carvosso

Director of Commercial Transformation
Bauer Audio UK



Lucie Cave

Chief Content Officer,
Bauer Media

“This report warns that hybrid isn't the answer to flexible working for women. The issues around the gender divide are still there but worryingly now they are less 'visible' with women doubling down and working twice as hard - juggling responsibility for domestic chores and the need to be seen to do a good job. Lack of meaningful work connections and promotions is a hidden reality for women that this important toolkit helps address.”

Lucie Cave



'Rewards and Risks for Women in Hybrid Work'

Quotes From Our Advisory Board

“ When tackling gender inequality, one of the most frequent challenges is dismantling well established, heavily ingrained policy and practise. Hybrid working at scale is a relatively new phenomenon and this study has sounded the alarm early. We have an incredible opportunity to ingrain equality and inclusivity in hybrid working from the get go – let's take it!

Rosie Campbell



“ This new work from The Female Lead could not be more timely. Every business leader I talk to says we've not found the tools we need to make hybrid working effective over the long haul. That's no surprise, as much of what we have been doing reflects emergency measures adopted during the pandemic. The simplicity and directness of the toolkit this project delivers will be a great help to businesses in managing the changes that are needed to support people, especially women at risk of organisational invisibility.

Neil Carberry

“ The impact of Covid has meant that many organisations have undergone a radical shift in both perspective and practise when it comes to the adoption of flexible, remote and hybrid working practises. We now know it's very possible but a new priority has come into focus – we need to get it right and ensure it confers all the benefits it has the potential to deliver to employers and employees.

Teresa Kotlicka



“ This study echoes and builds on what I found when researching my book, *The Flexibility Paradox*. We presume more flexible working models lead to better work-life balance and improvements in gender equality, but entrenched domestic gender roles combined with how productivity is defined in work culture means that this presumption is very often false.

Heejung Chung

Hybrid working: Toolkit

Our findings make it clear that while hybrid working has many rewards, organisations still need to consider how to make it more inclusive. We do not find that simply returning to the office full-time is a good or practical solution. Instead, we drew from our interviews and our own wider work on gender inclusivity to create a toolkit for organisations to enhance inclusivity in hybrid work. Here is an overview of our recommendations. The toolkit for organisations and for individuals can be downloaded at www.thefemalelead.com/research



Risk 1: Invisible workers

- Reframe and communicate what 'productivity' is all about
- Managers to champion employees upwards and sideways
- Find ways to showcase employees without relying on managers
- Support employees to separate work from home

Risk 2: Shielded from office politics

- Reframe 'politics' to encourage inclusive interaction
- Create transparent communities
- Incentivise (not mandate) the office

Risk 3: Slowing progression

- Onboard employees in-person
- Provide regular shadowing opportunities
- Design flexibility into all roles
- Provide sponsorship

Risk 4: Loss of joy and purpose

- Invest in purposeful team bonding
- Encourage camaraderie via transparent online social groups
- Create a vibrant office environment

At The Female Lead we believe that women in hybrid work deserve to...

- ☺ **Be seen and celebrated for their work efforts**
- ☺ **Have equal opportunity and flexibility for job advancement**
- ☺ **Find fulfilment and joy in work**
- ☺ **Enjoy connection and inclusion in their work communities**

Join our campaign **What's #hidinginhybridwork ?**



Inspire a brighter hybrid future

Click [here](#) to watch our Hidden Risks of Hybrid Working video or to read the full report

The Research Team



Dr Madeleine Wyatt

Reader in Diversity and Inclusion at King's Business School

Madeleine Wyatt is a Reader in Diversity and Inclusion at King's Business School and a Leverhulme Research Fellow. Her research examines equality, diversity and inclusion at work, organisational politics, and political leadership. By working with practitioners, politicians and policymakers her work provides tools for organisations and political parties to advance diversity and inclusion. Madeleine teaches diversity modules for King's Business School and works with the Global Institute for Women's Leadership to deliver executive education on gender inclusivity. Madeleine is Chair of King's Business School's Equality Diversity and Inclusion committee.



King's College London

King's College London has been ranked 5th in the UK, 5th in Europe and 24th in the world in the 2022 Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings, in recognition of the university's positive environmental and social impact. This ranking is the only global ranking that measures universities' contributions to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since 1989, King's Business School has grown into a leading management institution – established as King's ninth faculty in 2017 – and one of the largest in London. King's Business School has appeared in the top 10 for business and management studies three years in a row.



Global Institute for Women's Leadership

Global Institute for Women's Leadership has supported King's College London and The Female Lead in this original and cutting edge research. Chaired by Julia Gillard, the only woman to have served as Prime Minister of Australia, the institute brings together rigorous research, practice and advocacy to break down the barriers to women becoming leaders, while challenging ideas of what leadership looks like. The institute undertakes a range of activities designed to strengthen areas such as research, practice, and advocacy and engagement.



Julia Gillard

Is one of our celebrated Female Leads and the inaugural Chair of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership, which through research, practice and advocacy, is addressing women's under-representation in leadership. She was the 27th Prime Minister of Australia.

She currently serves as the Chair of Beyond Blue, one of Australia's leading mental health awareness bodies; She was recently appointed as the Chair of Wellcome, a global charitable foundation which supports science to solve urgent health challenge

About The Female Lead

The Female Lead is an educational charity founded by data science entrepreneur, Edwina Dunn OBE in 2015. The charity is dedicated to both improving the visibility of positive female role models and identifying the factors that continue to limit women's progress, choices and fulfilment.

The Female Lead shares stories of women who have found diverse paths to fulfilment and achievement, amplifying their voices in order to stimulate change and improve economic outcomes. Through research, analysing data and by listening to thousands of women across the whole spectrum of their educational and working lives, The Female Lead's mission is to build a substantive evidence-base to drive action that delivers real progress towards gender parity.

In 2021, The Female Lead launched The Fulfilment Finder, an online survey which uses implicit, neuroscience-based research techniques to reveal subconscious motivators and what matters most to survey participants. Fulfilment Finder, focuses on six dimensions important to women's happiness: Self, Society, Relationships, Money, Work and Health and at the end of the Survey, respondents receive a persona profile revealing emotional motivators, emotional fulfilment and relative fulfilment across all 6 dimensions of the survey.

With an online and social hub of

7.5 million followers, we champion women's stories and perspectives. Our website is dedicated to creating and curating free content personalised to women's needs – at every age and every stage.

We also have our books which share the stories of influential and remarkable women. For every Female Lead book purchased, The Female Lead donates a book to a school or a college – helping to change the lives of girls in local communities across the world. Already, thousands of books have been donated by the charity, creating active School Societies that take part in our inspirational programme with free content and expert advice – both online and through events

We collaborate on original research with leading academic institutions and source big data and tracking studies to develop evidence-based interventions and tangible action plans. We also headline events and targeted influencer outreach programme which inform and affect business strategies, processes and opinions

In 2021, The Female Lead published "Breaking Free of The 'Unentitled Mindset' which first identified the "entitlement gap" experienced by women at work whereby pre-existing norms and structures mean they suffer a career penalty for having flexibility around their work schedules in order to accompany additional responsibilities.

