

Hybrid Working Could Lead to Discrimination and Lack of Diversity Warns Firm Of Business Psychologists

Submitted by: Mobas

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- Leading firm of business psychologists is urging leaders to seriously consider the negative implications and complexities of hybrid working.
- Walking blindly into hybrid may inadvertently discriminate against individuals and groups - dragging businesses back decades.
- Organisations could suffer significant damage to their performance, reputation, and staff retention without considered planning.

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Over a year has passed since the pandemic struck the world, killing millions and restricting hundreds of thousands in the UK to working from home. During these extraordinary times, inequality and discrimination issues have come under the spotlight – triggering riots and social movements. Many corporates have embraced their responsibilities and committed themselves to change within their organisations, under the watchful eye of employees, clients, and the public.

However, jump forward to restrictions lifting in the UK, and businesses are at grave risk of undermining all this hard work with the very hybrid working practices that they hope will enhance the working environment.

Leading Cambridge firm of business psychologists, OE Cam, is urging businesses to consider the unintended impact of hybrid working. Their modelling suggests that planned policies will likely lead to greater discrimination and a lack of diversity within organisations in the UK and offices worldwide.

The very flexibility to work from home that is being welcomed by employees may inadvertently lead to those who choose this option suffering detrimental impact to their careers by missing out on opportunities.

OE Cam's insights into hybrid working - published in a journal launched this month - has revealed that organisations could face having to backtrack on diversity initiatives that have taken decades to put in place. Diversity & Inclusion policies - that ensure women, the disabled, parents, older workers and culturally diverse employees have equal opportunities in the workplace - could be seriously undermined. Business performance will quickly follow.

The team of organisation consultants and psychologists at OE Cam has explored how businesses will be affected as they move to a hybrid working model. The formation of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups', something that has been noticed by organisations during remote working, will be even more prominent in a hybrid workforce.

'Present privilege' means that those in the workplace are more likely to be involved in spontaneous discussions in the office and have better access to the boss - meaning that they are more front of mind for that promotion.

Those working remotely, who may potentially include greater numbers of working mothers, the disabled and

minority groups, will be left at a disadvantage, finding themselves a part of the 'out-group'. Over time this could lead to them becoming unnoticed, left without a voice, the ability to contribute or progress.

Martyn Sakol, Managing Partner at OE Cam, explains: "I saw first-hand in a meeting I observed, how remote workers became disadvantaged over their physically present colleagues. A team was considering a significant deal. It adjourned for a planned break. Those who were working remotely logged off to take a comfort break alone, while those in the office continued group conversations. When the meeting resumed, it became glaringly apparent that the opinions on how to shape the deal had changed amongst the office-based team; their new stance did not reflect conversations that had included any remote participants. It was apparent at this point that the implications to businesses worldwide could be hugely damaging.

"The issue for any organisation now is to reduce the effects of out-groups. Businesses must be mindful of which employees are the ones most likely to wish to work remotely most of the time. Experts believe that there are certain groups this will include: those with caring responsibilities, parents (with more mums choosing, or even feeling obliged, to work remotely over dads), disabled employees – for whom the commute can be more difficult - and older generation workers, hoping to improve their work-life balance.

"To prevent these staff from losing their voice, their ability to contribute effectively to the business and their chance of promotion, firms must take active steps. This is not something that will just 'work itself out' as teams become accustomed to hybrid working."

Age imbalance between city-dwelling young staff and commuting senior managers will also create challenges. The experts warn that offices could become playgrounds for young, inexperienced employees working without hands-on managerial support. The lack of experience, guidance and support from experienced peers will lead to weaker employee development, affecting complex decision making, creativity and collaboration. Those inexperienced, professionals may unknowingly use their 'present privilege' to shape the business and create a new culture that is misrepresentative, and potentially destructive, reversing a company's progress by decades.

Mr. Sakol continues: "Hybrid offers huge advantages, but the risks must not be underestimated. Business leaders must take note of all the impacts and consider the complexities to ensure they cover all bases for all employees. No-one should be compromising their career by choosing to work from home more. No business should lose the value of their team's inputs, because they have not been given equal ability to make an impact."

OE Cam recommends that organisations engage their management teams now to consider the complexities and understand the effect hybrid can have on their operations. OE Cam's modelling and simulation programmes have already identified unexpected issues and solutions to them.

For further information on the complexities of hybrid working, 'The OE' – the journal containing the report's findings, can be downloaded free of charge on the OE Cam website (<https://www.oecam.com>).

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Notes to Editors:

Images and biographies available here

(<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/8k40qierei6a5yw/AABj4FD-nx16CvIVVMfVaViOa?dl=0>) please credit @OE Cam.

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