

# Hybrid Work and HRM Practice in a Global South Context: A Job Demands-Resources Perspective

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study explores how hybrid work is implemented and experienced in a Global South (GS) context, with a focus on Mauritius, a small island developing state (SIDS) where remote work was virtually non-existent before the COVID-19 pandemic. It investigates how hybrid arrangements reshape job demands, resources and employee outcomes.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Drawing on the job demands-resources (JD-R) model and a practice-oriented lens on Human Resource Management (HRM), the study examines hybrid work through two focus groups comprising professionals from 14 organisations across IT, finance, education and creative industries. Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns in the data.

**Findings:** Four interrelated themes emerged: technological enablers of performance, autonomy and flexibility, tensions in virtual collaboration and inequalities in hybrid work. The findings reveal how job resources such as autonomy, digital infrastructure and supportive leadership buffer demands such as technostress, role ambiguity and over-monitoring. Human resource (HR) professionals play a key role in mediating these dynamics through both formal and informal practices.

**Research limitations/implications:** The study has limitations due to the focus on professionals in Mauritius, a SIDS, which limits the generalisability of its findings to other GS contexts with varying technological and cultural landscapes. The qualitative design, relying on a limited number of focus groups, further restricts the breadth and empirical generalisability of the insights. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data, particularly from managerial-level participants, introduces a potential for social desirability bias. Finally, the exclusive theoretical grounding in the JD-R model may have inadvertently constrained the emergence of other relevant constructs beyond its framework.

**Practical implications:** The study offers actionable insights for HR practitioners and organisational leaders designing hybrid work systems in digitally uneven environments. Emphasis is placed on the need to address equity in access, enhance virtual collaboration and support employee autonomy through tailored HRM practices.

**Social implications:** The findings highlight that hybrid work exacerbates social inequalities and strains. HR must address the uneven distribution of job demands and resources across demographic lines. Older employees often struggle with digital tools, while younger staff face heightened monitoring and blurred work-life boundaries. The loss of informal connections and spontaneous interactions also risks social isolation and reduces organisational cohesion. Inclusive HRM practices are essential to mitigate these socio-technical divides and ensure sustainable transformation.

**Originality/value:** This study extends the JD-R model to an under-researched GS setting and contributes to understanding how hybrid work evolves in contexts lacking a pre-existing culture of remote working, adding depth to theory and informing inclusive practice. A conceptual model is proposed to illustrate how hybrid work experiences are shaped by the interaction between structural enablers, job characteristics and HRM practices.

**Keywords:** hybrid work, human resource professionals, HRM-as-practice, informal HR practices, employee experience, job demands-resources model, HR competencies

## **Introduction**

The accelerated adoption of digital technologies has reshaped how work is organised, experienced, and managed across sectors (Dabić *et al.*, 2023; Yao *et al.*, 2024). Spurred by the pandemic, organisations rapidly introduced hybrid work models, blending remote and on-site work, to ensure continuity in times of crisis (De Lucas Ancillo *et al.*, 2023; Hill *et al.*, 2024; Khedhaouria *et al.*, 2024; Peetz *et al.*, 2022). While these arrangements have provided greater autonomy, reduced commuting time, and improved work-life balance (Galanti *et al.*, 2023; Rohwer *et al.*, 2024; Kähkönen, 2023), research also highlights unintended consequences such

as role conflict, technostress, social isolation, and productivity concerns (Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2024; Durakovic *et al.*, 2023; Pensar and Rousi, 2023). These tensions place Human Resource (HR) professionals in a critical position, not only as strategic facilitators of organisational change, but also as frontline practitioners managing the complexities of employee support, resource allocation, and changing expectations in digitally mediated work environments (Wallo and Coetzer, 2022; Ferm *et al.*, 2024). Scholars such as Häll *et al.* (2023) highlight that the implementation of strategic HR models often generates tensions between formal expectations and the daily realities of HR practice. Their study of a global organisation revealed how imported models like the HR transformation framework require careful contextualisation, as HR professionals frequently navigate conflicting interpretations of their roles amid decentralised business environments..

As hybrid working becomes an embedded organisational norm, its implementation is far from uniform. Access to hybrid work is not equally distributed. Globally, only one in every five jobs is estimated to be suitable for remote work, and in low-income countries, that ratio drops to just one in 26 (Garrote Sanchez *et al.*, 2021). This disparity places immense pressure on HR professionals in less digitally mature contexts, who are required to engage with the practical realities of this new model. This includes addressing employees' daily concerns, aligning digital practices with performance systems, and cultivating a supportive culture amid shifting norms (Turner *et al.*, 2021).

This study therefore investigates the implementation and lived experience of hybrid work in Mauritius, a small island developing state (SIDS) where remote work was relatively uncommon prior to the pandemic. As noted by Betchoo (2020, p. 69), teleworking in Mauritius was described as “infinitesimal or never put into practice”. Despite the enactment of formal measures such as the Workers' Rights (Working from Home) Regulations 2020 and the Work-From-Home Protocol for the Public Service 2021; Beebeejaun and Gunputh (2022), hybrid

working remains inconsistently embedded. Local employers remain hesitant due to perceived cultural and organisational barriers, including managerial mistrust, weak institutional frameworks, and employee visibility concerns (Sambajee and Appadoo, 2023). Yet, most research on hybrid work remains centred on high-income, digitally advanced economies, creating a notable geographical gap in understanding how hybrid models function in resource-constrained, culturally distinct environments (Kwet, 2019; Sengupta and Al-Khalifa, 2022).

To explore these contextual gaps, this study uses a qualitative approach and draws on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001), a widely applied framework for understanding how work conditions influence employee wellbeing and performance. The JD-R model categorises work characteristics as either job demands such as workload, time pressure, or digital complexity that require sustained effort and may result in strain or burnout (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2008), or job resources such as social support, autonomy, and digital tools that facilitate goal achievement, buffer stress, and promote engagement (Bakker and Demerouti, 2024; Bakker *et al.*, 2023). These elements operate along two core pathways: a health-impairment process and a motivational process. The JD-R's flexibility and broad occupational relevance make it a valuable lens for exploring hybrid work arrangements. However, this paper argues that the geographical oversight in the literature also reveals a significant theoretical gap: it remains unclear how this established framework, developed primarily in digitally advanced contexts, translates to and must be adapted for the unique infrastructural and cultural realities of the Global South (GS) (Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2025). In particular, recent studies show that hybrid and digitally mediated work can generate novel combinations of demands and resources such as digital surveillance pressure, uneven access to technological infrastructure, and heightened expectations for temporal flexibility that are not fully captured by traditional JD-R formulations (Charles *et al.*, 2025; Junça Silva, 2025). These emerging conditions suggest the

need to refine and extend the JD-R model to account for how hybrid work reshapes the balance between demands and resources in under-studied contexts.

Moreover, existing hybrid-work research largely assumes organisational maturity, technological readiness, and stable institutional support, which are conditions that are rarely present in SIDS or other GS environments. This study therefore responds to calls for greater contextualisation by demonstrating how hybrid work in Mauritius activates context-specific stressors and resource mechanisms, thereby offering a theoretically meaningful extension of the JD-R model to settings marked by infrastructural fragility, cultural hierarchies, and limited digital preparedness (Charles *et al.*, 2025; Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2025).

This research adopts a practice-oriented lens on HRM by exploring how employees and managers experience the everyday realities of hybrid work, highlighting the expectations placed on HR professionals, the informal practices they must respond to, and the organisational support needed for effective work design and wellbeing. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

*What job demands and resources do HR professionals and employees experience in the transition to hybrid work in Mauritius?*

*How do these demands and resources influence employee well-being and organisational performance in practice?*

By addressing these questions, our study makes several contributions. First, it adds to the JD-R literature by extending the model to a SIDS context, showing how job demands and resources interact in hybrid work systems shaped by infrastructural and cultural limitations. In particular, the study advances JD-R theory by illustrating how hybrid work reconfigures demands (e.g. digital overload, boundary blurring, surveillance anxiety) and resources (e.g. autonomy, flexibility, digital support) in ways that differ from patterns documented in high-income

settings, thereby contributing to an emerging body of work calling for culturally and infrastructurally sensitive adaptations of JD-R mechanisms (Bakker and Demerouti, 2024; Charles *et al.*, 2025; Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2025). Second, it contributes to the HRM-as-practice literature by showing how HR professionals engage in the daily, situated work of supporting employees in hybrid environments, moving beyond strategy to hands-on adaptation, decision-making, and care (Wallo and Coetzer, 2022; Espegren and Hugosson, 2023). Third, the study addresses a geographical gap in current scholarship by focussing on the GS, where hybrid work remains under-researched and inconsistently implemented (Kwet, 2019; Beebeejaun and Gunpath, 2022). Finally, the study provides empirically grounded insights into how HR practitioners in less digitally mature contexts negotiate competing hybrid-work demands, illuminating the practical challenges between digital enablement, employee well-being, and managerial expectations, and offering actionable implications for policy and organisational design in GS economies.

The rest of the article covers the theoretical framework and literature (Section 2), methodology (Section 3), findings and discussion (Sections 4 and 5), and concludes with limitations, future research, and final remarks (Section 7).

## **Literature Review**

### ***Theoretical Framework: Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R)***

The JD-R model has become a foundational framework for examining how workplace factors influence employee wellbeing, motivation, and performance across various organisational contexts (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014, 2024). Central to the model is the categorisation of work characteristics into two overarching domains: job demands, which are aspects of a job that require sustained effort and are associated with physiological or psychological costs such as workload, emotional pressures, or digital complexity (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2008); and job

resources, which are aspects that facilitate goal achievement, reduce stress, and promote personal development, such as autonomy, support systems, and access to adequate technology (Bakker *et al.*, 2023). These operate via two mechanisms: a health-impairment pathway where excessive demands lead to strain or burnout, and a motivational pathway where resources trigger engagement and performance (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

This model's adaptability makes it an appropriate framework to study emerging work arrangements like hybrid working, where both demands and resources are reconfigured across digital and physical settings. It is also increasingly used to understand the role of HRM in shaping these experiences, not just through strategy, but in daily decisions about support, performance expectations, and resource provision (Bakker and Demerouti, 2024; Wallo and Coetzer, 2022). Recent studies demonstrate that digitally mediated work introduces new categories of demands such as digital surveillance pressures, connectivity overload, and infrastructural inconsistency and novel resource configurations including hybrid autonomy, digital upskilling, and flexible temporal structures (Charles *et al.*, 2025; Junça Silva, 2025; Silva and Lopes, 2025). These shifts indicate that hybrid work does not merely change the intensity of existing JD-R components but transforms their nature, highlighting the need for theoretical refinement in contexts where digital maturity is uneven and work cultures are not historically aligned with remote practices.

### ***HRM Practices and Hybrid Work: Linking Strategy to Practice***

Recent scholarship revealed the expanding scope of HR practices in hybrid work environments, with HR professionals being more and more involved in daily decision-making related to flexibility, wellbeing, and digital infrastructure (Cooke *et al.*, 2020). For instance, performance management, employee voice, wellbeing, and inclusion are no longer viewed solely as strategic levers but as practical routines and informal support mechanisms mediated by technology and

context (Espegren and Hugosson, 2023; Ferm *et al.*, 2024). These activities directly influence employee autonomy, capability development, and discretionary effort (Boxall and Macky, 2009), particularly as digital tools become embedded in core HR functions (Turner *et al.*, 2021).

Hybrid systems also challenge HRM to strike a balance between organisational outcomes and employee expectations. In this context, the JD-R model provides a valuable theoretical lens to understand how HR-led policies such as technology provisioning, flexible scheduling, and wellbeing initiatives translate into perceived job demands and resources. However, evidence increasingly shows that HR's interpretive work such as how professionals make sense of new workflows, negotiate expectations and respond to informal tensions plays an equally significant role in shaping JD-R processes within hybrid systems (Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2025; Espegren and Hugosson, 2023). Thus, HRM-as-practice perspectives help illustrate how hybrid demands and resources emerge not only from formal policies but through situated, everyday interactions.

### ***Hybrid Working in the Global North and Global South***

The shift to hybrid work has been widely studied in high-income, digitally advanced economies, where infrastructure, cultural acceptance, and institutional support often facilitate the implementation of flexible models (Hill *et al.*, 2024; Khedhaouria *et al.*, 2024). In contrast, emerging evidence from the GS reveals significant disparities in digital readiness, access to technology, and policy clarity (Beebeejaun and Gunpath, 2022; Sengupta and Al-Khalifa, 2022). Though the shift to hybrid work has been widely studied in high-income, digitally advanced economies, emerging evidence from the GS reveals huge disparities in digital readiness, access and policy clarity (Beebeejaun and Gunpath, 2022; Sengupta and Al-Khalifa, 2022).

This geographical gap, however, points to a deeper *theoretical blind spot* in leading frameworks such as the JD-R model. The model's application often carries implicit assumptions from Global North contexts, for instance, that digital tools are a ubiquitous, baseline resource, and that autonomy is a uniformly positive factor that inherently motivates (Couldry and Mejias, 2023; Holvikivi, 2024). In a GS setting such as Mauritius, characterised by digital inequality and a non-existent pre-pandemic remote work culture, these assumptions are challenged. Here, digital access is not a given but a potential demand *per se*, and autonomy, without the supporting structures of strong digital literacy or a culture of trust, can become a source of isolation and overwork (Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2025). Hybrid work may therefore generate entirely different constellations of demands and resources in SIDS contexts, where infrastructure instability, hierarchical managerial norms and uneven digital skills reshape the basic contours of JD-R pathways (Charles *et al.*, 2025). These contextualised dynamics reveal how the model's definitions require adaptation to adequately capture phenomena such as infrastructural strain, culturally embedded presenteeism, and fluctuating organisational support which are factors rarely present in dominant JD-R applications.

This study, therefore, investigates how these core JD-R constructs are reconfigured, asking not just *if* the model applies, but *how* its very definitions of demands and resources must be contextualised. Prior research highlights that teleworking in Mauritius was nearly non-existent before the pandemic, reflecting infrastructural and policy gaps (Betchoo, 2020). This aligns with broader trends in low-income countries, where only a small fraction of jobs is amenable to remote work (Garrote Sanchez *et al.*, 2021), revealing the need to understand how hybrid models operate in under-resourced environments. These contextual limitations shape how hybrid working is introduced, managed and experienced, often requiring HR professionals to improvise with limited digital or institutional support. Such improvisation offers a rich empirical setting for theorising extensions to JD-R, illustrating how job demands emerge from

formal tasks, from responding to infrastructural unpredictability, and how job resources become contingent, negotiated and socially distributed rather than structurally defined.

### ***Emerging Pressures in Hybrid Work Systems***

Hybrid work environments frequently introduce or intensify what the JD-R model conceptualises as job demands. For example, employees may experience heightened cognitive load, role ambiguity, and connectivity pressure due to the layering of digital systems and blurred boundaries (Bondanini *et al.*, 2020; Adisa *et al.*, 2023). Scholars note the growing concern around technostress, extended working hours, and the expectation to remain perpetually available, which are challenges that can elevate job demands and negatively affect recovery and wellbeing (Niebuhr *et al.*, 2022).

These demands extend to employees' personal and social spheres. Researchers have flagged the strain arising from managing home and professional responsibilities in the same space, particularly for employees with caregiving duties (Durakovic *et al.*, 2023; Bhat *et al.*, 2023). These overlapping roles may reduce role clarity and contribute to emotional exhaustion (Pensar and Rousi, 2023). Moreover, the loss of informal connection and spontaneous interaction which are elements central to organisational cohesion and learning, has been observed in hybrid systems (Rohwer *et al.*, 2024). The literature further highlights the differential impact of hybrid working across generational lines, digital skill levels, and job types, reinforcing the need for context-sensitive support mechanisms (Mundy and Roy, 2022; Kacprzak and Chrzęszcz, 2023). In GS contexts, these pressures are often amplified by unreliable digital infrastructure, unequal access to devices, and cultural tendencies toward managerial monitoring, intensifying the strain associated with hybrid work and generating context-specific forms of overload (Charles *et al.*, 2025; Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2025).

### ***Supportive Resources and HR-Led Interventions***

In response to these job demands, the literature identifies a range of critical job resources that can mitigate strain and enhance employee engagement. Autonomy, trust, and schedule flexibility are consistently reported as protective factors that support motivation and work quality (Chiguvi and Bakani, 2023; Galanti *et al.*, 2023). When hybrid models are designed with employee input, and when HR ensures clear communication and support, work-life integration and satisfaction are likely to improve (Doargajudhur and Hosanoo, 2023).

Digital upskilling, access to appropriate tools, and technical support remain central in settings where digital inequalities exist (Sampat *et al.*, 2022; Fazal *et al.*, 2022). In response, HR professionals addressed these through virtual training sessions, feedback loops, and wellness initiatives, including peer support networks and virtual engagement programmes (Sun *et al.*, 2023). Organisational cultures that emphasise psychological safety and openness have also been shown to buffer against the isolating aspects of hybrid work (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020; Manroop *et al.*, 2024). In GS settings, resources such as reliable connectivity, responsive HR support and culturally sensitive managerial practices become more pronounced, as they compensate for structural deficiencies and facilitate the emergence of hybrid work as a viable and sustainable work mode. This highlights the need to examine resources not as stable job characteristics but as dynamic, negotiated elements that gain significance through context-specific HR practices (Junça Silva, 2025; Silva and Lopes, 2025).

### **Study Approach**

#### ***Method***

Grounded in interpretivist assumptions, this study employed a qualitative design to investigate how hybrid working is experienced and supported in a resource-constrained setting. The aim was to explore how workers and managers in Mauritius navigated the changing demands of

hybrid work, through the JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017) to examine how strain and support are distributed across everyday working experiences. Consistent with an interpretivist stance, the study prioritised depth of understanding over statistical representativeness, focussing on how participants made sense of hybrid work within their organisational and socio-cultural contexts (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Lincoln *et al.*, 2011).

### ***Data collection***

Data were collected through two virtual focus groups, comprising 14 purposively selected professionals from 14 different organisations operating in Mauritius, comprising micro, small, medium and large enterprises. The inclusion of this broad representation enhances the generalisability of the findings (Polit and Beck, 2010). Table 1 presents a visual breakdown of participant demographics and company profiles across the two focus groups. Participants spanned age brackets from 25 to 65, with the majority between 30 and 50. The sample size of 14 participants may appear small, but it is consistent with established qualitative research practices aimed at depth and richness of understanding over statistical generalisability (Morgan, 2018). The sample size was further guided by the principle of “information power”, which posits that qualitative studies with a clearly defined aim, a specific and highly relevant participant group, and strong quality of dialogue require fewer participants to generate meaningful insights (Malterud *et al.*, 2016). Given the focused research aim and participants' direct involvement in implementing or experiencing hybrid work, a smaller, information-rich sample was appropriate for addressing the research questions.

**Table 1.** Demographic details

Company	Industry	Size	Participant
A	Education	Medium	Pro Vice-Chancellor and President
B	Conglomerates/multi-sector enterprises	Large	Head of People Operations
C	IT	Medium	Web Operations Manager
D	Design and Comms	Small	Graphic Designer
E	Finance	Medium	Executive
F	IT	Small	Director
G	Conglomerates/multi-sector enterprises	Large	Corporate HR Manager
H	Finance	Large	Rewards Operations Analyst
I	IT	Large	Director-Implementation
J	Education	Medium	Academic
K	Finance	Large	Senior People Partner
L	Design and Comms	Small	Executive Creative Director
M	IT	Micro	Director
N	IT	Medium	HR Manager

Source(s): Authors' data

The purposive selection of professionals from 14 distinct organisations across diverse sectors (IT, finance, education, etc.) and hierarchical levels (from executives to analysts) was designed to capture a wide range of experiences, ensuring maximum variation. This diversity was not aimed at producing sector-level comparisons but at achieving maximum variation, which facilitates the identification of cross-cutting patterns that strengthen analytical and theoretical generalisation (Patton, 2023; Maxwell, 2013). By examining themes that recurred despite organisational, sectoral and hierarchical heterogeneity, the study identified underlying JD-R mechanisms that were robust across contexts. This approach aligns with qualitative research traditions that emphasise pattern convergence across diverse settings as a basis for developing theoretically meaningful insights (Gioia *et al.*, 2013).

Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, whereby subsequent focus group discussions and data analysis yielded no new substantive themes or insights relevant to the research questions. Saturation was indicated when new contributions reinforced existing codes (e.g. connectivity pressures, hybrid autonomy, visibility concerns) rather than

introducing qualitatively distinct concepts, and when the research team agreed that the emergent JD-R-aligned structure was conceptually coherent across participant groups.

Focus groups were selected as the primary method to promote interaction among participants and elicit shared experiences that might not emerge through individual interviews. This choice was particularly relevant given the study's interest in workplace practices, collaborative dynamics, and collective meaning-making (Morgan, 2018; Gupta, 2024). Compared to individual interviews, group discussions provided a richer opportunity to observe how participants affirmed or challenged each other's experiences of hybrid work. This interactive format was valuable for identifying how HR professionals and employees co-constructed meanings around hybrid work demands and resources, illuminating processual and relational dynamics that may remain implicit in individual interviews.

A semi-structured discussion guide was developed around core JD-R concepts, targeting areas such as job-related stressors, support mechanisms, and outcomes. The guide included 15 open-ended prompts and was refined after a pilot phase to improve clarity and flow. While facilitators followed a consistent structure, they also encouraged participants to pursue emergent topics of interest, in line with qualitative best practice (Patton, 2023). Sample questions include *“Please share your current experience regarding remote/hybrid working post covid?”*, *“How easy did you find it to adapt to any new technology you needed to use during and or post covid Pandemic?”*, *“What are the main challenges you experience as an individual, and as a team in remote or hybrid working? How have you overcome them?”*, *“If you used new digital tools and techniques post Covid, what kinds of training or support did you get for these?”*.

Sessions were conducted via video conferencing platforms, lasted 60–90 min, and were recorded with participant consent. The transcriptions were produced verbatim. The total data corpus amounted to 98 pages of transcripts. Ethical protocols were observed throughout the study, including informed consent, confidentiality assurances, and the anonymisation of all identifying details.

### ***Data Analysis***

The analytical process followed a thematic approach informed by Gioia *et al.* (2013), which allows for a systematic transition from raw data to theoretical abstraction while preserving participants' language. In the first cycle, transcripts were coded inductively, with attention to expressions of strain, adaptation, support, and emotional tone. These first-order codes were developed using data-informed labels that captured participants' perspectives.

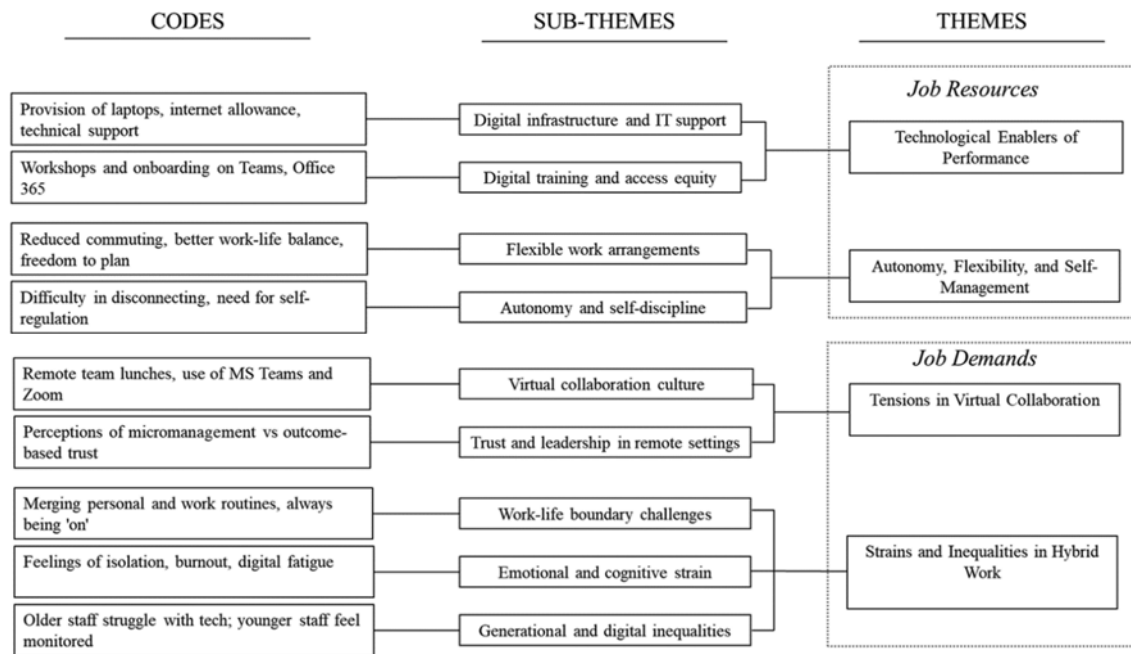
Subsequent coding cycles involved grouping these codes into second-order themes. Here, the JD-R model provided a sensitising lens, guiding the organisation of data into categories of job demands, job resources, and emergent outcomes, that is, it was not used to predetermine findings but rather to interpret recurring patterns that aligned with its theoretical dimensions. During this stage, the team also remained attentive to whether particular demands and resources appeared more salient in specific organisational types, while ensuring that the overarching analytical focus remained on cross-cutting mechanisms relevant to theoretical generalisation.

The research team intentionally avoided prematurely applying formal theoretical labels during coding. Instead, interpretive labels grounded in participants' experience were retained to preserve analytical openness and remain faithful to participants' lived experiences.

To ensure analytic rigour and transparency, we developed a data structure in line with the approach proposed by Gioia *et al.* (2013). This involved synthesising first-order concepts into

second-order themes and aggregating them into overarching dimensions consistent with the JD-R framework.

The resulting data structure (Figure 1) illustrates the inductive-to-deductive coding journey and forms the analytical foundation of our findings.



**Figure 1.** Thematic map of hybrid work in line with JD-R. Source: Authors' data

To ensure analytical rigour and validate the findings, multiple researchers independently coded the transcripts. The ensuing themes were then refined through iterative team discussions: a process of investigator triangulation that strengthened the credibility of the analysis. This collaborative approach, bolstered by the team's diverse disciplinary backgrounds, facilitated robust critical reflection and enabled a comprehensive understanding of hybrid working in this underexplored GS context by systematically blending inductive insights with the theoretical structure of the JD-R model. The researchers also discussed discrepancies particularly when determining whether an experience should be understood as a job demand or job resource, or

whether it reflected sector-specific variation until agreement was achieved, reinforcing the stability and clarity of the final thematic structure.

## **Findings**

This section presents the findings from the thematic analysis of the focus group data. Anchored in the JD-R model, four overarching themes emerged that explain the relationship between job demands, job resources, and employee experiences in a hybrid work context in Mauritius. Across all themes, participants described hybrid work as producing context-specific constellations of demands and resources that were shaped by digital capabilities, organisational culture, and infrastructural conditions, factors that influenced how strongly certain experiences were felt without altering the overarching patterns observed across the dataset.

### ***1. Technological Enablers of Performance***

Participants described how the availability of organisational resources such as digital tools, infrastructure, and technical support played a vital role in enabling performance during the shift to hybrid working. Employees cited being equipped with laptops, internet allowances, software tools (e.g. MS Teams, SharePoint), and Information Technology (IT) assistance as critical to sustaining productivity. In several cases, organisations also ran training programmes on digital platforms, helping to ease the transition, as illustrated by the remarks from the following participants:

*“We did get training, workshops on how to use Teams, Office 365. Training was done on how to work remotely”*

*“I think everything we need is really provided, and I think there is a lovely channel of communication if ever you need that additional support with regards to IT or even software and stuff”*

Moreover, the proactive investment in remote access systems and collaboration tools was framed as a sign of organisational trust and commitment, as in the following verbatims:

*“Everyone is provided with a chair, a headset, internet allowance, flapjack, a pack for everyone”*

*“We have given everybody a laptop...no more desktop...some colleagues have already received a phone with an allowance... we use MS Teams extensively”*

These resources contributed to a smoother transition and supported motivation, competence, and continuity during disruption. Similarly, these findings illustrate the presence of job resources, specifically access to digital tools, training, and infrastructure which facilitate task completion and mitigate stress.

Participants also noted that some organisations were better equipped than others due to differences in digital maturity or resource capacity. These differences did not reflect systematic sector effects but general variations in organisational readiness. Notably, regardless of capacity, the pattern remained: access to functioning digital tools and support acted as a key motivational resource.

The findings extend JD-R theory by showing that in GS settings, basic digital infrastructure constitutes a primary resource rather than a baseline assumption. In addition, certain resources (e.g. autonomy) can function simultaneously as demands when infrastructural instability requires additional self-regulation or troubleshooting, illustrating a duality less acknowledged in existing JD-R applications.

## ***2. Autonomy, Flexibility, and Self-Management***

A strong pattern across the dataset was the perception of increased autonomy and flexibility, which many participants valued as a resource supporting both wellbeing and performance. The ability to manage one’s time, avoid commuting, and balance personal obligations was repeatedly highlighted as illustrated in the following excerpts:

*“You have control over your time...you can manage your time and balance this work and your life”*

*“It’s given people a lot more liberty or freedom and flexibility... it’s flexibility for people who have children, or transport issues, where you actually can still work at home and deliver”*

Participants noted that these changes helped boost their engagement and sense of trust from the organisation, as indicated in the comments below:

*“Level of engagement of people has gone up... they feel like we trust them. We are not micromanaging... we are very flexible”*

*“It has increased my level of motivation... my commitment to the organisation, to the team”*

However, the very flexibility that empowered some employees also created the expectation of constant availability, requiring individuals to self-manage rigorously. The following comments are typical of respondents’ sentiments:

*“At home, no one tells you it is time to stop...always working and sleeping..no talking except if it was a meeting”*

*“Not being able to stop...at home, you do not have a break...you have to discipline yourself to take a break”*

The increased flexibility and trust described by participants represent critical job resources. This ambivalence illustrates how hybrid autonomy can simultaneously operate as a resource (enhancing engagement) and a demand (requiring high self-discipline and boundary management). The degree to which this duality became challenging appeared to be shaped by organisational expectations and managerial communication practices rather than by sectoral differences.

### ***3. Tensions in Virtual Collaboration***

While collaboration tools were in place, job demands surfaced in the form of inconsistent communication, lack of cohesion, and managerial control, pointing to potential resource inadequacies in team leadership and trust-building mechanisms. Many organisations nurtured virtual social bonds through remote team lunches or informal interactions, promoting a sense of belonging and cohesion, as in the following verbatims:

*“We would have our team lunches on that day, just to have that bond and keep that kind of team bonding spirit within the group”*

*“It is something that never used to be before...it was on emails, or in face-to-face meetings...then we had to adopt Teams and Zoom for client meetings”*

However, these positive efforts were counterbalanced by reports of fragmented communication, surveillance-like monitoring, and loss of spontaneity, pointing to resource gaps in trust-building, leadership adaptation, and digital team dynamics. Several participants described feeling scrutinised or disconnected despite technological tools being in place. Trust emerged as a central fault line: while some participants felt empowered by outcome-based management, others perceived a return to presenteeism and distrust, as illustrated in the comments below:

*“We trust them...we are not micro-managing”*

*“There’s a tendency to get back to managing people by the number of hours that they are spending at their desk”*

These experiences illustrate job demands related to digital ambiguity, emotional strain, and reduced psychological safety. Where managers provided clarity and relational support, digital collaboration tools acted as job resources; where leaders reverted to monitoring, the same tools intensified demands.

Participants also noted that organisations varied in the maturity of their virtual practices, reflecting differences in managerial readiness and digital infrastructure rather than sector-level distinctions. These capacity-related variations influenced how strongly certain demands or resources were experienced, but the underlying patterns remained consistent across the dataset.

#### ***4. Strains and Inequalities in Hybrid Work***

This theme captures various job demands, including role conflict, technostress, and emotional exhaustion. The absence or uneven distribution of resources such as psychological support and clear work boundaries contributed to burnout risks, reinforcing the health-impairment pathway in the JD-R framework. The following comments are typical of respondents' sentiments:

*“There’s no real downtime anymore...messages keep coming even late at night...you are always kind of on duty”*

*“Working in the living room with kids was not easy”*

In addition, participants with caregiving duties spoke about having to merge personal and professional routines, often without adequate organisational support, as in the following remark:

*“You had a set of people that had intertwined their personal lives with their professional lives ... you have to accept”*

Others reflected on social disconnection and the psychological toll of prolonged remote work, as testified by some participants:

*“I forgot what it meant to speak to people...felt alienated in the human world”*

*“Did not go to office for over a year...as long as the job was being done...you could be working from the beach, hotel, mountain...everything is on Teams”*

Inequalities also emerged in relation to digital adaptation, with some senior staff struggling to adjust to new platforms, as in the excerpt below:

*“Our senior team really struggled with the tech...they were not used to these platforms, and that created delays sometimes”*

Conversely, younger staff, though typically more digitally fluent, felt heightened monitoring and mistrust, reflecting how hybrid work can also generate pressure to maintain constant visibility, as reported below:

*“Too much abusing the WFH... feedback from senior managers... some were missing during the office hours”*

These findings demonstrate how digital fluency, household constraints, and managerial expectations interact to create uneven distributions of demands and resources. Participants emphasised that such inequalities stemmed from organisational capability and individual circumstances, which is consistent with the study's aim of identifying cross-cutting patterns.

To further explain how each emergent theme aligns with JD-R mechanisms, Table 2 summarises the key job resources and job demands identified in the data, along with contextual considerations relevant to Mauritius and comparable GS settings.

**Table 2.** Mapping of hybrid work themes to job demands and job resources

Theme	Job resources	Job demands	Contextual notes (Mauritius/GS)
1. Technological Enablers of Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to laptops, software, collaboration tools (Teams, SharePoint)</li> <li>• Responsive IT support</li> <li>• Digital training and remote-access systems</li> <li>• Signals of organisational trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital instability or unreliable connectivity</li> <li>• Frustration linked to insufficient IT support</li> <li>• Stress from navigating unfamiliar tools</li> </ul>	Digital infrastructure acts as a foundational resource, not a baseline assumption; organisational capacity differences shape resource strength
2. Autonomy, Flexibility, and Self-Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control over time and location</li> <li>• Reduced commuting</li> <li>• Trust-based management</li> <li>• Enhanced engagement and motivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blurred boundaries and inability to “switch off”</li> <li>• Constant availability pressure</li> <li>• Self-discipline and self-regulation demands</li> </ul>	Autonomy shows “dual valence”: it can motivate or strain depending on digital fluency, boundaries, and managerial clarity
3. Tensions in Virtual Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual social interactions (team lunches, informal chats)</li> <li>• Clear communication and relational leadership</li> <li>• Outcome-based management practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fragmented communication</li> <li>• Perceived micromanagement or monitoring</li> <li>• Loss of spontaneity and psychological safety</li> </ul>	Leadership style moderates whether digital tools function as resources or become coordination/visibility demands
4. Strains and Inequalities in Hybrid Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occasional team support and informal sensemaking</li> <li>• Peer assistance in adapting to hybrid work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technostress</li> <li>• Overlap of caregiving and work roles</li> <li>• Emotional exhaustion and isolation</li> <li>• Digital skill inequalities (younger vs older staff)</li> </ul>	Digital readiness, caregiving responsibilities, and cultural expectations of visibility unevenly distribute demands across employees

## Discussion

Our results show that hybrid work arrangements in Mauritius present both enabling and constraining forces, shaped by the presence or absence of key job resources, such as access to digital tools, autonomy, and leadership support. and the weight of job demands such as constant connectivity, blurred boundaries, and surveillance.

One of the clearest insights relates to the centrality of technological infrastructure as a job resource. Participants described how accessible digital tools, responsive IT support, and targeted training enabled a smoother transition to hybrid working. These findings support earlier research showing that digital readiness is crucial to performance and engagement in remote settings (Sampat *et al.*, 2022; Adisa *et al.*, 2023). In organisations where such resources were lacking, participants reported heightened strain, manifesting as disconnection, frustration, or anxiety, thus reinforcing the JD-R model's health-impairment pathway (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2008). In Mauritius, where hybrid work had limited historical precedence, technological availability functioned not as a baseline expectation but as a highly essential job resource. This reveals the context-dependence of what counts as a resource in the JD-R framework.

Autonomy and flexibility also emerged as significant resources, providing employees with control over their time and space. These features were perceived positively and often led to improved engagement and motivation, echoing prior findings that autonomy is a core buffer against stress (Bakker and Demerouti, 2024; Galanti *et al.*, 2023). However, the data also revealed that flexibility can become a double-edged sword when not accompanied by clear boundaries or supportive structures, leading some participants to struggle with overwork, fatigue, and diminished work-life separation. This paradox reflects broader concerns in the literature around the risks of unstructured flexibility (Pensar and Rousi, 2023; Kähkönen, 2023). This duality shows that autonomy in hybrid settings can operate simultaneously as a resource and a demand depending on the presence of supportive conditions, highlighting an important nuance for JD-R theory.

The results also highlight tensions around visibility, trust, and collaboration in hybrid environments. While some participants described increased trust and empowerment, others experienced heightened monitoring or a loss of informal connection in digital environments. These contrasting experiences indicate that leadership style and communication practices play

a moderating role in determining whether hybrid arrangements are experienced as supportive (resource-enhancing) or stressful (demand-intensifying). This aligns with JD-R scholarship emphasising psychological safety and managerial support as key social resources in technology-mediated contexts (Bondanini *et al.*, 2020; Turner *et al.*, 2021).

Of particular relevance to HRM is the way in which demands and resources are unequally distributed across employees. For example, older participants often encountered difficulties with digital tools, while younger staff reported more comfort with technology but sometimes struggled with blurred work-life boundaries. These generational differences mirror findings by Kacprzak and Chrzęszcz (2023), who argue that hybrid systems can intensify inequality if not carefully managed. HR professionals, therefore, face the challenge of responding to these differences not just with standardised policy, but through adaptive, practice-based responses that address local needs and capabilities. Such differences highlight how demographic factors can shape the experience of hybrid work, influencing whether specific job characteristics (e.g. autonomy, digital communication) function primarily as resources or demands.

This study also reinforces the idea that HRM operates not only through formal systems but through everyday support and informal problem-solving. The emphasis placed by participants on team culture, spontaneous collaboration, and manager responsiveness reflects the HRM-as-practice perspective, which focuses on what HR professionals do in practice, not just what policy prescribes (Wallo and Coetzer, 2022; Espegren and Hugosson, 2023). By linking JD-R theory with lived experiences, the findings reveal that the traditional balance between job demands and resources is not fixed but contextually contingent. In digitally uneven environments such as Mauritius, infrastructure gaps, cultural expectations of visibility, and managerial norms of trust actively reshape how demands and resources manifest, illustrating that HRM practices function as critical mediators that recalibrate this balance in practice.

## **Theoretical Implications**

Building on the JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014, 2024), this study extends theoretical understanding by illustrating how hybrid work arrangements are shaped by digital infrastructure, cultural norms, and generational differences in a developing economy context. We propose that for the JD-R model to be fully applicable in digitally uneven GS contexts, variables such as digital fluency and infrastructural stability should be considered as key moderators. They determine whether a characteristic like “flexibility” is experienced primarily as a resource or a demand. In this way, the study provides empirical evidence that hybrid work environments in under-resourced settings reconfigure the traditional boundaries of demands and resources, challenging JD-R's implicit assumption that certain job resources (e.g. digital tools, autonomy) operate universally in the same way across contexts.

While the JD-R model traditionally distinguishes between job demands (e.g. workload, role ambiguity) and resources (e.g. autonomy, social support), our findings show that these categories are not static. They are mediated by factors such as technological access, digital literacy, and managerial practices. For instance, resources like flexibility and autonomy were empowering for some employees, but burdensome for others who lacked the digital skills or support to manage them. This finding points to the critical role of demographic moderators in shaping the employee experience. In particular, the study shows that digital preparedness and cultural expectations of visibility function as mechanisms through which hybrid work transforms previously established job resources into dual-purpose constructs that simultaneously motivate and strain employees. This dynamic supports and extends recent JD-R scholarship emphasising the contextual plasticity of work characteristics (Bakker *et al.*, 2023; Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2025).

In doing so, our study contributes to the HRM-as-practice literature by situating HR not merely as strategic policy makers but as active facilitators of daily adaptation. Consistent with Wallo and Coetzer (2022) and Ferm *et al.* (2024), we demonstrate that HR professionals in hybrid environments engage in continuous sensemaking, informal decision-making, and employee support, practices that are often invisible but critical to the functioning of hybrid systems. This reinforces the view that HRM in digitally mediated contexts must be understood not only through formal systems, but through everyday routines that support employee wellbeing, collaboration, and performance.

Furthermore, our research adds to geographically underrepresented perspectives in hybrid work literature by focussing on Mauritius, a setting where remote work was described as “infinitesimal or never put into practice” prior to the pandemic (Betchoo, 2020). In doing so, it complements existing Global North (GN) studies and responds to the gap identified by scholars such as Sengupta and Al-Khalifa (2022) and Häll *et al.* (2023) who call for deeper examination of hybrid work in resource-constrained contexts. The study therefore provides conceptual grounding for extending hybrid-work theory beyond Western settings, demonstrating how JD-R constructs must be recalibrated when digital infrastructure and cultural norms diverge from canonical assumptions.

### **Practical Implications**

This research has significant implications for HR professionals and organisational leaders. First, the variability in how hybrid work is experienced signals the need for differentiated support strategies. HR teams must prioritise inclusive digital upskilling, particularly for older or less technologically confident employees, as unequal digital readiness remains a critical barrier. Organisations must also recognise the emotional and cognitive strains of hybrid work, including technostress, isolation, and blurred boundaries. Mental health support and wellbeing

initiatives must be tailored to address these hybrid-specific challenges in ways that are visible, non-stigmatising, and easily accessible. This differentiated approach is essential in settings where technological gaps amplify uneven access to job resources, potentially deepening workplace inequalities.

Second, promoting autonomy and trust is not simply a cultural preference, it is a performance enabler. HR should train managers to shift from monitoring input (hours logged online) to evaluating output (goals met), formalising this through updated performance management systems. As participants noted, trust-based management approaches that emphasise outcomes over visibility or hours logged can enhance motivation and commitment. This aligns with broader trends: recent surveys indicate that nearly 50% of employees globally prefer hybrid or remote models, while only 4% favour fully in-person work (Doargajudhur *et al.*, 2025). In Mauritius and similar GS contexts, where infrastructure and leadership norms may differ, this trust must be actively cultivated, particularly as only one in 26 jobs in low-income countries is considered amenable to remote work (Garrote Sanchez *et al.*, 2021). Strengthening trust-based managerial practices therefore directly complements the JD-R framework by reinforcing key social resources that buffer high demands.

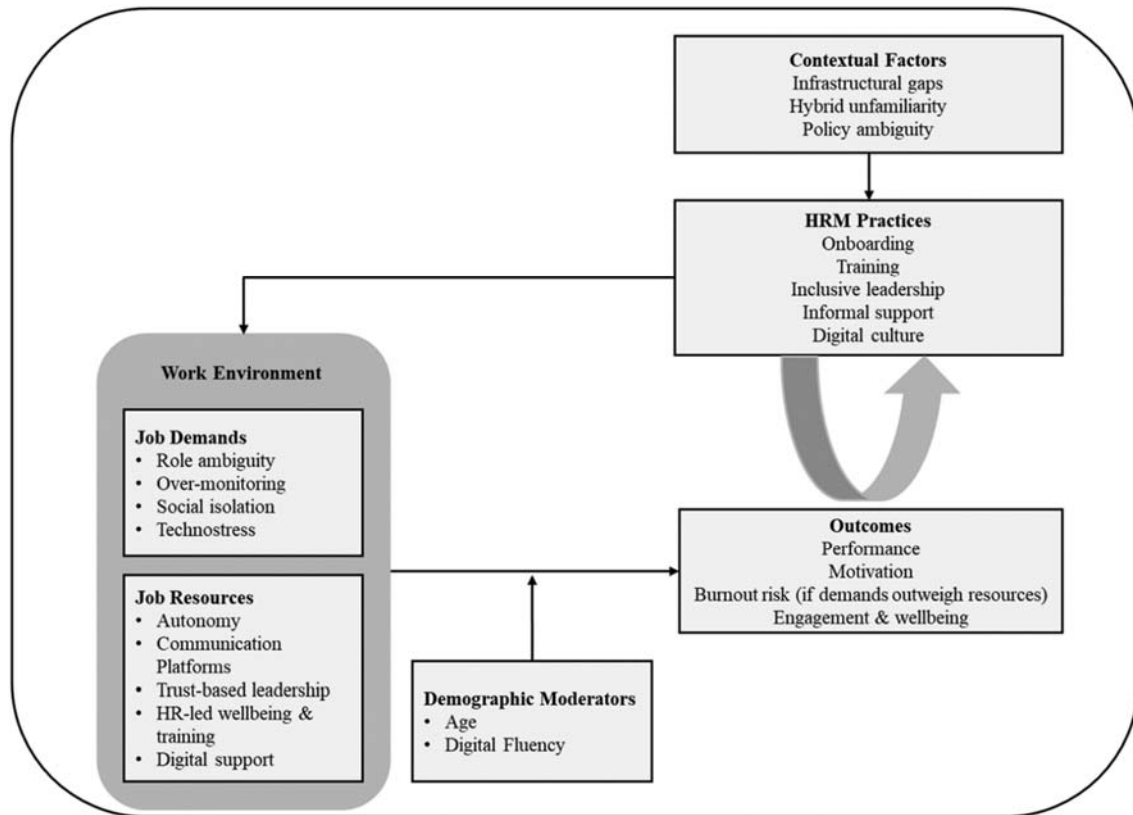
Third, HR professionals must take a proactive role in redesigning work systems. This involves not only developing hybrid-specific leadership capabilities, digital empathy, and clear norms around communication, but also intentionally designing the purpose of in-office time to address the loss of informal connection found in our study. Rather than simply mandating physical presence, on-site days should be curated as high-value opportunities for activities that are difficult to replicate remotely, such as collaborative project kick-offs, complex problem-solving sessions, mentorship, and team-building events that rebuild social capital and promote a sense of belonging.

Beyond the organisational level, the findings also have broader societal implications. The unequal distribution of digital skills and access in Mauritius reflects wider structural disparities that influence employment outcomes, work-life balance, and opportunities for participation in hybrid work. Policymakers and public institutions in GS contexts should therefore consider hybrid work within broader digital inclusion strategies, including national investments in broadband stability, public training initiatives, and support for digitally vulnerable groups

The study also bridges theory and practice by demonstrating that hybrid work cannot be implemented effectively through policy alone; its success depends on the alignment between formal hybrid structures, available job resources, and the day-to-day practices of leaders and HR professionals. This reinforces the centrality of HRM-as-practice in shaping employee experiences and highlights the practical value of JD-R-informed approaches to hybrid work design.

As hybrid work becomes embedded, attention must move beyond emergency adaptation toward long-term integration, including workflow redesign and performance evaluation models suited for dispersed teams. It can be argued that organisations that treat hybrid work as a strategic shift, not merely a logistical accommodation, will be better positioned to retain talent, support wellbeing, and build resilient teams. Our empirical findings informed the development of the following conceptual model (Figure 2). Grounded in the JD-R framework, the model illustrates how hybrid work experiences are shaped by the dynamic interaction between job demands and resources, mediated by the role of HRM as practice. This includes HR professionals' everyday involvement in enabling digital adaptation, supporting employee wellbeing, and facilitating informal workplace cohesion. In doing so, the model captures how hybrid arrangements are not experienced uniformly, but are instead contingent on contextual enablers and constraints, in under-resourced environments such as Mauritius. While grounded in the Mauritian context, the conceptual model provides transferable insights into how hybrid

work systems can be supported or strained in other under-resourced or transitioning environments. It invites further empirical testing and adaptation across diverse organisational and geographical settings.



**Figure 2.** Conceptual model. Source: Authors' own work

Ultimately, for leaders in Mauritius and similar GS contexts, the key takeaway is that successful hybrid models cannot be simply adopted from Western multinationals. Instead, success depends on first building a unique foundation of digital readiness, equitable resource provision, and, most critically, a high-trust managerial culture. These insights position hybrid work not only as an organisational practice but as part of a broader socio-technical system whose stability shapes employee wellbeing and economic resilience in GS settings.

## **Limitations**

Despite the theoretical and practical contributions, our study also comes along a few limitations. For instance, the study focused solely on professionals in Mauritius, a SIDS with specific infrastructural and socio-economic characteristics. As such, the findings may not be directly generalisable to other developing economies with differing political, cultural, and technological environments. Although Mauritius shares certain characteristics with other GS contexts, such as variable digital access and institutional constraints, broader representation is necessary to reinforce the transferability of the insights generated.

In addition, the qualitative nature of this research, based on a limited number of focus groups, constrains the breadth of perspectives captured. While the thematic richness adds depth, larger-scale or mixed-methods approaches could enhance the robustness and empirical generalisability of the findings. Moreover, the study's reliance on self-reported data from managerial-level participants introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, where responses may reflect perceived expectations rather than candid experience.

Finally, our theoretical focus on the JD-R model, while valuable for highlighting the balance of demands and resources, may have inadvertently constrained the emergence of other relevant constructs or perspectives not captured within this framework.

## **Future Research**

Scholars are encouraged to build on this study by expanding the empirical scope across multiple developing countries. Comparative or cross-cultural analyses could reveal how hybrid work is shaped by regional differences in digital infrastructure, leadership styles, and HR practices. Incorporating longitudinal research designs would also provide insights into how employee experiences and organisational adaptations evolve as hybrid work becomes more entrenched post-pandemic.

Future studies could extend theoretical lenses to explore hybrid work through complementary perspectives such as psychological contract theory, institutional theory, or identity work frameworks. These could unearth further dynamics around trust, surveillance, professional identity, and adaptation. Quantitative studies examining job demands and resources across occupational roles and industries could also validate the conceptual insights developed in this paper. Future research should investigate the efficacy of technostress-reduction strategies, successful in Global North countries, when adapted to the specific infrastructural and cost constraints of GS organisations. Lastly, other studies could explore how HR professionals adapt hybrid policies into everyday routines, mediate tensions across generational and digital divides, and act as interpreters of organisational flexibility in practice.

## **Conclusion**

Our study responds to growing academic and organisational interest in hybrid work, particularly in underrepresented GS settings. Guided by the JD-R framework, we show that employee experiences are shaped by the interaction of job demands and resources, mediated by context-specific enablers such as trust, technology, and flexible leadership. Our analysis further reveals the paradoxical nature of flexibility and highlights an unequal distribution of these demands across different demographic groups. Using rich qualitative data from Mauritius, we extend JD-R theory and accentuate the role of HR professionals as everyday practitioners of hybrid work design. These insights provide actionable lessons for supporting wellbeing and performance in digitally mediated environments. As hybrid work becomes increasingly normalised, addressing socio-technical inequalities and promoting inclusive HRM practices will be key to ensuring sustainable transformation. Finally, this study does not merely apply the JD-R model in a new setting but refines it by demonstrating the contextual plasticity of its core constructs and highlighting the critical role of HR-as-practice in mediating them.

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