

Blended Future



Dr Matthew Davis

Image: Vecteezy.com

The Project and Team

- Multi-disciplinary research
- Exploring changes to offices to accommodate new ways of working
- Measuring behavioural and organizational implications
- Finish September 2022.





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Property sector

+ Add to myFT

The end of the office? Coronavirus may change work forever

Business ease in adapting to lockdowns changes attitudes to remote set-ups



<https://on.ft.com/3f9PMJ6>

Leeds University Business School





“Mother Nature does
not like working from
home”

Boris Johnson, Prime Minister, 22.11.2021

Is the Future Hybrid?

Hybrid:

mix of office & home working

93% of businesses expect majority of workers to undertake some **hybrid working**

however.....

60% of businesses expect staff to spend **more than 50% of their time in the office.**

CBI Economics / University of Leeds (2021)



But do staff want to return to the workplace....?



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Our survey of UK office workers Dec 2021:

- 28% never wanting to return to office working
- 23% wished to work only in the office
- 49% sought a hybrid pattern

Up

Down

Men want to return for a greater % time in the office.



Public Sector seek greater % time in the office.

34%

Aware of a hybrid policy

Office pull factors....?



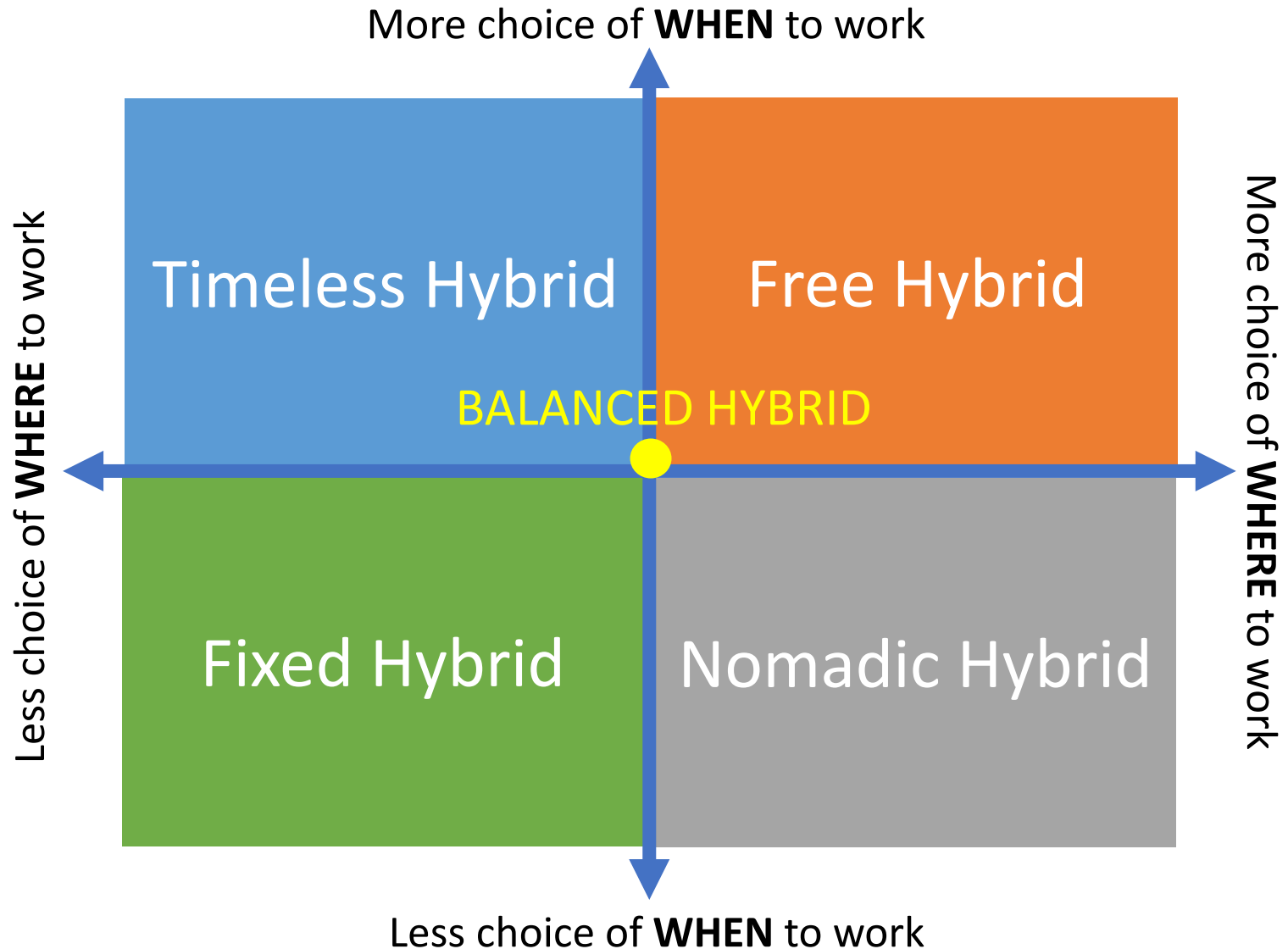
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Pull Factor	More likely
Job requirements	78%
Commute	72%
More flexibility	75%
Meet new colleagues	65%
Training	64%



Task	Prefer Office
Team collaboration tasks	84%
Face to face meetings	86%
Hybrid meetings	27%
Virtual meetings	7%
Solo, high concentration tasks	35%
Solo, low concentration tasks	28%
Creative tasks	29%

Hybrid is not one single way of working....



Emerging tensions...

Collect data and monitor diversity across different roles and office attendance. What are the consequences of your design decisions?

- Division between those able/ unable to work flexibly.
- Groups may not benefit from or be able to use innovative office spaces.
- Competitive risk.



Us &
Them

Me vs
We

Role redesigned to introduce tasks that permit flexibility and/or create other forms of autonomy → condensed hours, leave changes etc.

Requires managers to clearly articulate the purpose and benefit of office working → “me does not always beat we”



What does
this mean for
workplaces?



Thanks to Walker Morris for images

There has been limited adaptation of offices for post-COVID working



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18% reported offices redesigned to support hybrid working (December 2021)

58% work in offices with task specific spaces.

17% work in activity based offices.

43% working in offices with unassigned desks.

21% currently have booking a desk booking system.

61% experienced a hybrid meeting



6% having received hybrid meeting training

Setting the policy is not enough....



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Risk of slippage back into old ways of working...

- Will access to meetings, decision making, development opportunities remain if meetings move hybrid or back to in-person?
- Difficulty in coordinating or enabling hybrid attendance may result in default office presenteeism, regardless of flexible policies.

Preferences and desires are likely to evolve alongside the more widespread return to offices and the emergence of new work patterns....

- Basing policy on reported preferences is a risk.
- Level of office space and types of spaces required will change.





What impact does office working have?

Place still matters.....

Our snapshot survey.... More days spent in the office related to:

- Higher levels of **Job Satisfaction**
- Higher levels of **Work Engagement**
- Higher levels of **Organizational Commitment**
- Lower levels of **Work-life Balance**

Our initial diary data (over 4000 diary entries).... Working in the office associated with:

- Higher levels of **Job Satisfaction**
- Higher levels of **Work Engagement**
- Higher levels of **Concentration**
- **Undertaking additional work tasks**



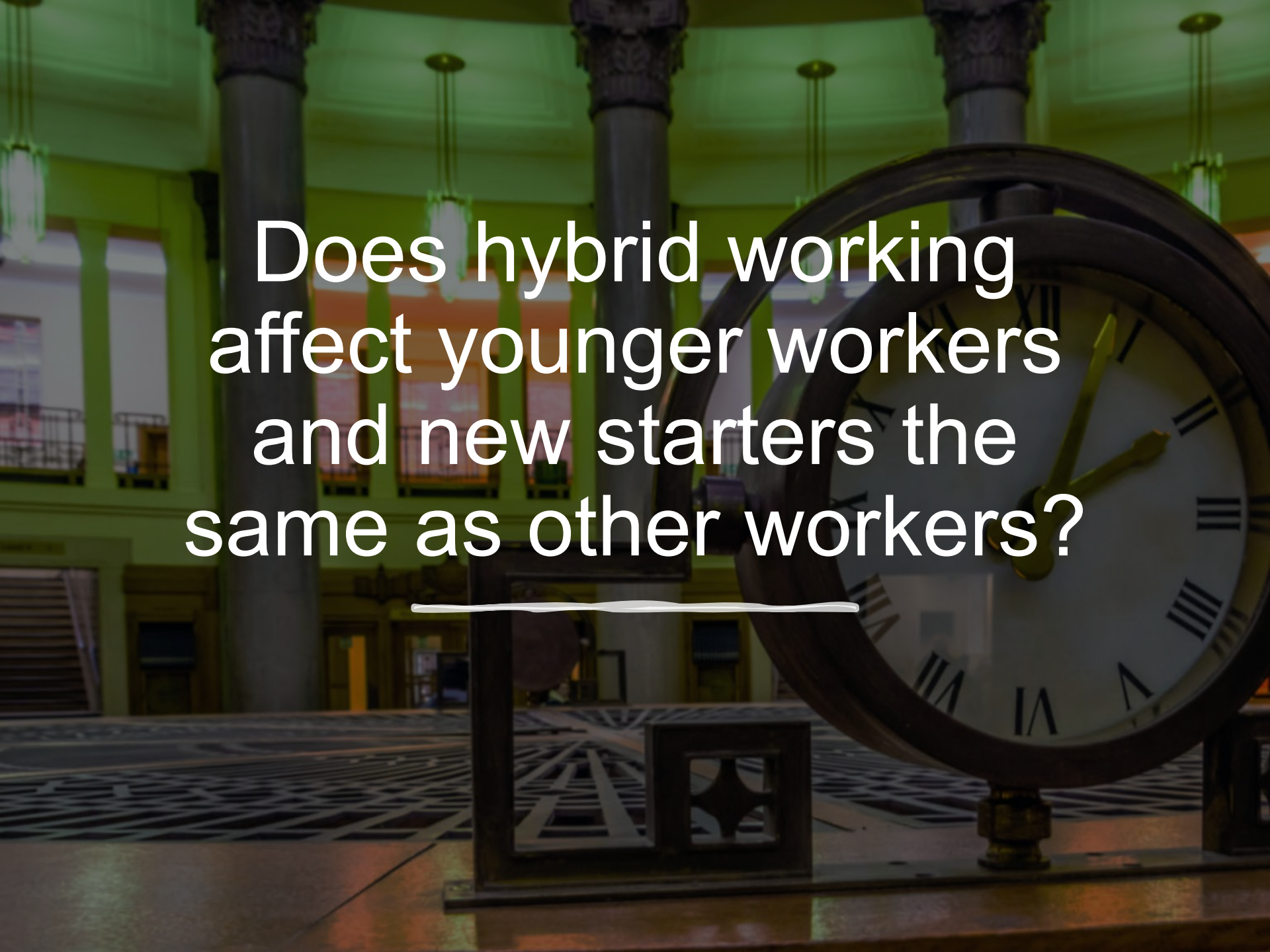
Personal control & fit also matter.....

Work engagement boosted when employees work from the office and they feel control over where to work from. Also buffers dissatisfaction with physical workspace.

Suggests granting autonomy over choosing where to work helps employees feel engaged and happy at work and in turn to perform better when in the office.

Feeling that the task fits the office space is associated with:

- ✓ higher job satisfaction and engagement
- ✓ greater performance and motivation
- ✓ higher workplace satisfaction and concentration
- ✓ positive mood
- ✓ lower counter-productive work behaviours.

A large, ornate clock with a white face and black Roman numerals is positioned on the right side of the image. The clock is mounted on a dark, decorative stand. In the background, a grand hall with high ceilings, large columns, and a patterned floor is visible. The lighting is warm and ambient.

Does hybrid working
affect younger workers
and new starters the
same as other workers?

 **25** interviews

 **175** questionnaires

 **175** essays

Co-located for **15%** of the internship

Majority of communication occurs through scheduled video meetings (**47%**) or quick online 'chats' (**31%**)

Experienced of remote and hybrid working varied – some with strong, polarised views, others more balanced

Many described pros and cons to remote/hybrid working that have been reported elsewhere

Four Themes



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Workplace learning is affected by remote working



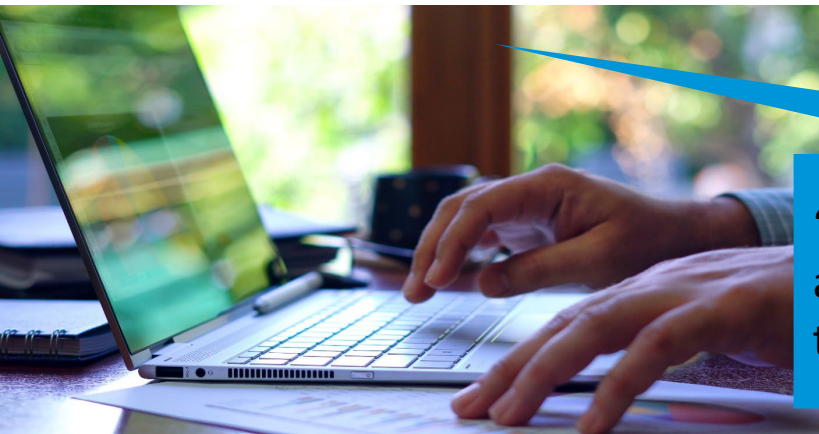
The built environment is valuable



Remote communication brings new challenges



The importance of being proactive



“I want to achieve as best I can, and I won’t go about achieving that having willy-nilly conversations here and there.”



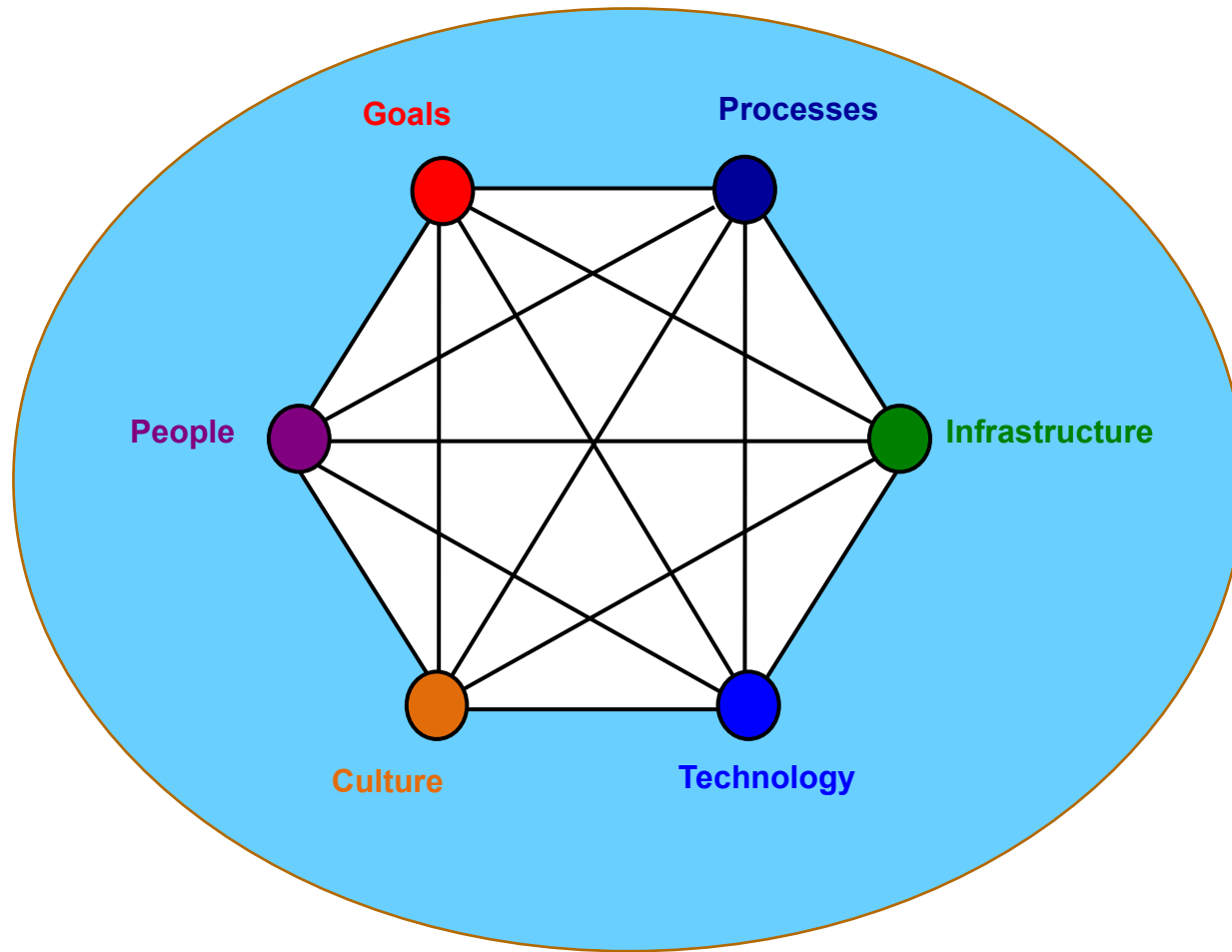
It's socio-technical....

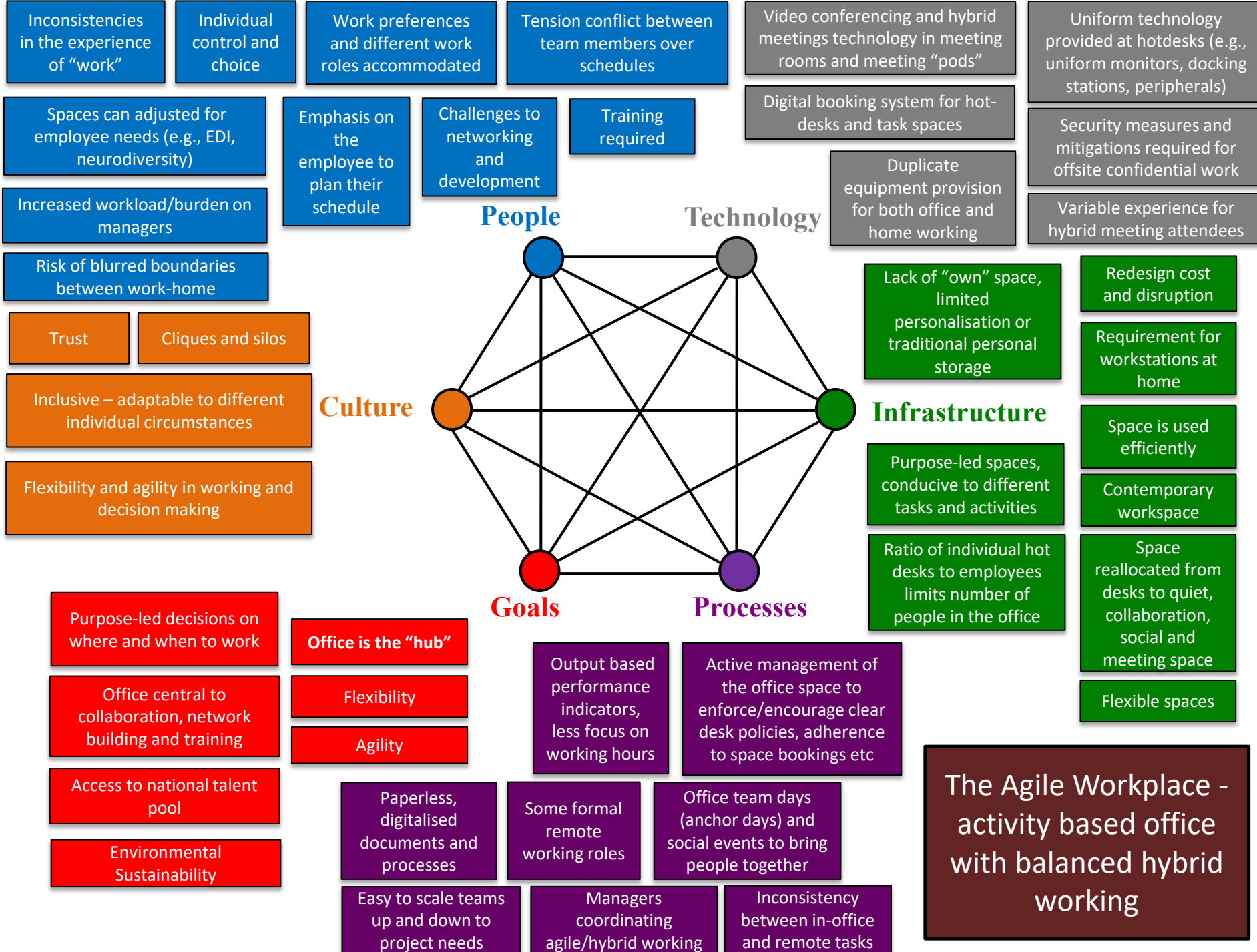


Cannot isolate the change to hybrid working from the wider organisation



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10 Tips for designing a hybrid workplace

1. Be clear on the purpose, value & reasons for office working
2. Define what a good outcome would be
3. Map the system
4. Articulate the constraints & non-negotiables
5. Don't rush to create rules
6. Staff involvement & engagement are key
7. Be prepared to lose people
8. Experiences matter
9. We need to train people!
10. Act with honesty & be prepared to fail



Conclusions

Blended or hybrid working comes in many guises.....

- Each has implications for the type and amount of office space required
- It may not be an empowering change
- There's the potential for tensions – me vs we, us vs them

Place still matters.....

- Office working linked to higher job satisfaction, engagement, commitment. But.. At the cost of work-life balance.
- Control and fit are key to the employee experience.

Physical workplaces are valued by younger workers – has a key role in networking & learning.

It's socio-technical – we cannot look at space without culture, technology, psychology....

One-size won't fit all – requires flexibility, engagement and localization.....



Economic
and Social
Research Council



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Webinar:
**Is hybrid working
for you and your
business?**

Thu, 19 May
12:30 – 14:00

Thank You!

Report launched
late May –
email/register
details for a copy

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