Nurturing teamwork and team dynamics in a hybrid work model

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Abstract

Purpose – We aimed to analyze the impact of the transition to the hybrid model of teamwork and team dynamics from the perspective of the five key challenges, i.e. communication, coordination, connection, creativity and culture.

Design/methodology/approach – To achieve the stated aim, we conducted a literature review and then an exploratory qualitative study. We split the research into phases: December 2021 to January 2022 and July to August 2022. In the first phase, we conducted computer-assisted online interviews (CAWIs) with all members of the remote team and an in-depth interview with the manager. After the transition from remote to hybrid work in February 2022, we returned to the team to conduct in-depth interviews with team leaders and the manager.

Findings – We identified key findings, i.e. managerial implications of differences across the 5 Cs (communication, coordination, connection, creativity and culture) noted in the functioning of the analyzed team as the team shifted from fully remote work to the hybrid work model.

Research limitations/implications – We concluded that if people do not spend time together and are not impregnated with the unique culture and values of a given organization, they will not feel a connection to its distinctive ethos and may choose to leave. In the longer-term, the last challenge may be the biggest single opportunity for employees post-pandemic and concurrently the single biggest challenge that organizational leadership will need to address, given that sustainable market success depends on talent.

Originality/value – The results showed that team communication, teamwork coordination, social and emotional connections among team members, nurturing of creativity, as well as of the organizational culture were of high importance to the team in the hybrid work model. Thus, we confirmed the findings of other authors. The study contributes to our understanding of the impact of the hybrid work model on teamwork and team dynamics and provides some guidance on how organizations can mitigate these, in particular through the team manager.

Keywords Hybrid work, Teamwork, Team dynamics, Team management, Change management

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic was a tough test for organizations worldwide. We have managed to contain the risks of the pandemic and are amidst the great return to offices worldwide. However, for the vast majority of those who "went remote" in the thick of the pandemic, this has meant a "new normal" rather than a return to the office. The new normal is a hybrid workplace, with at least some work done outside the office. It remains unclear whether humanity will overcome the challenges of working remotely and whether the hybrid model will not create additional challenges. We aimed to analyze the impact of the transition to the hybrid model on teamwork and team dynamics from the perspective of the five key challenges, i.e. communication, coordination, connection, creativity and culture. This article investigates the topic of teamwork and team dynamics in the hybrid work model in a two-pronged approach, i.e. a literature review, to define a structured lens to assess the challenges of hybrid work, and then an in-depth study of an expert team established remotely during the pandemic and transitioned to hybrid post-pandemic. The team situation allowed us to closely examine the impact of the transition to the hybrid model. We recognize that the hybrid model is relatively new and thus that their findings may be silent on the longer-term implications and challenges of the hybrid work model on teamwork and team dynamics (see Table 1).

In this article, we understand a team as a small group of people with complementary skills, presenting a common approach to work, who are genuinely committed to and jointly

	Remote work model	Hybrid work model
Communication	A team that is purely remote is easier to manage as everyone faces the same challenges The key communication challenge is one of difficulties in capturing non-verbal messages and ambiguous responses. This makes it difficult to understand team members	The problem of asynchronous communication, in particular across time zones, remains with the move to the hybrid model. While it helped make communication easier, when F2F, it created a new problem: because of proximity, some people could not have better access to team management and to informal team interaction, leading to differences in the quality of communication across the team members
Coordination	Team coordination requires additional planning and tools. Achieving visibility on work performance and results consumes much more time. It is beneficial to rely on tools/dashboards and to limit the number of persons one supervisor coordinates	The hybrid work model requires additional planning to ensure that the little face-to-face time the team has is optimally used for tasks that are best performed F2F, in particular brainstorming, team building, strategic discussions, defining objectives and purpose
Connection	It is necessary to really think through and intentionally plan meetings, and implement processes to drive the required connectedness across the team	Hybrid work exposed the team to the creation of 'fault lines' as people living in the same location could now meet while they were still unable to meet with the entire team
Creativity	Fostering creativity as something generated with others is difficult to achieve remotely. It is important to hire people with high openness and curiosity because they are better at managing themselves and more creative in a remote work setting	Hybrid work re-opens opportunity for meetings conducive to creativity
Culture	A fully remote team is able to create its own culture, which is not marginalized by local office culture. However, the team then becomes an island that can easily separate from the overall organization	F2F work is hugely beneficial for onboarding new joiners into a team and into organizational culture. The F2F time is an opportunity for the organization to instil its unique culture and atmosphere

Table 1.
Differences in impact of the remote and hybrid work models on teamwork and team dynamics

Source(s): Own elaboration

responsible for a common goal and specific objectives (Katzenbach & Smith, 2008). On the other hand, teamwork is the set of interrelated thoughts, actions and feelings of each team member that are needed to function as a team and that come together to facilitate coordinated, adaptive action and achievement of task and task goals, resulting in value-added outcomes (Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005). The ability to work in a team is one of the most sought-after skills as team-based organizational projects are becoming the norm in many companies owing to the added value teamwork creates by making good use of employees' diverse knowledge, skills and abilities (Rudawska, 2017).

The concept of hybrid work

In the hybrid work environment, employees work part of the time in the traditional office and partly elsewhere. People can split their work time across locations thanks to digital technologies. Rahaman, Kudo, Rawling, Ren, and Salim (2020) highlight the disappearance of physical barriers among team members, enabling individuals to choose where to work and which tools to use. Employers may implement the model in various ways. In some cases, they may ask only some employees to work remotely, while others work in the office. Alternatively, the same people come into the office on defined days and work remotely the rest of the week (Iqbal, Khalid, & Barykin, 2021). Hybrid teams meet face-to-face occasionally, which sets them apart from teams that work fully remotely and never meet physically, and traditional teams who work in the same location daily (Fiol & O'Connor, 2005).

The mixed or hybrid model is likely to be incorporated into organizational strategies not only in the short- but also long-term. Alexander *et al.* (2021) recommend it to organizations that want to combine the benefits of remote work with those of traditional work. The shift will necessitate significant changes in organizational culture, the establishment of new ways of working, and the development of related work policies and procedures (EURES, 2021; Guidetti, Converso, Sanseverino, & Ghislieri, 2022). Organizations that successfully integrate the hybrid work model will secure a material competitive advantage in today's rapidly changing world (Santos, Pache, & Birkholz, 2015).

Opportunities and challenges

The hybrid work model enables a balance between physical engagement in organizational matters and the independence and comfort of working from home (Baker, 2021). For many, it is the perfect merger of work with lower stress, which yields greater productivity (Elsbach, 2003; McElroy & Morrow, 2010). It saves employees' time (no work commute) giving a better work–life balance, and thus greater effectiveness and work satisfaction (Sundstrom, Burt & Kamp, 1980; Cole *et al.*, 2012; Kim & De Dear, 2013). Hybrid work is also conducive to creativity and improves relations with clients (Moll & de Leede, 2016); it lowers infrastructure costs, including office space, office maintenance and administration (Grzegorczyk, Mariniello, Nurski, & Schraepen, 2021). It also enhances the employer's recruitment reach beyond office proximity (Beno, 2021).

Moreover, the hybrid model also introduces challenges that organizations and employees need to address. The model makes it hard to maintain and foster corporate culture, effectively manage teams and drive collaboration, and ensure mental health and high productivity (Berger, Weber, & Buser, 2021). The above challenges guide us to where management should focus: motivating hybrid teams, supporting their productivity and fostering the organizational culture to retain talent (Leja, 2021). The first relates to soft management competencies – team integration and communication, encouraging employees to play an active role in organizational culture, facilitating meetings and onboarding hybrid employees. The second relates to securing higher productivity among employees, including new hires; this requires easy access to all work-critical information (e.g. training, documentation and

instructions) to develop and improve the quality of the provided products or services and to create a safer work environment. However, tools and processes are not the foundation of the hybrid model. Its success relies on trust. This is the only means to retain employees who may not feel closely connected to the organization without face-to-face integration. Such people are more likely to experience burnout or demotivation. Furthermore, they also find it easier to change employers. Thus, employee personal and professional development is critical in the hybrid organization.

Our article analyzes the five main challenges mentioned by both management theorists and practitioners. These can be seen as key to building a sense of community and belonging across the organization. These are communication, coordination, connection, creativity and culture. A number of authors identified these challenges (see, e.g.: Bolisani, Scarso, Ipsen, Kirchner, & Hansen, 2020; Kniffin *et al.*, 2021; Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020; Spicer, 2020; Berger *et al.*, 2021; Kovacs, Caplan, Grob, & King, 2021; Li, Liu, Mai, & Zhang, 2021; Yang *et al.*, 2022; Babapour Chafi, Hultberg, & Bozic Yams, 2022; Bloom, Han, & Liang, 2022; Brucks & Levav, 2022; Delany, 2022; Kropp & McRae, 2022; Maurer, Bach, & Oertel, 2022). Haas (2022) identifies these as the 5Cs, which we used to analyze the case study data.

Communication

Effective communication is the foundation of hybrid work. It is critical to its success. Therefore, it constitutes a potential high risk. Mistakes in communication may lead to weak information flow, gaps in know-how, barriers to effective teamwork and team members exclusion.

Communication encompasses formal and informal interactions, the challenges of asynchronous communication and time zones. Despite significant technological advances, nothing can fully replace face-to-face interactions, which include non-verbal communication and ambiguous and difficult-to-convey messages. The manager must align the communication mode to the complexity of the conveyed information (Alexander, De Smet, & Mysore, 2020). Being proactive is also important. Regular communication and constructive feedback are a must (EURES, 2021). It is important that employees who work remotely and those who work in the office feel they have equal access to team management and to informal team interactions, like those when people eat lunch together in the cafeteria (Alexander *et al.*, 2020).

Coordination

It is important to focus on communication because it affects the team's coordination and ultimately its productivity (Uitdewilligen & Waller, 2018; Kollmann, Hensellek, Stöckmann, Kensbock, & Peschl, 2020). Maurer *et al.* (2022) highlight the importance of factors that help teams comply with rules related to working effectively from home. Second, it is important to analyze how team members behave when they work from home to detect early signs of work–life conflicts (Maurer *et al.*, 2022). "Faultiness" may appear between those who work together in person and those who work remotely owing to the extra effort needed to coordinate. Initially, those not in the office are left out of insignificant decisions (e.g. where to have lunch), but with time, they may also be excluded from important discussions (Haas, 2022).

Connection

Remote employees depend on information and communication technologies (ICT) tools to communicate with their managers, co-workers and others. Long hours in online meetings lead to "zoom fatigue" (physical and emotional exhaustion caused by extensive screen time and limited communication), as well as greater passive listening and non-stop partial attention, which increases tiredness and headaches (Majumdar, Biswas, & Sahu, 2020). Additionally, it contributes to emotional fatigue, stress and is detrimental to our productivity (Rose, 2010).

The phenomenon of continuous partial attention (CPA) associated with video conferences may lead to anxiety, psychological exhaustion and sleeplessness, and may lower concentration, appetite and even sexual drive.

Work from home and communication through digital technologies limit our work interactions and reduce networking opportunities (Sokolic, 2022). Informal connections and difficult access to information may be especially detrimental to new joiners' ability to develop and advance their careers (Kropp & McRae, 2022). Hybrid work carries the risk of a "dominant class" consisting of people who feel to be in the center of the organization and are strongly engaged, and an "underclass" of those who feel pushed onto the margin and disconnected not only from work but also from social interactions (Haas, 2022).

Creativity

The pandemic triggered many enterprises to quickly implement new solutions in, for example, work organization and digital technologies. In the long term, such changes may be detrimental to employee creativity (Kniffin *et al.*, 2021; Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020) in particular if the new solutions lower the frequency of informal exchanges that help to establish a common work atmosphere of collaboration and trust, which fosters innovation (Łużniak-Piecha & Bobrowska, 2020). Hybrid work endangers both individual and collective creativity (Haas, 2022). Even though organizations can hold brainstorming sessions on Zoom, the defined times and formats may prove less productive than impromptu face-to-face chats. While time alone can help focus on new ideas, it is unclear whether working alone is fully conducive to creativity. According to Ritter and Dijksterhuis (2014), some social interactions and spontaneous conversations with co-workers, a glance at a random knick-knack in a colleague's office cubicle or even changes in scenery during a work commute may be critical for creativity.

Culture

In the hybrid work system, in the absence of physical interactions, an individual may lose contact with co-workers. In the traditional work setting, it is easier for employees to internalize the corporate mission, vision and ambition, as well as their own tasks and objectives. In a hybrid setting, the adoption of these elements is more difficult (Iqbal *et al.*, 2021). According to Haas (2022), during the initial months of remote work, employees' prior close collaboration before the pandemic probably influenced their motivation and productivity. They had internalized the effective norms, values and expectations during that time. Today, some of those employees are leaving and are being replaced. It is difficult to integrate newcomers with the organizational culture, regardless of whether they are interns or experienced managers. The corporate culture may also be key to articulating the organization's distinctiveness, especially in industries in which companies strongly compete for talent. If employees never or rarely spend time together, it becomes difficult to foster the unique atmosphere of a given workplace (Haas, 2022).

Methods

The research focused on the impact of the hybrid work model on team dynamics, in particular team performance and team belonging, from the perspective of the top five challenges (5Cs) (Haas, 2022). We intentionally selected the respondents as members of one expert team established fully remotely during the pandemic. The analyzed 37-member team works in a global organization with more than 350,000 employees worldwide. It consists of marketing advisors, and includes 23 women and 14 men, who live in Poland (13), India (14), Singapore (1), Australia (2), Germany (1), Switzerland (2), Sweden (1), the United States (1) and the United Kingdom (2). The type of work and tasks engaged in by the surveyed team classified it as a

virtual team in the initial phase of the research and as a hybrid team in the second research interaction. Even when they moved into hybrid work, the bulk of the teamwork continued to be remote, but they had opportunities to meet team members to work together in person and also to meet other employees face-to-face in their home office locations.

We chose exploratory qualitative research to investigate the topic. Exploratory research makes it possible to broadly pursue a research question not previously explored in-depth (Stebbins, 2001; Waters, 2007; Swedberg, 2020). It is used to investigate topics that lack pre-existing knowledge or paradigm, with the intention of building understanding without preconceived assumptions (Czernek, 2014). Although we may use both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in exploratory research, qualitative exploration often initiates it.

We conducted a computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) between December 2021 and January 2022. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to disclose their views freely and honestly on teamwork across their geographically dispersed team and on the support their manager and the organization provided while they worked remotely. Then, in the second half of January 2022, we interviewed the team manager. We analyzed the gathered data by content analysis to understand the impact of remote work on the team. We published the research results in an earlier article (see Bloom *et al.*, 2022). As the team shifted to the hybrid work model as of February 2022, the researchers went back in July–August 2022 to conduct in-depth interviews with eight team leads and the team manager to secure insight on how the move to the hybrid model had affected teamwork and team dynamics. The specificity of the team, the roles and the tools had not changed. The researchers interviewed only those with people management responsibilities, i.e. eight team leads, each with responsibility for four to six team members of similar skill sets.

Although the small research population means the survey results are not representative and cannot be generalized to apply beyond the team, the results provide insight into trends, including attitudes and reactions toward hybrid work.

Results

Despite the challenges of working remotely, during the team's initial survey, respondents recognized the benefits. More than half appreciated the time savings of not having to commute to the office and resulting improved work–life balance. For some, virtual work was more productive. Working from home increased mobility and created the option to work across the organization, regardless of the employee's physical location (Bloom *et al.*, 2022). Most would like to continue working partially from home. However, based on the literature review, we may see that the hybrid work model also ushered in several challenges which are outlined below through the lens of the 5Cs.

Communication

According to Stewart, Manz, and Sims (1999), the work team is – after family – the most important community unit for an individual. Relationships between co-workers depend on the communication's quality, and every team member is responsible for effective communication.

In the initial survey, many team members highlighted the lack of direct "face-to-face conversations" (woman, 36–45, Sidney). They found it difficult that "you cannot walk up to someone and discuss things" (man, 36–45, Mumbai). This challenge did not go away with the arrival of the hybrid model and team leads mentioned their efforts: "Trying to calm nerves and build an environment where they feel assured that they are part of a larger objective and purpose and clearly have those open conversations with them on what is working and what is not" (man, 36–45, London).

In his research, Pincus (1986) confirmed a strong correlation between work satisfaction and communication. In the analyzed team, respondents appreciated the personal help and

support the manager provided and emphasized their readiness to listen and talk: (she) "always kept me motivated and was very approachable" (woman, 26–30, Mumbai); "always open to conversation, asking how I'm feeling, etc." (man, 36–45, Krakow) and "available whenever I need" (woman, 36–45, Sidney).

The team leads also recognized the importance of strong peer-to-peer communication. "Encouraging the team members to talk to each other and share experiences of how some difficult situations were addressed" (man, 36–45, Pune). "Helping when your colleague feels stuck or needs support with an initiative, collectively solving problems that can help the whole team, sharing best practices, being transparent with everyone, treating everyone as your equal and giving that kind of respect to all" (woman, 26–30, Mumbai).

Asynchronous communication takes place when team members are in different locations and time zones. It allows for the information to be processed and for a thoughtful response to be formulated. However, it also slows planning and decision-making. The interviews reflected the difficulties of asynchronous communications: "It is easier for people to avoid you, if they don't deliver something on time" (woman, 31–35, Goteborg): "by the time I was aware of a conflict between employees, it had been going around for some time."

To work effectively, people need to clearly understand the task at hand, they need to communicate in case of any changes or if they are uncertain of what needs to be done or how. While there are tools to support communication and collaboration, hybrid work continues to generate difficulties in this area: "We all use multiple communication tools. We need to make choices and prioritize. We need to constantly agree/control if all of us are on the same page" (woman, 31–35, Krakow).

Coordination
Hybrid teamwork presents many challenges related to coordination. In the initial survey, team members recognized the difficulties: "Out of sync workday schedules. People plan their days differently" (man, 36–45, Pune); "Sometimes, I really do think the time difference is a challenge. For ex: lunchtime in IST is the start of the day for the UK" (woman, 31–34, Bangalore).

In a physical setting, quick exchanges and adjustments happen naturally. When the team is not in the same location, additional processes need to be put in place. The manager summarized: "It is hard to engage and mobilize the entire team. This usually requires an approach that makes everyone feel personally engaged and mobilized and this is super hard in a larger team that is all remote, or even harder if 90% remote." One team lead added another aspect: "If not managed in a disciplined way – can make you work longer hours as there is no specific time to disconnect which can lead to fatigue at times" (woman, 26–30, Mumbai).

Managing people in a virtual environment has to be more intentional and structured. "For a manager, it's harder to evaluate/assess the employee's performance" (woman, 36–45, Krakow). It is important to provide the team with structures and frameworks in the form of processes and tools. Team members need to have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and the value of their work. This helps them see the purpose and engage. In the second interview, the manager shared a challenge she experienced in balancing team members' autonomy with her need to control team performance. When collating data to create an H1 2022 summary, all advisors submitted quantitative performance info. There were marked performance variations. The manager had known of some difficulties. However, these had not been as visible and had not triggered intervention. "I had always thought of myself as a good manager, one who really felt the pulse of the team, both in terms of professional performance and individuals' wellbeing. The data showed me I was not diligent enough on performance." She realized that in a hybrid setting, she could not closely manage so many people and she decided to give more administrative responsibilities to the team leads.

Connection

During both the analyzed periods, i.e. respondents worked full remotely, and when some worked in hybrid mode, 90% of them missed "personal connections" the most. Respondents mentioned a lack of "human connection" (man, 26–30, Zurich). They found it difficult that "you cannot walk up to someone and discuss things" (man, 36–45, Mumbai). Respondents also experienced psychological problems. They struggled with "boredom" (woman, 31–35, Krakow), "routine" (woman, 26–30, Zurich) and a deep "sense of loneliness and being stuck in their own glass jar" (man, 36–45, London). They also faced challenges with "motivation without meetings – when I've got not many appointments, I find it difficult to focus" (woman, 36–45, Nuremberg). Even with the hybrid mode, the challenges of connecting persist. Team leads highlighted difficulties in emotionally connecting with team members. "As much we like to switch on video for one on one meetings, it makes it a little hard to figure out the actual body language during a distress type of situation" (woman, 31–35, Bangalore); "Not seeing each other in person regularly doesn't allow you to pick up on your colleagues mood, body language etc. which can be important to realize the stress level in the team, etc." (man, 36–45, London).

All team leads stressed the importance of connection and community. "I definitely feel part of the team and community . . . it improves their performance and lowers the chance of them leaving the company (woman, 31–35, Goteborg); "The team's common goals can only be achieved if we feel good to be part of the work community" (man, 35–46, Pune). Fortunately, much of the surveyed team interacts with other team members on a daily basis and feels that they have a good connection with others (see Figure 1).

Individuals need to take responsibility to foster a sense of connection and belonging. As the team manager believes: "While I know they need to connect with each other without my mediation, they need to recognize this themselves. I can only nudge it by encouraging project work among different people or asking them to be responsible for initiatives that require the input of others" (Buła, Klecha, & Żak, 2022).

We asked the team leads what they do to encourage connections among their direct reports. "Regular connects within the team, understanding the pain points of teammates and addressing them, helping when your colleague feels stuck or needs support with an initiative, collectively solving problems that can help the whole team, sharing best practices, being transparent with everyone, treating everyone as your equal and giving that kind of respect to all" (woman, 26–30, Mumbai). Furthermore, the team leads make sure they are fully present

Do you feel well connected with your team members?

Figure 1.
Sense of a connection with the team members

Source(s): Own elaboration

by leveraging the available technology: "I turn my camera on at every meeting and do not work simultaneously" (woman, 31–35, Krakow). Team leads also recognize the need for establishing connections outside work-related topics. "We arrange informal connects with the team when possible" (woman, 31–35, Goteborg); "We also make sure we have some fun as a team – playing online games, having contests, online coffee together" (woman, 31–35, Krakow).

With the support of the business leader who agreed for her to allocate a budget to such an initiative, the manager decided to organize something special for the team by the end of year of remote work. She sent packages to everyone, including a cup and tea, a book, a canvas and paint. She organized a virtual Christmas party, featuring a painting lesson facilitated by a Norwegian artist through video conference. "For two hours it felt we were together. All wore their Christmas gear, had the tea, and shared with the rest what they painted. The event, the positive emotions, felt very real, very tangible" (Buła *et al.*, 2022).

While the event gave the team a boost, it made it clear they needed a face-to-face meeting. Three months later, right after the pandemic restrictions were lifted, the team traveled to Mumbai. During the four days together, the main focus was on discussing significant initiatives that would impact the team's way of working. It also provided an opportunity for the team to bond. The physical meeting played a crucial role in individuals renewing personal bonds and strengthening the sense of being one team. Ahead of the meeting, three persons decided to resign. However, as they were still part of the team they were included in the physical event. After the trip, the two decided to stay.

Creativity
Creativity enables us to navigate the rapidly changing world (Ritter & Dijksterhuis, 2014). Known from the theory of communication, the so-called Allen Curve shows that if we do not see someone directly, we do not cooperate with them (Allen & Henn, 2007). In the initial survey, people spoke of a lack of "sharing ideas, helping, brainstorming together" (woman, 31–35, Krakow). We asked the team leads how they encouraged creativity. "I really like using challenging initiatives as a way for all of us in the team to think creatively to arrive at solutions. I can see this approach serving as an impetus for the team to proactively look for challenging initiatives for the broader team to solve." (man, 36–46, London). Others encourage a cross-pollination of ideas "trying for everyone to see what everyone else on the team is doing" (woman, 26–30, Mumbai) and "learning to accept that our ideas can be enhanced if we share them with people who are more experienced and can value add or give a twist which can make a world of difference" (woman, 26–30, Mumbai).

Team leads also mentioned how they nurture their own creativity. They look "for inspiration outside of work. Looking at other creative companies, curious of what others are doing in marketing. Sometimes I like to listen to interesting podcasts" (woman, 36–45, Krakow). "Read about what competition does and what is happening that is innovative in the marketing world" (woman, 26–30, Mumbai). "Taking inspiration from good reference works helps to think differently as an individual moves ahead" (man, 36–45, Pune). For some individuals, fostering creativity is also broader than looking for inspiration for new ideas or being inspired by others. "Taking a break to do something like making tea/coffee mindfully also helps the brain relax, stimulating creative activities" (woman, 31–35, Bangalore) A team lead from Krakow said that self-care fosters her creativity: "We are working from home and we can have a very personalized space to work." (woman, 31–35, Krakow).

Much research today covers the challenge of creativity – the need for it, as a driver of competitive advantage. There is a concern that working separately translates into less creativity and a greater need for structured intervention to encourage creativity. The manager had two insights. Creativity depends on creative people. "Regardless of whether you

all work in one office, in a hybrid model, or fully remotely, people are who they are; if they are creative, that is great; if they are creative and open, then you are blessed. Even having a couple of such people can catalyze team creativity and a good work atmosphere for the entire team" (Buła *et al.*, 2022). Her latter observation made during the pandemic changed her approach to recruiting. A team with open-minded individuals is necessary to drive healthy team behaviors, including creativity: "I am now hiring a bit differently since I have been working with teams that I need to set up as remote teams, and this aspect of openness helps them in coping while working remotely and also encourages teamwork and team creativity. It is something that I definitely look for now more than before."

Culture
Hybrid work helps employees feel more autonomous, which builds their trust in the employer. However, this trust needs reinforcement along with the distinctive culture of the specific organization to neutralize any negative sense of isolation (Taylor, Vigneau, Florisson, & Khan, 2021). Malviya and Gupta (2022) showed three important dimensions of culture in the hybrid work model: empathy, autonomy and trust. The importance of understanding an employee's emotions, the impact of fewer social interactions, vesting more trust in the employee, and giving them sufficient autonomy and flexibility in how they do their work is essential for the long-term success of the organizational culture.

In our case study, both the manager and the team leads recognized and articulated the importance of culture at the team level. The manager highlighted that it was easier to build a one-team culture in a fully remote environment "The pandemic deactivated the local offices and put everyone's focus on the virtual office, and this office thus had to attend to all their needs and requirements." In the second phase of the research, the leads mentioned initiatives used to cultivate a common culture "both the company and the management of our team create occasions for us to gather online (not only for work) and to interact" (woman, 31–36, Krakow). The larger organization needs to take the opportunity of people's presence in offices as the time to convey and reinforce the company's culture, values and mission. However, this seems a challenge. "I know the employer made people come back to the office for eight days in a month in some countries but in my opinion, this still doesn't fix the problem of building culture because right now in a more flexible setup – you will probably never meet the same colleagues so it is hard to strengthen the feeling of community this way" (woman, 36–45, Krakow).

The team does the extra effort whenever people meet in person "We do try to meet when we can with team members. When this happens, we take a photo and share it with the rest of the team." Shifting from a fully remote to a hybrid model has made it possible to have "dinners together and some sports activities too. We also celebrate each other's big life events . . . and have an annual get together for the entire company within the country where we reward the individual who best represents the company values" (woman, 31–35, Goteborg).

The integration of new joiners is also a huge challenge. One team lead said: "The personal connection that you build with your team takes time unlike when we used to work just in offices and build rapports faster . . . for new joiners, it can be tough as there can be this sense of working in silos" (woman, 26–30, Mumbai) Training is also a huge challenge. "We need to constantly look for new ways to train people, as when having online sessions, some work simultaneously" (woman, 31–35, Krakow).

Key findings
Our key findings involved managerial implications of differences across the 5 Cs noted in the functioning of the analyzed team as the team shifted from fully remote work to the hybrid

work model. Table 1 lists these findings as differences in the impact of the two work models on teamwork and team dynamics.

The hybrid work model is likely to become the new normal. In this new reality, organizations that surmount the challenges unique to managing virtual teams will be the winners (Van Buggenhout, Murat, & De Sousa, 2020). The team manager and the organization need to fulfill their mission and purpose in the new boundaries of hybrid work. This requires increased awareness and reflection. Koźmiński (2022) states: "The confrontation of bounded leadership with the virtual world leads me to conclude that individuals who perform leadership roles use the opportunities provided by technology to overcome the constraints they face in the real world. We may expect that the spectacle of leadership will gradually move to the virtual sphere. The ability to function in this environment will become essential among other competencies of leaders."

Although the research sample and the research method present some limitations, we confirmed the findings of other authors (see, e.g. Cole *et al.*, 2012; Kim & De Dear, 2013; Alexander *et al.*, 2020; Maurer *et al.*, 2022; Sokolic, 2022). The desktop research and the case study allowed us to investigate those continuing and deepening challenges, not just in theory but also in the setting of a real team. We used the 5C model (Haas, 2022) for a structured analysis of the challenges that the analyzed expert team faced as they transitioned from remote to hybrid. The extending period of out-of-office work attested to the importance of top-down and lateral communication and the importance of healthy communication channels beyond work, both in top-down but also peer-to-peer communication. The lengthening absence from the office meant a greater disconnect from the entire organization. When the team is fully remote, the challenge of communication and coordination is the same for everyone. In a team dispersed across multiple geographies, the hybrid model in every location threatens with multiple "faultiness." Organizations must be aware of this risk and equip their managers and their teams with the right tools and competencies. The hybrid model should relieve some challenges of collaborative creativity as people are again able to meet and brainstorm in person. However, for a hybrid team, achieving this will demand extensive planning and logistical efforts, opposing the spontaneity often associated with creativity. The solution might lie in increasing awareness of factors that foster creativity and understanding what individuals require to nurture their personal creativity. Meanwhile, managers – as the one in the case study – may more consciously select people to the team who are more open, more apt to make connections and invest in relationships to foster a sense of openness, which so crucial to creativity. The sense of culture that we used to take for granted before the pandemic is proving a real challenge to maintain. If people do not spend time together, they will not feel a connection to its distinctive ethos and may choose to leave. In the longer-term, the latter challenge may be the biggest single opportunity for employees post the pandemic and concurrently the single biggest challenge that organizations will need to address given that sustainable market success rests in talent.

Limitations and future research
The article deeply analyzed creating a sense of community and belonging in a team. However, it did not cover all the challenges organizations might encounter with a hybrid work model. The topics that require further analysis are the collaboration effectiveness, tools necessary to optimize collaboration in a hybrid workplace, new skills needed by employees and support in shaping their professional development, office design and technology optimized for hybrid work. It is also important for organizations to adopt tools to assess employees and their development potential in a hybrid work model.

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